



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Wednesday, 1 March 2006

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sizzler Restaurants, Rat Poison

Hon. PD BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.32 am): The events surrounding the food tampering at Sizzler's restaurants in Brisbane are a disgusting attack on one of this state's most popular family restaurants. Police are investigating who was responsible for putting rat poison in Sizzler's salad bars, which is an act of criminality. I am told that the amount of poison found in the samples tested by Sizzler makes it unlikely that anyone will have suffered serious harm from this criminal act. However, the attacks on Sizzler, the families who eat there and the people who rely on the restaurants for their income raise a larger question, and that is: should restaurants advise their customers of an attack of this nature? Should there be mandatory reporting, for example?

No-one doubts that Queenslanders have a right to know if there is a real and immediate risk to their health which can be averted by avoiding a particular establishment. This must be balanced, of course, by the welfare of the employees, the hundreds of Queenslanders who rely on Sizzler for their income and the likelihood of any deliberate tampering occurring again. In other words, we have to be careful about hoaxes. A public announcement of potential risk, no matter how low, has the potential to destroy jobs. As a community, we need to find a balance between the right to know and the need to protect jobs. The Minister for Health, Stephen Robertson, is seeking an urgent meeting with the Restaurant and Catering Industry Association to begin discussion on this very issue. That meeting will discuss the toughening up of the Food Act including the introduction of mandatory reporting, forcing restaurants to hold samples of contaminated food to allow Queensland Health to conduct urgent testing, and new protocols to ensure restaurants have clear guidelines to follow if they are the victims of suspected food tampering. This would include information on when Queensland Health and the Queensland police are to be informed.

This shocking criminal act is an attack on hundreds of Queenslanders. We will work with the restaurant and catering industry to ensure we do all we can to protect Queensland diners from this type of illegal activity.