



Speech by

Mr D. BRISKEY

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard 27 March 2003

CORONERS BILL; CREMATIONS BILL

Mr BRISKEY (Cleveland—ALP) (6.16 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Coroners Bill 2002 and the Cremations Bill 2002. The content of these two pieces of legislation reflects a significant shift in the role of coroner in Queensland. In this move towards a state coroner system, a move under consideration by a number of Australian jurisdictions, the government recognises the ever-expanding role of the coroner, particularly in the area of prevention. The Coroners Bill establishes a state and deputy state coroner, registrars, coroners' findings and comments, and the adoption of a national coronial information system by Queensland. An information system must have the ability to assist coroners and researchers to identify clusters of events which may be fruitful areas for prevention. Clause 92 of this bill will authorise the minister to enter into an agreement with other Australian states and territories to participate in the national coroners' information system, which was created in late 2000. This move toward the sharing of information will significantly assist Queensland coroners to identify clusters of events not only from within Queensland but from other Australian jurisdictions. This will be quite an improvement on the current manual filing system which prevents the easy retrieval of cases of like nature.

In recent decades greater emphasis has been placed on the prevention role of a coroner. Originally, the coroner's role was to determine the identity of the deceased, when and where they died, how the death came about and the cause of death and whether anyone else contributed to their death. In effect, the role of the coroner was to act as an investigator. Over time, however, the expansion of the role now means that instead of investigating a death or the issues surrounding a death the coroner now investigates a class of events and identifies patterns and causes and effects of those events. In fact, society has come to accept and recognise the comments and recommendations of a coroner as a significant indicator of areas requiring change or reform. What this creates is a body of information which coroners in Queensland and interstate can use to identify trends which go well beyond the prevention of death.

As I have mentioned, the passage of the Coroners Bill will see the appointment of a state coroner in Queensland. The creation of such a position was a recommendation that came from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. The State Coroner will play a vital role in overseeing and coordinating the coronial system throughout Queensland. This move towards a state coroner system will allow for easy management of information systems, investigation practices and the nature of findings will be more consistent, and opportunities for gaining an overview of all cases in the jurisdiction will be increased.

I will now briefly touch on the Cremations Bill. This piece of legislation is complementary to the Coroners Bill in that it will ensure that the body of a person whose death is suspicious is not cremated without discovery. Currently, before a body is cremated there must be a medical certificate as to the cause of death or a certificate by the coroner releasing the body and a certificate by another doctor giving permission to cremate. This dual certification helps ensure that suspicious deaths do not go undetected. It is important to note that a two-certificate system operates in most Australian states with some variations. Further, the bill looks at the concerns of crematoria that bodies with cremation risk, for example a cardiac pacemaker that may explode during cremation, are not presented for a cremation. This section of the bill is very much a matter of commonsense.

I will briefly comment on the idea of the honourable member for Kurwongbah to have a state based coroners TV show. I think that is a marvellous idea.

Ms Boyle: Do you want the lead role?

Mr BRISKEY: No. I suggest that it be called *The Kurwongbah Coroner*, of course. Perhaps we could get the honourable member for Cairns to play the lead role of coroner, carrying around her briefcase. I suggest that the honourable the Attorney-General could be played by somebody—

Ms Boyle: Jack Thompson.

Mr BRISKEY: Maybe a Jack Thompson type character, certainly. He could be wandering around the state bewildered, not knowing where he was going or what he was doing. I think this is a marvellous idea and I would like support from the Attorney-General to see that *The Kurwongbah Coroner* becomes a local television show.

Mr Welford: You're mad.

Mr BRISKEY: I am suggesting that the honourable member for Kurwongbah's idea was quite a good one.

Ms Barry: To promote the coroners.

Mr BRISKEY: Certainly the member for Aspley agrees with me. It would promote the coroner's role and the film and television industry in Queensland.

I congratulate the Attorney-General on bringing these bills before the House. He and his staff have done an excellent job in bringing forward bills that will enhance the role of the coroner and ensure that cremations are done with due regard to the bodies of the deceased and that, with medical certificates as to the cause of death and by the coroner, those bodies can be cremated without any concerns.