



Speech by
Jan Jarratt

MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard Wednesday, 14 March 2007

SECURITY PROVIDERS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (12.49 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise in support of the Security Providers Amendment Bill 2006. As stated in the minister's second reading speech, the key objective of this bill is to tighten a regulation of the security industry to ensure that only those persons of reputable character operate in the industry. This is a very welcome and I believe mutually beneficial outcome, because over recent times the reputation of some of those in the security provision industry—and in particular those we refer to as bouncers—has come under question with reports in the papers of some not so satisfactory outcomes of the way they actually undertake their work.

That involves only a very small number of people in the industry. Nevertheless, it does tend to tar the whole industry with a bad name. The measures in this bill will go a long way towards tightening up the industry and removing those bad elements who have crept into this form of work. These measures are very welcome because it will lead to greater public confidence as people undertake their day-to-day activities which quite often involve them going into crowded public areas. In nightclubs there is the potential for people to get in harm's way so we rely on these people to protect us in some way. So I welcome the tightening and toughening up of the provisions covering the security providers industry.

Among the measures contained in this bill is the expansion of the licensing categories to capture currently unregulated providers of security services, including those who operate in industries where security work can be mixed with other duties. I think that this change reflects the changing nature of work and the work mix that people undertake in modern society. We are seeing a growth in the use of electronic surveillance and high-tech equipment employed by individuals as well as companies providing security.

The bill also seeks to strengthen character and probity tests in an effort to weed out undesirable elements in the industry. I referred to these earlier. I think everyone accepts that they are a small minority. Quite often when these people come to the public's notice it is for something quite drastic. We need to get rid of that element that seeks to find its way into the security provision industry so that we can have a greater sense of confidence in the people we are dealing with.

The bill requires licensees to continue their professional investment through ongoing training. Keeping up to date is so important. The only constant in life often is change. In every field of endeavour and in every profession these days it is a constant effort to keep up with the latest and greatest in professional development in order to carry out our roles to the best of our ability. Keeping up with professional development has become a community expectation that needs to be taken into account. I am pleased that this bill addresses that issue.

The bill seeks to increase the penalties for operating without a licence or for engaging unlicensed personnel. I welcome this increased deterrent that will again lead to an increase in public confidence and better protection generally for licensees themselves. It also seeks to implement other important changes to the way security providers operate and are monitored to ensure protection of the community and property. These are measures such as a mandatory code of practice and a provision for ongoing training. I have already mentioned the benefits that this can bring.

The Security Providers Amendment Bill also contributes to the harmonisation of the national security provider regime. I want to focus my attention on this area. In September 2005 the Council of Australian Governments, COAG, recognised that a national harmonised security industry has a key role to play in counter-terrorism activities at a time when security is paramount. COAG also requested a review of all state and territory licensing regimes.

We sadly live in an age of terror. It is not something we welcome, particularly not in a country like Australia that has a history of encouraging egalitarianism and has been a home for people from countries all around the world. We have lived in relative peace and harmony for several hundred years. We cannot put our heads in the sand. We must recognise the increased threat. We need to be aware of it and we do need to be vigilant.

The COAG review report recommended that there be nationally consistent probity and character checks and that a core set of security activities for the purpose of licensing in all jurisdiction be developed. This harmonisation seeks to enable greater consistency between the interstate licensing regimes so that a common approach to licensing appropriate and competent operators is taken nationwide. The current Queensland act does not licence as many security activities as the majority of other states and territories legislation does, nor does it contain as high a standard of probity criteria to filter out those who are not appropriate to work in an industry trusted by the community to protect people and property.

The bill dramatically boosts the standard of the security industry by expanding the licence categories and strengthening the probity checks under the act to ensure that rogues do not flock to Queensland. The national approach in licensing of security providers will enable security resources to be quickly deployed across jurisdictional boundaries on the basis of need. The bill allows for this by the introduction of a temporary permit regime for bodyguards, crowd controllers, security officers and security firms currently licensed in another Australian state or territory to carry out authorised functions for a particular event.

This is most relevant to the south-east corner and, indeed, to the Gold Coast where, from time to time, activities take place on a cross-border basis or there are travelling officials and VIPs who have security travelling with them. That is probably where this provision will, in practical terms, be applied. I have some examples here. Security officers licensed in New South Wales will be able to perform security officer functions at specific events such as a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Queensland. Such events place an unusual short-term demand on the services of the Queensland industry. The changes will allow such demand to be met for the duration of the event. Applications for temporary permits will be processed and tested against the same suitability criteria as normal applications. This means that the applicant will be assessed against the same criminal history and other probity checks. I welcome these moves.

I acknowledge that there has been very broad public consultation behind the development of this bill. That is most welcome. There has been some comment that it has taken a long time. It is a complex area and there are a lot of views to be sought and assessed. They then have to be put into a form that actually makes most people confident about the outcomes in the final bill. I acknowledge that consultation process.

I also acknowledge the minister's effort and her department's effort in bringing this to the House. Minister Keech above all has a commitment to the rights of consumers in this state. That is a really welcome commitment. We all need protection. All of us are vulnerable at some time in our lives, and particularly as we get older. It is the elderly in our communities who have the least defence against people who are increasingly cunning. I acknowledge the minister's support for these vulnerable people and consumers in this state. I commend the bill to the House.