



Speech by

**HOWARD HOBBS**

**MEMBER FOR WARREGO**

Hansard 28 May 2003

**COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER BILL**

**Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—NPA) (3.57 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Community Ambulance Cover Bill 2003. At the outset, I say that the members on this side support the ambulance officers and the enormous amount of work that they do.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** If the member listened, he might be able to hear and he can comment later on.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** But it is important to say that we support the ambulance officers.

**Mr Lawlor** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** Maybe it is. I have not been in this place for the entire debate.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Jarratt): Order! The member for Warrego will address the chair.

**Mr HOBBS:** My view is that the ambulance officers do a great job and that we should support them in the work that they do. However, how they are funded is a different matter altogether. Obviously the subscription scheme worked well for quite a long time, that is, until the Beattie government—the members opposite—mismanaged it. It is as simple as that. Some of the members opposite were not in this place when it first arose. The whole issue blew up before the last election. I have heard it stated that the government's election promise has cost an extra \$100 million-odd. The ambulance funding scheme has blown out because the government just stuffed it up.

We have to fix the system. The minister has introduced a bill to try to resolve that issue that was created by the ALP. So we have to work our way through that. First of all, the government wanted to introduce a levy based on council rates. Again, the government displayed its arrogance. It did not even talk to the local governments about it. They did not know anything about it. The next thing, it was out. It was the same old thing. Local governments ran a very, very strong campaign against collecting that levy—and rightly so, because there would have been even less people paying it than there are now. The electricity account system is not the best, but it certainly is the next—

**Ms Nolan:** When you are talking about individuals, it would be 'fewer'. 'Less' relates to quantity. So you might say 'less water'.

**Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Ms Jarratt): Order! If the honourable member wishes to interject, would she please return to her own seat.

**Mr HOBBS:** Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for your protection. I take that interjection. The issue is that there would be less people paying it through their rates—

**Mr Lawlor:** Fewer people.

**Mr HOBBS:**—fewer people paying it through their rates than through their electricity accounts. So putting the charge on electricity accounts is the next best option. But then the government still did not get it right. It did not allow enough exemptions. If the government allowed more exemptions, the levy scheme would probably be a lot more acceptable to the community.

**Mrs Carryn Sullivan:** No, it would be more expensive.

**Mr HOBBS:** For sure, but by the same token, the government has to make the system fair. There are still many people who will not have to pay the levy and other people who will have to pay it more than once.

I cite the example of a small real estate company that has a power pole in a common area for which they pay an electricity account. It is \$25.20 a quarter. Guess what? They have to pay 88 bucks a year on top of that. So not only are they looking at paying \$100 for their power; now they have to pay an extra \$88. It is totally ridiculous to allow that situation to arise. In that example, the government is virtually increasing that company's costs by 100 per cent. We have already heard today numerous accounts of similar situations.

Nearly all business operators have at least two electricity accounts. They have their home electricity account and their business account. They could possibly have three accounts. Some people will have to pay double the levy. That is the way it is in communities: the ones who do all the work are saddled up so that the government can put its hands in their pockets. That is what is happening in this instance. I know people in my area who will have to pay the levy six, seven, eight, nine or 10 times. Why should someone have to pay the levy 10 times every year—year in, year out? It is just not fair.

**Mr Shine:** They are really doing it hard.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, they are.

**Mr Lester:** It is a tax on incentive.

**Mr HOBBS:** As the member for Keppel says, it is a tax on incentive.

**Mr Malone:** It is not only \$88; it will be \$100 in a couple of years time—\$120 in five years time.

**Mr HOBBS:** As the member for Mirani said, the levy will go up. As time goes by, it will get more expensive—possibly as much as \$100. So someone who has 10 electricity connections could be up for \$1,000.

Yes, the government has made some concessions, and that is good. Local government has been able to obtain some exemptions, and so it should. The exemptions include animal pounds, cemeteries and park lighting in public toilets. I certainly do not think that local government should be paying a levy on those facilities.

A while ago the minister replied to a question asked by the member for Gregory in relation to shearers' quarters. Shearing sheds are exempt, but in fact the minister said that shearers' quarters are not. In many instances, a shearing shed and shearers' quarters may be located a considerable distance from the homestead. So there may be one electrical power pole for an area that is used predominantly for shearing and mustering purposes. It could be that, for two weeks of the year, shearers may live in that area. However, in this day and age, shearers mostly drive in from town and drive out again. There would probably be nobody staying there, but because shearers' quarters are located there they will have to pay the extra \$88.

**Mr Reynolds:** You say there would be no-one staying there?

**Mr HOBBS:** No-one stays there at all. Shearers' quarters are only temporary.

**Mr Reynolds:** But no-one is staying in them?

**Mr HOBBS:** There is a shearing shed and then there are shearers' quarters that are hooked to it. But there is only one power meter. The quarters do not have separate power meters. In those rural areas there might be 20, 30 or 40 miles of powerline. It goes to a station and then to the shearing shed.

**Mr Reynolds** interjected.

**Mr HOBBS:** The explanatory notes states—

For example a building which is used at any time for residential purposes, such as shearers' accommodation quarters, will not qualify as a farming shed ...

**Mr Reynolds:** But you said that probably there would be no-one even staying there.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is right.

**Mr Reynolds:** Well, if there is no-one staying there and it is not being used, it is exempted.

**Mr HOBBS:** But you cannot disconnect it, because it is all hooked up to the shed.

**Mr Reynolds:** The shed not being used for accommodation is exempt.

**Mr HOBBS:** A shearers' quarters may be used for two weeks of the year when they do actually use it as accommodation. They may not even stay there. They may in fact come back and forth from town every day. They may use the shearers' shed to eat or to get out of the sun. They may even stay in the shed. The point is that they have to have it. There are supposed to be shearers' quarters that are presentable enough to comply with the law. That is an anomaly. That is a case where the government definitely does not require a levy. There is one power pole, and the power will then string to the shearers' quarters and to the shearing shed or other sheds. I think this is a particular case in which the levy is totally unfair. I would like the minister to look at this situation. If there is any way to get an exemption, that would be wonderful.

Labor members in the House have talked about the great support for this proposal in their communities. I find that hard to believe. It cannot possibly be true.

**Mr Lester:** Some have not had big support.

**Mr HOBBS:** Absolutely. It just cannot be true. So many people have contacted my office and have spoken to me as I travel around. People do not mind paying the \$88, but they do not want to keep on paying it. No-one is arguing about paying the rate; it is a matter of paying the rate over and over again. On that basis, I have great difficulty in supporting this legislation.