



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Tuesday, 18 May 2004

LEGAL PROFESSION BILL

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (5.27 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Legal Profession Bill 2004. In doing so, I commend the Attorney-General for his ongoing commitment to ensuring that the concerns and expectations all Queenslanders have of our legal system and services offered in this state are responded to and are held to the highest standards. The minister has introduced sweeping reforms that address the many concerns residents have raised with me about the legal profession. These reforms will go a long way to ensuring Queenslanders can feel confident that they will receive the fair, honest and professional legal advice and services they expect.

The bill before the House today is the second round of Beattie government reforms to the Queensland legal profession. This bill incorporates and updates the Legal Profession Act 2003. Key aspects include the provision of greater independence, accountability and transparency in the complaints and disciplinary process for lawyers. This objective is delivered by the provision of an independent statutory office of the Legal Services Commissioner to receive and manage the investigation of complaints against lawyers and prosecute professional conduct charges where necessary. I am pleased that the minister has ensured that the position of the commissioner is given full investigative powers, with staff to assist. The bill states that minor professional conduct breaches will be heard by the legal practice committee and more serious matters involving possible suspensions, striking off or serious fines will be heard by the legal practice tribunal.

The bill provides for a much more accountable system for the management and allocation of interests on solicitors' trust accounts. Previously, funds were managed by the Queensland Law Society. This bill determines that such funds are managed through a government-held fund that is allocated in the public interest such as the Legal Services Commission and Legal Aid. This bill also provides for Queensland's participation in the national legal profession scheme. There are a number of changes introduced as part of the national legal profession scheme, including the point that lawyers admitted into other jurisdictions will be able to apply for local practising certificates without having to be first admitted in Queensland.

Before closing, I wish to briefly comment on the inclusion of the professional provisions for multidisciplinary partnerships. The ability that will be provided to solicitors who work alone or in law partnerships will enable them to form firms with other professional services such as accountants, valuers, surveyors or financial planners. It provides for a one-stop shop approach to legal and related professional services, and I am confident that this will assist all consumers in being able to get the relevant service that they want but also reduce the time and the money that they spend on getting that service that they need. I am pleased that the bill adequately provides the safeguards, however, that consumers would obviously expect such as disclosure requirements.

In closing, this legislation represents the serious commitment this government places on the importance of the public confidence in our legal system. It introduces changes that will hopefully improve the services offered and ensures that services delivered are made accountable and can be scrutinised by the most appropriate and effective complaints and investigative measures. I congratulate the minister and his staff and commend the bill to the House.

