



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 27 April 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Legal Profession Reform

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.35 a.m.): Last year our government introduced historic reforms to bring greater independence, accountability and transparency to the regulation of the Queensland legal profession. I am pleased to advise the House that cabinet this morning has approved a second round of reforms. The Attorney-General, Rod Welford, will introduce legislation encompassing these reforms this week.

These latest reforms take a timely and important step towards a national legal profession and improve choice and competition for legal service consumers. Lawyers from other states will be able to practise here. Queensland lawyers will have the same rights to practice across borders. These changes recognise the commercial reality that lawyers frequently operate on a national basis. It will further enhance Queensland's Smart State business environment by making it easier for the nation's biggest law firms to come and operate here. Major law firms which for some time have been represented here are now likely to take advantage of these changes by locating specialist teams in Queensland to support key industries such as mining.

The new national approach will also protect consumers by ensuring there are consistent professional standards across all jurisdictions. For example, a lawyer who has been struck off or suspended in one state will not be able to practise in another state. These reforms will also allow for the registration of foreign lawyers practising in foreign law to operate in Queensland. This means these lawyers can support international companies which decide to set up business here in Queensland. That is another important aspect of attracting international business.

These new reforms will also allow law firms to establish multidisciplinary practices, bringing together professional services under one roof. There will be safeguards in place to ensure only appropriate links are created and there are no obvious conflicts. The reforms will also make some minor changes to the operations of the Queensland Law Society, necessitated by the changes to the complaints and discipline processes passed in this place last year. The size of the Law Society council will be reduced from 17 to a maximum of 12. The society requested this reduction in order to reduce its costs.

This latest round of reforms will modernise our legal profession and combine benefits for consumers with broader protection.