



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

Hansard Thursday, 13 May 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Strategy for Indigenous Consumers

Hon. M.M. KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development) (10.09 a.m.): State, Commonwealth and territory fair trading and consumer affairs agencies have teamed up to prepare a national strategy for indigenous consumers. The Ministerial Council for Consumer Affairs, which I chair and which includes ministers responsible for the nation's major fair trading and consumer protection agencies, has established a working party to prepare the strategy. Agencies will share information and education materials and take joint compliance and enforcement action where appropriate. Indigenous people are among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged consumer groups in Australia.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Member for Gregory, this is my final warning.

Ms KEECH: As I was saying, indigenous people are among the most vulnerable and most disadvantaged consumer groups in Australia. They are often targeted by unfair traders and scams who take advantage of their linguistic and financial literacy levels, low socioeconomic circumstances and geographical remoteness. By establishing a working party, the council seeks to identify existing programs that meet the needs of indigenous consumers and catch rogue traders. It also aims to implement successful programs nationally through the state agencies that make up the Standing Committee of Officials of Consumer Affairs. New programs that will meet the needs of indigenous consumers can also be identified.

Key issues impacting on indigenous consumers that will be addressed by the strategy include book-up, which is the use of informal credit arrangements by traders, financial literacy, buying cars and tenancy issues. The strategy also aims to improve indigenous consumer knowledge of their rights and access to consumer protection programs. Also, we want to educate traders and service providers on their rights and responsibilities to indigenous consumers and communities. The Northern Territory chairs the national indigenous consumer strategy working party. All state and territory consumer affairs and fair trading agencies are represented, together with nominees from Commonwealth Treasury, the ACCC and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Service.

Christine Ross from the Northern Territory has been appointed strategy coordinator. Ms Ross will consult with indigenous people, groups and communities across Australia over coming months. I am pleased to advise that the working party will formally meet in Melbourne later this month to progress the strategy. Members are keen to hear about successful strategies and examples of traders working proactively with indigenous consumers to address their problems. The strategy will have a five-year life span and is expected to be implemented nationally. I look forward to ensuring that, through this strategy, Queensland's indigenous people have access to a range of consumer programs to protect them from

being ripped off by unscrupulous traders and to educate them on their consumer rights and responsibilities.