



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Wednesday, 15 February 2006

FOOD BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (4.15 pm): As has been stated to the House by the shadow minister for health, the opposition supports the bill. But there is a large question mark over one element and that is the ability of the bill to bind both public and private sectors.

The member for Glass House hit the nail right on the head when she made the comment that it is important that, in the preparation of food by anybody or any organisation, there be in place safety regulations to ensure the food produced at the end of the day is fit for human consumption. She also pointed out that Queensland has an ageing population. Coupled with the fact that we have many fast-food outlets and an increasing number of food distribution outlets across the state, we then have to wonder why the state exempts itself from what is, in essence, one of the major causes of illness in this state—that is, food being prepared poorly or badly.

If we are going to produce legislation that is going to assist the public, then it is important that the government shows the way ahead by providing that the regulations apply to itself. As the bill stands now, there is a distinction between the public and private sectors. In my opinion that is unsustainable. For example, as has been pointed out by earlier speakers, public and private hospitals are guided by different principles. The public hospital system is simply not bound by the terms of this bill. Private hospitals are bound by the terms of this bill and the regulations that will flow from it.

If we have a principle that people are required to be protected in relation to the preparation of food and also the preparation of ingredients, there is no reason for the health system to be exempt, whether that be the public or the private health system. State school P&Cs are exempt and P&Fs and other organisations of private schools are not. As has been stated here in the past, it is inconceivable that the public is going to accept that state schools operating a P&C are exempt from regulation or control whereas private schools and P&F organisations are required to stick to the letter of the law. In my opinion, and in the opinion of other members of the opposition, it is simply nonsensical that legislation should differentiate to that extent.

Queensland Rail, a tourism body, a tourism destination and a tourism organisation, supplies food just as frequently as the Hilton, the Ramada or other complexes. Why should Queensland Rail be exempt from the terms of this bill purely because it is a state government body or organisation? It makes no difference: bad food will make people ill; bad food will kill people. There is no basis in either reason or fact that this government or other government organisations should be exempt from the terms of the bill.

Two sets of rules are being established. The smaller, private organisations will be burdened by more regulation and more taxes, more requirements, more scrutiny. Yet organisations that fall under the state government banner are not going to face that same scrutiny. It is inequitable and, in my opinion, it is blatantly wrong.

In a matter of this nature and of this importance, the government cannot differentiate between public and private sectors. If the government is going to introduce legislation to govern a critical issue such as food preparation, that legislation must govern all segments of our society. To do otherwise is blatantly a

mistake. In my opinion the bill should definitely be amended to cover all segments of our society and not pick and choose one over the other.

I conclude my comments by making this very strong point: a government has to lead by example. A government has to set the benchmark for others to follow. If the government does not place itself under its own legislation, in my opinion it fails morally in guarding the interests and protecting the rights of the citizens of this state.