



Speech by

Hon. Margaret Keech

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Scams

Hon. MM KEECH (Albert—ALP) (Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading, Wine Industry Development and Women) (10.16 am): The Beattie government is committed to protecting Queensland consumers. That is why we have in place one of the strongest consumer protection regimes in Australia. And that is why the Office of Fair Trading will play a lead role in the National Scam Campaign, which I launched yesterday. The focus for this year's campaign is money and identity theft through phone and internet scams.

Sadly, Queenslanders continue to fall victim to crooks, fraudsters and scammers. The government wants to help Queenslanders become 'scam smart' and this national campaign provides the ideal opportunity to get our message across. The top scams in Queensland during 2006 were chain letters, with 351 reports to the Office of Fair Trading; invoice fraud, with 267 complaints; fake lotteries and competitions, with 263 complaints; and computerised gambling programs, with 243 complaints. My department will be working closely with police on information and education programs on how to avoid being scammed.

Scams can turn up anywhere, anytime—in the mail, in the letterbox, over the telephone, on the street, at a seminar or in an advertisement. Because scams are becoming more sophisticated and professional, people continue to fall into the trap as they can appear to be the real thing. Scammers often target the most vulnerable people in the marketplace, including seniors, people looking for work and people who have a low level of financial literacy. Each year scams become harder to spot. There seems to be a scam created to trap just about everyone from dodgy emails and text messages, to lottery scams, fake investment schemes, medical cons, fake employment and money laundering schemes and identity theft. We even have a new twist on the long-running Nigerian scam, which targets people looking for long-lost relatives.

So what can Queenslanders do to protect themselves against scams? The best thing they can do is to maintain good computer security since scams rely more heavily on email and the internet than ever before. The Office of Fair Trading will continue to work hard to protect Queenslanders, but people have a responsibility to educate themselves. Consumers need to remember the golden rule: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If people are approached and they think someone is trying to scam them, hang up, rip up the letter and delete the email.