



Speech by

## Hon. MARGARET KEECH

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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Hansard 21 April 2004

### NATIONAL COMPETITION POLICY

**Hon. M. M. KEECH** (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (6.09 p.m.): I am pleased to support the motion moved the member for Nanango. An area where Queensland is significantly affected by competition policy is the sale of takeaway liquor. All Queenslanders are being penalised a massive \$7.3 million each and every year by the federal government for the Beattie government doing what is right. Those millions of dollars could be spent on new schools, more teachers, more health services and more police for regional and rural Queensland. Instead, it goes straight into the federal government's coffers.

We make no apology to the National Competition Council or the federal government for doing what is right for Queensland. We made a number of NCP concessions as a result of our review of the Liquor Act. To have bowed to the NCP edict in respect of takeaway liquor would have had devastating effects. In particular, adopting national competition policy principles for takeaway liquor would have delivered a killer blow to regional and rural Queensland.

Giant supermarket chains would have devoured trade at the expense of pubs and clubs in hundreds of communities. Countless jobs would have been lost and pubs and clubs would have been forced to shut their doors. Instead, the Beattie government did what was right four years ago—and it remains right—when cabinet endorsed a policy that takeaway liquor sales remain the domain of hotels and clubs in Queensland. The decision was taken in the best interests of the Queensland economy and Queensland communities. It was the right decision then and it remains the right decision to this day.

The NCP review, by an independent panel, examined anticompetitive aspects of the Liquor Act. Under national competition policy, provisions deemed anticompetitive could be retained only if it could be demonstrated that they were in the public interest. It was recommended that supermarkets not be allowed to sell takeaway liquor in their stores. Cabinet accepted the recommendations relating to takeaway alcohol sales. The government was not prepared to let the supermarket chains devour competition in smaller centres.

Hotels and clubs, as honourable members realise, represent a considerable collection of small business ventures throughout Queensland. They are a major provider of employment and, importantly, supply a vast range of other services including entertainment, food and accommodation. They also rely heavily on the takeaway liquor market as one of their primary sources of income. The government was convinced that there would be no negative impact pricewise in retaining the status quo. Altering the structure of the market would have had a huge impact on hotels, forcing many to close with a resultant negative public interest impact, not to mention the impact on communities.

Pubs and clubs in country areas, as those who represent those areas know full well, are the social hub of towns and regional cities. As I was reminded at the Clubs Queensland Achievement Awards on Saturday night at the Convention Centre, clubs contribute greatly to their local communities, not just through the provision of entertainment, meals and other services, but, importantly, through generous sponsorship of community events, sporting teams, sports events and the like. They really are the heart of their communities.

Had we abided by the NCP edicts, we would have allowed supermarkets to kill off pubs and even clubs across the entire state all under the guise of national competition policy. We were not about to do that. We were not about to rip the heart out of hundreds of communities around Queensland.

Every year we continue to pay the price for standing up for regional and rural Queensland. Some \$7.3 million is paid into the federal government coffers each and every year. That is what the federal government thinks of regional and rural Queensland. Regardless of where members live, I am proud that the Beattie government is a government for all Queenslanders. We support the motion moved by the independent member and we send a strong message to the federal government that the National Competition Council's \$7.3 million levy on Queensland is not fair and not right.