



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Thursday, 15 March 2007

ASSOCIATIONS INCORPORATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (4.44 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak to this bill. I join with other members of the House by stating quite clearly that many organisations in our communities work with us on a day-to-day basis. They are important to us, because they feed back to us the needs and aspirations of the community which we can raise in this House or pass on to the relevant ministers. The RSL, Rotary, Lions, the CWA, the Red Cross, National Seniors, Probus, the Caloundra Hospital Auxiliary, the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides to name just a few—all of these organisations draw people, including youth, into a community system. They generate social capital in the community, which is so important in modern society. Without social capital, we are not going to achieve many of the things that we believe are important in regard to the environment, the necessity of caring for older people, dealing with people who are isolated, and dealing with the needs of the homeless and the poor.

These organisations play a very important role in bringing those issues to the surface and also providing funds, comfort and support to these people. In addition, organisations such as the Caloundra Chorale and Theatre Co., which is actually an amateur organisation, have staged wonderful productions over long periods. These people rely upon donations and the support of the community. When one considers the importance of those organisations, one can certainly see the benefit of this bill.

In regard to the auditing of financial statements, it is quite clear that over time the fees associated with accountants undertaking that work, for what in many cases are small amounts of money held in bank accounts, are exorbitant for the organisations that have to pay those fees. Given that the organisations involved are quite small and detailed work is required to be undertaken, many accountants are now backing away from wanting to do that sort of work, because it takes up too much of their time and they are perhaps engaged in other business.

This bill provides a tiered reporting system. Other members have gone through that system in some detail. In many cases, that tiered reporting structure will certainly alleviate the need for fully audited financial statements to be prepared. In that regard, that can only be good for the organisations that are involved.

I refer to the association rules, meetings and forms. The legislation clarifies what I—and I think most people—have believed for a long period and that is that the provisions of the act will always override the rules and that should always be the case. This bill also confirms teleconferencing as being a method by which a committee meeting can be held. People who are unable to attend a meeting for whatever purpose can now be linked to that meeting by teleconference. This bill deems that method to be an attendance under the terms of the act.

The most important provisions of this legislation relate to public liability insurance. Under the current act, it is mandatory for organisations to have public liability insurance. That was an exceptionally hard impost on many organisations. In fact, the massive increase in insurance premiums that occurred a few years ago led to the tort law reform and to a number of these organisations closing or, at least, curtailing their activities significantly. This bill does not require organisations to have public liability insurance.

Basically that means that the organisations will have to work on a needs basis—that is, do they need to have public liability insurance when assessed against the activities that they undertake? One could certainly see that an organisation such as a bridge club, which has little likelihood of its members suffering harm or damage while attending, as compared to those in a hang-gliding club—

Mr Lawlor: I don't know about that.

Mr McARDLE: A bridge club on the Gold Coast might be a bit raucous.

Mr Lawlor: Very wild.

Mr McARDLE: It would be very wild club indeed. I ask members to compare the activities of a bridge club with the activities of a hang-gliding club, which are inherently dangerous. In that case, the risk assessment for each club would be distinctly different. Accordingly, I would suspect that the risk assessment undertaken by the hang-gliding club would encourage that club to take out public liability insurance. Of course, the issue then goes further. If a club on a needs basis determines that it does not require public liability insurance, it is then required to inform its members of that decision. Also, incoming committee members and incoming members to the organisation are also required to be so informed.

All in all, this House should definitely endorse this bill. I can assure members of the House that people throughout Queensland will applaud the action taken here this afternoon.