



Speech by

Peta-Kaye Croft

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard Wednesday, 1 September 2004

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS BILL

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (9.22 p.m.) I rise to speak in support of the Professional Standards Bill 2004. The Beattie government has worked hard to address the problems that emerged from the insurance crisis of two years ago when issues relating to the availability and affordability of professional indemnity insurance became a concern for all Queenslanders. Over the past two years, the Attorney-General has worked hard to address those concerns. He introduced the first stage of the government's reforms in June 2002 with the Personal Injuries Proceedings Act 2002. Later, in March 2003, the second stage of tort reform was introduced with the passing of the Civil Liability Act. This bill represents the third stage of tort reform by this government.

Following the recent insurance crisis, problems arose such as the increased cost of professional services and instances where professionals were not actually insuring the services they provided. These are the reasons for the introduction of this bill. The objective of this bill is to ensure that professionals have access to affordable insurance options and that, as a result, the everyday consumer is provided with greater protection when engaging a professional and the quality of professional services is of the highest standard. This can be achieved by providing for a scheme in which an association representing persons of a similar or substantially similar occupation will submit to an independent body established under this bill—the professional standards council—and there will be a commitment by its members to improve the standards of their work. By improving their standards, the expected outcome is that the risk of exposure to liability for their work is reduced.

In its submission to the professional standards council, an occupational association will be required to implement measures such as a code of conduct, complaints and disciplinary procedures and ongoing professional development. The positive outcome derived from improving risk management strategies and quality assurance mechanisms submitted by an organisation will primarily be the decrease in insurance premiums for professionals. However, no doubt the scheme will go a long way towards restoring the public's faith in a number of tarnished professions.

It will be a requirement that professionals have the insurance policies and/or the business assets to cover any potential liability that may arise from claims against them. This will ensure that clients who suffer damage caused by the negligent work of the engaged professional are covered. While the bill offers a number of ways of limiting liability for professionals participating in the scheme, I am pleased that the bill provides a mandatory scheme for all members of an approved occupational association.

In conclusion, it is important to mention that the bill provides flexibility for occupational associations that participate in the scheme arrangements. Quite a number of relevant stakeholders were consulted in the formation of this bill. Finally, the consumer will ultimately reap the benefits that will result from the implementation of this bill, including guaranteed level of recovery if an adverse event occurs, access to improved professional services and the money saved by the reduction of professional indemnity insurance premiums. I congratulate the minister and commend the bill to the House.