WEDNESDAY, 15 MAY 2002

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. R. K. Hollis, Redcliffe) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 a.m.

PRIVILEGE

Member for Robina; Mr C. J. Gabriel

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.31 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege. In yesterday's *Courier-Mail*, the Liberal Leader, Bob Quinn, likened me to African dictator Robert Mugabe in relation to Queensland's electoral system. I support optional preferential voting as it gives choice and I make no apology for giving people choice, nor does my government. Unlike Mr Quinn, I do not support people being forced to vote for parties that they do not support. Under optional preferential voting, Queenslanders have to vote only for parties or candidates that they do support.

I remind Mr Quinn that in 1983 under his preferred system, the National Party won government with just 38.9 per cent of the first preference vote—and that was after the split with the Liberals. In 1986, they again won government—that is the Nationals—with just 39.6 per cent of the first preference vote, and the split with the Liberals continued.

While I welcome constructive debate on important matters such as our electoral system, I am disappointed that Mr Quinn, the Leader of the Liberal Party, would cheapen the pain that is being suffered by many people in Zimbabwe as a result of the murderous and barbarous regime of Robert Mugabe. Many Australians are watching as their families and friends suffer in Zimbabwe. Make no mistake, insensitive comments like those of Mr Quinn cause them hurt and heighten their suffering.

I table for the information of the House the official Parliamentary Library statistics and the quote from the Leader of the Liberal Party. I am disappointed that he has gone down that road.

While I am dealing with matters of privilege, the *Courier-Mail* yesterday also ran an article saying 'Killer's family seeks apology from Beattie' in relation to the Gabriel family. This follows an apology that I issued quite appropriately to Mrs Clarke on behalf of the government. Let me make it clear: while I am a compassionate person and where I think an apology is appropriate I will issue one, I do not believe that the Gabriel family are entitled to an apology. However, I do believe that they do owe Mrs Clarke an apology—something that they have refused to give—and I look forward to them doing just that.

PETITIONS

Alpha Road, Pioneer-Albro Road, Laglan Road

Mrs Christine Scott from 196 petitioners requesting the House to increase the funding allocated for the Alpha Road, the Pioneer-Albro Road and the Laglan Road in order to seal or increase the per annum grading of the roads.

Caloundra Hospital

Mrs Sheldon from 50 petitioners requesting the House to (a) ensure both Caloundra City Hospital theatres are fully operational, (b) all hospital beds are fully functional, (c) fully staff and equip the new quick recovery wards, (d) provide funding for staff and equipment to service the 16 bed Rehabilitation Unit, (e) ensure that there are sufficient specialists, GP and medical staff permanently employed to allow the hospital to make available to patients a seven day, twenty four hour, outpatients and emergency service, (f) reinstate the outpatients physiotherapy clinic, (g) place in position additional financial resources into the Caloundra City Hospital Dental Clinic and (h) employ more dentists so as to reduce the extended waiting time that patients must endure waiting for dental treatment.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.34 a.m.), by leave: Last night, the federal Treasurer delivered a mean-spirited budget which reveals a deficit and offers no real initiatives and absolutely no vision to help drive this country forward. In parliament last week I tabled a list of initiatives that were a minimum if the budget was to deliver a

fair dinkum outcome for Queensland. Looking at that list now and comparing it to what Mr Costello has actually delivered makes for a very disappointing read for all Queenslanders.

Overall, Queensland has received only a 1.4 per cent increase in our total funding, yet our inflation and population growth combined represent at least five per cent. So we have been short-changed. Therefore, we actually face a real per capita shortfall in funding to Queensland of more than $350 million—money that is essential to provide basic services for people such as the sick, the elderly, the homeless and the disabled.

A closer look at some of the key policy areas reveals further bad news. There was no attempt to reverse the downward spiral in funding under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. After the budget last night, we are no better off and we still face the prospect of a further loss of $109 million under the next Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement starting mid next year.

The budget did include money for unmet demand in disability services. However, this is money that Queensland was always entitled to, and there is absolutely no provision for growth. That is the point: no provision for growth. Hospital services did not even rate a mention. With an increase of almost 30 per cent in the cost of essential medications offered through the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, Mr Costello's budget ensures that the sick, elderly and disabled will continue to suffer the most. With no apparent support from the Commonwealth, the increase in the pharmaceutical benefits scheme medications is likely to add pressure on the public health system as more people access publicly funded medications. The budget offers nothing to relieve pressure on public hospitals, particularly our emergency departments.

And what is Liberal Leader Bob Quinn doing to fight for Queenslanders who need these health services? The ABC reported today that—

Liberal Leader Bob Quinn agrees, saying funding cuts to areas such as health were needed.

I do not know where. I have a detailed statement in relation to what my government has achieved in relation to health and I seek to incorporate it in *Hansard* for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

Health Response to Federal Budget 2002-2003

Hospital services didn't even rate a mention in the Federal Government's 2002-2003 Budget.

With an increase of almost 30% in the cost of essential medications offered through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Mr Costello's budget ensures the sick, elderly and disabled will continue to suffer the most. With no apparent support from the Commonwealth, the increase in PBS medications is likely to add pressure on the public health system as more people access publicly funded medications.

The Budget offers nothing to relieve pressure on public hospitals, particularly our emergency departments.

While we welcome the $4 million per year for four years Queensland to provide extra doctors to fringe metropolitan areas, there is no evidence of a much needed increase in the GPs general rebate or after hours services that would have provided some respite to overworked emergency departments that are now seeing huge increases in GP type patients.

Key Health Achievements

The Beattie Government is committed to a public health system which promotes good health and well being for all Queenslanders.

Since coming to office we have delivered record health budgets.

Labor's initiatives have created—

more than 2300 new jobs in health service delivery to the community

more than 500 private sector health positions at the Noosa & Robina private hospitals

more than 23 000 construction jobs since July 1998.

The Labor Government has delivered on its promise to make public elective surgery waiting list information, and has cut waiting lists through its waiting list reduction strategy.

Under the first two years of Labor 20 753 more people have received their operations than under the previous two years of Coalition Government.

To date, over 408,000 people have received their elective surgery under the Beattie Government.

Labor's $2.8 billion Statewide Health Building Program is providing Queenslanders with access to modern, well equipped hospitals and health facilities and services.

Major projects include—

the $182 million Townsville Hospital redevelopment;

the installation of Magnetic Resonance Imaging Machines at the Prince Charles Hospital, Gold Coast Hospital, the Royal Brisbane Hospital, Nambour and Townsville Hospitals; and

Hospital redevelopments at Maryborough, Gold Coast, Mackay, Caboolture Critical Care Unit, the Royal Brisbane Hospital Rehabilitation/Dual Diagnosis Unit, Baillie Henderson Hospital and the Ipswich Renal Service Unit.

Long overdue changes have been made to the Mental Health Act, providing the right mix of caring for people with an illness, while also maintaining the necessary protection and support for the community, victims and their families.

Mental health services expanded across the state—

more than 300 new mental health worker jobs created; and

new services have been opened in Charters Towers, Redcliffe, Maryborough, Redlands and Robina.

School Nurse Program—

119 youth health nurses now employed under the program and reach almost 150,500 students in 240 schools across Queensland from Thursday Island to Mount Isa to Longreach to the Gold Coast;

Specially trained nurses work with students and school communities to promote good health and address health issues of concern to Queensland youth such as smoking prevention, body image, nutrition, sexual health, alcohol and drug use, mental health, violence and suicide prevention.

This Government has delivered a range of programs and services that aim to help strengthen families, including—

The Triple P which operates from 30 locations and has already provided almost 1,301 free parenting programs to 10,880 Queensland mums and dads; and

An expansion of services provided from child health centres to include counselling and better family support, and more home visits. Expanded Child Health Centres will be in operation in 18 locations across 10 Health Service districts, delivering on the Beattie Government's 2001 election commitment to expand these services.

Cancer treatment improved and expanded—

$25m Radiation Oncology Services Plan biggest and most far-reaching expansion of cancer treatment services in Queensland's history.

The Plan has seen establishment of a new $8 million radiotherapy unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

The Beattie Labor Government has played a key role in facilitating the establishment of the James Cook University Medical School which took its first students in January 2000. 2002 saw an intake of 80 students to the School of Medicine for Years 1,2 and 3. The Government's support for this initiative includes $10 million capital funding towards its establishment. The School expects its first graduated in 2005.

This Government is tackling the drugs problem.

All Queensland Health programs link in with the Beattie Government's holistic approach to this complex problem. This has culminated in the development of the Beyond a Quick Fix—Queensland Drug Strategic Framework 1999/20000 to 2003/2004, a cooperative and comprehensive approach to support community groups and the Government tackle the complex issues surrounding harmful drug use and the associated problems.

Since 1998 the Beattie Labor Government allocated an extra $4.6M a year to the health budget for drug related initiatives under the Crime Prevention That Works and Illicit Drugs Strategies.

The Beattie Government has provided free needles for Queensland's 25,200 insulin dependent diabetics, when the Commonwealth refused.

Labor matched Commonwealth funding to palliative care with an increase to $5.1m per year in State funding, up from $0.5m in the Coalition's last budget. Access to services has been enhanced through increased funding to community-based agencies and they have been moved to three-year service agreements to allow them to better plan and manage service delivery.

Since 1999-2000 The Beattie Government has allocated more than $6.5 million to implement the key findings of a ministerial taskforce to examine nursing recruitment and retention. As a result of the Beattie Government's efforts in this area, turnover of permanent nursing staff has fallen to an average of 11.77% in 2000/01, from an average of 20.2% per annum over the five years from 1994-1998. Other key Government initiatives in this area include—

The launch of the www.thinknursing.com website, a dynamic living site which provides on-line services promoting nursing as a career option to school students and the community; undergraduates with information on career prospects; and nursing professionals with information and opportunities to develop career paths within Queensland Health;

an extra 300 undergraduate places in 2001; and

a range of scholarship schemes have been introduced including indigenous nursing scholarships; rural nursing undergraduate scholarships and mental health endorsement scholarships.

Health Promotion Queensland was established in 1999 with an annual budget of $1m. Its focuses on health promotion activities that can achieve ongoing results, and be copied in other communities. Key projects undertaken by Health Promotion Queensland to date have included—

the Falls in Older People five year project to reduce the incidence of falls in older people living at home; and

the Ten Thousand Steps a Day Project aimed at encouraging working aged adults and unemployed to engage in regular physical activity.

TOPIC: Health Achievements

The Beattie Government is committed to a public health system which promotes good health and well being for all Queenslanders.

On any one day in Queensland Health—

$11 million is spent on public health services

$1.1 million is spent on rebuilding and maintaining health facilities

1901 people are treated in emergency departments

6933 patients are cared for in public hospitals

23,500 out patients receive services

878 people receive day-only procedures in a hospital

940 adults complete free dental treatment

935 school aged children complete dental treatment

1729 people are cared for in State Government residential aged care facilities and residential facilities for younger people with disabilities

184 mental health patients are treated in the community

462 women are screened for breast cancer

820 women are screened for cervical cancer

3900 vaccines are distributed

100 babies are born

Since coming to office the Beattie Labor Government has delivered record health budgets.

It has allocated more than $6.5 million to implement the key findings of a ministerial taskforce to examine nursing recruitment and retention. As a result of the Government's efforts in this area, turnover of permanent nursing staff has fallen to an average of 11.77% in 2000/01, from an average of 20.2% per annum over the five years from 1994-1998.

Cancer treatment is being improved and expanded. The $25m Radiation Oncology Services Plan is the biggest and most far-reaching expansion of cancer treatment services in Queensland's history and has seen establishment of a new $8 million radiotherapy unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

Queensland's new tobacco laws which come into effect of 31 May are the most significant tobacco reforms ever to be embarked upon by any Queensland Government, and will benefit the health and well being of thousands of Queenslanders.

Mr BEATTIE: One of the most disappointing aspects is in the area of research and development. Queensland is committed to a long-term strategy to create thousands of long-term, new-age jobs in the Smart State. After the budget was handed down last night I have to ask the question: where is Mr Costello's plan for the smart nation? Where is the vision? There is none! Unlike Queensland, the federal government has failed to deliver funds for research and development in any key areas that will provide jobs for our future generations, that is, jobs for our kids. Where is the additional money for research in key areas such as biotechnology, information technology and telecommunications?

It appears the coalition has slashed about 15 per cent, or about $76 million, from an area supposedly dedicated to making our communications and information technology industries more competitive and effective. Mr Costello has handed down a budget that delivers no vision for the future of this country. Our Smart State strategy has a focus on delivering a better, more relevant education and training system so our children have the skills to gain jobs. But the budget contains no significant measures to boost funding to schools or higher education. Education is about Australia's future. It is through improving our skills that we will deliver jobs to our kids and prosper. Once again, it has fallen to the states to deliver on education. I have to say that that is one of the most disappointing aspects of this budget—no innovation, no vision for education or training or research and development.

Despite being the most decentralised state in Australia, Queensland has also fared poorly when it comes to basic transport infrastructure. Three hundred million dollars has been slashed from federal roads funding. There has been a $52 million cut in overall funding for roads in Queensland based on last year's forward estimates and a range of federal coalition election commitments. There is no funding for the Tugun bypass, a shortfall in funding for the Douglas arterial road, cuts in funding for maintenance, road widening and rehabilitation, and a reallocation of safety and urgent minor works funding away from Queensland to the southern states to ensure consistency.

Mr Costello has reneged on the Pacific Highway reconstruction agreement which was signed by the federal and state governments on 7 June 1996. The agreement provided for payment to Queensland of $150 million, or at least $15 million per year for 10 years. Mr Costello has scrapped the $15 million payments for the next two years. We have already spent the money. Once we do a deal and reach an agreement, we expect people to stick to it. Obviously Mr Costello does not. It means that we have $30 million less to spend on roads.

Yet the opposition supports this budget. Go out and tell that to everyone in the bush; that is my challenge to the opposition. This cut in road funding is a deliberate penalisation of Queensland because New South Wales will get its payments under an identical agreement.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Here we go. I see the Leader of the Opposition supporting a deficit! It is not something that we warm to on this side of the House, but the Leader of the Opposition says, 'Oh well, the Treasurer said it was a big deficit,' and he is out there supporting a deficit. Look at them. Deficit one, deficit two and deficit three! The deficit! We have an opposition of deficit. I heard the opposition leader supporting the deficit this morning. He is on record as supporting a deficit. I will be reminding him until the day he dies that he was on radio supporting a deficit. Thank you very much.

In fact, the list of what is missing goes on and on and is far longer than the list of what we received. Take the environment, for example. Where is the money for management of world heritage areas? What about the South East Queensland Forests Agreement, the Vegetation Management Act and Cape York? However, the federal government can find $10 million to build radioactive waste dumps. The only detail missing is whose backyard they will be built in.

We welcome the $34 million in additional funding over four years for the Australian Tourist Commission, for domestic tourism marketing and for the provision of regional infrastructure. However, the federal government—which takes a $5 billion GST dividend from the tourism industry—has missed a golden opportunity to invest heavily in an industry which employs more than 500,000 Australians and generates $71 billion a year for the nation. The federal government's inability to establish a credible mechanism for ensuring that workers' entitlements are paid has left airline travellers with a $100 million-a-year legacy.

The budget contains nothing in terms of additional funding to the states to provide for any extra costs which may be incurred as a result of the new trans-national crime arrangements. This federal budget is also bad news for Queensland agriculture, particularly those farming families in need and dealing with the ravages of drought. Last financial year, 2000-01, the federal government spent $303 million on rural assistance. This financial year, 2001-02, according to last night's budget papers, that rural assistance, which includes exceptional circumstances assistance for drought stricken farming families, will be $238 million at a time when large sections of Queensland are in drought. Talk about concern; there is none! The forward estimates show that spending will be reduced to $146 million in the financial year 2002-03, to $115 million in 2003-04, to $39 million in 2004-05 and to only $27 million in 2005-06. They do not care about people in the bush and they do not care about droughts. They do not care about the people in the bush who are striving to make ends meet during a drought.

The United States had launched a $17 million campaign to promote US beef in Japan, but the federal coalition government is not prepared to spend a cent in our biggest market where demand is being hit by mad cow disease scares. Queensland councils have again missed out, receiving only the normal increase in federal financial assistance grants.

In summary, this is a deficit budget for 2001-02, which shows no vision and which snubs the needs of Queenslanders.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Premier's Export Awards

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.43 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland government is working hard, in contrast to our federal colleagues, to develop a strong export culture in this state. Over the past year we have been helping 3,130 Queensland exporters to expand into new and existing export markets. We are also helping another 351 companies that hope to begin exporting within 12 months.

The state government assists business in a number of ways, including partnering with the private sector, identifying international business opportunities, providing workshops and training, and offering support and advice. We are also using new technology to help our exporters save time, money and reduce risk. By integrating the use of videoconferencing and an interactive web site, Queensland firms are conducting trade missions in a virtual environment—and they are doing extremely well.

In the financial year to 30 June 2001, exports of merchandise and services generated revenue of $27.7 billion, an increase of 25.8 per cent or $5.69 billion on the previous year. Not a

bad record—not bad at all. There has been further growth in the current financial year. Queensland's merchandise exports for the eight months to February 2002 were up by 15.1 per cent compared with the same period in 2001. Trade for the whole of Australia rose by 4.87 per cent during the same period. One can see that Queensland leads Australia.

Exports create jobs. Therefore, at lunchtime today at Parliament House, along with my key ministerial colleagues, I will be launching the 2002 Premier of Queensland Export Awards, which recognise and honour the success of Queensland exporters across all sectors of business. The awards are supported by an excellent team of sponsors, including the *Courier-Mail* newspaper and Mincom Limited, both new sponsors which have come on board this year. I thank them both. This year we are also expanding our regional awards, with Cairns and Townsville having their own regional export awards for the first time. These are in addition to existing regional awards in Toowoomba and on the Sunshine Coast. Queensland exporters have until 26 July to enter for the 2002 awards.

Four of the winners of my export awards last year went on to win their respective categories at the national export awards, and we have had some outstanding achievements already this year. HOK Sport finalised negotiations in March for a $500 million contract to design an Olympic Sports Centre in Nanjing, China. That came about in part because of a visit to China that I undertook with Tom Burns and other leading business people, where we hosted a major dinner in Nanjing with the governor. This company was 33rd on the list at one point and it went from there to win the contract. I am delighted that we were there to support it.

Mount Isa Mines secured a number of contracts in China, worth about $40 million, to supply ISASMELT technology. This technology produces lead and copper. Sanderson, a Queensland design group, began work in November to design and build a premier tourist destination in Macau valued at $40 million. The company will employ an extra 30 full-time staff to fulfil this contract. Ludowici Mineral Processing Equipment Pty Ltd secured a $2 million deal in October with Codelco, a major mining company in Chile. In December, Australian Garlic Bread cracked the Singapore retail market. The company now supplies frozen garlic bread to 55 stores in Singapore's largest supermarket chain, NTUC Fairprice. Wedgetail, a software company, signed a lucrative deal in April with Sony Corporation to provide enhanced security and authorisation for Sony's new interactive digital television.

As members can see, our exporters are an innovative lot who truly represent our Smart State objectives. Tom Barton and I and other key ministers are doing everything we can to develop this export culture because a Smart State needs an export culture, and that is what we are developing.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Archbishop Aspinall; National Child Abuse Inquiry

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.47 a.m.), by leave: Last month I gave my backing to the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr Phillip Aspinall, by calling on the federal government to establish a national inquiry into child abuse.

This is an important ministerial statement which, because of time constraints, I would like to have incorporated in *Hansard*, along with a letter from the Prime Minister, who replied to my request.

Leave granted.

Ministerial statement by Premier Peter Beattie

Last month I gave my backing to the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr Phillip Aspinall, by calling on the Federal Government to establish a national inquiry into child abuse.I believe Dr Aspinall is genuine about uncovering the truth of the Church's handling of past sexual abuse, but his search for a suitable inquiry head has been hamstrung by the limitations on an inquiry constituted by the church.

I understand his desire for a national inquiry, because good intentions come to nothing if you cannot find an independent investigator, and cannot promise victims their efforts to expose perpetrators will be rewarded.

As Dr Aspinall has said: 'The value of uniform mandatory reporting arrangements, uniform screening procedures and dealing with criminal justice issues across jurisdictions all need to be examined'."

The difficulties of establishing an inquiry which does not have broad scope, does not offer protection to witnesses and cannot compel witnesses to appear have been highlighted by the fact that the Anglican Church in Brisbane has been unable to make headway with its plans for an inquiry.

I have spoken to Dr Aspinall about these matters twice.

As a result of these difficulties and because I believe it is crucial for an inquiry to take place, I wrote to the Prime Minister in April, asking him to give Dr Aspinall's call for a national inquiry the consideration it deserved.

I have received a reply in which the Prime Minister tells me the Federal Government does not intend to proceed with a royal commission.

Instead, the Prime Minister is expressing his hope that the original inquiry announced by the Archbishop will go ahead and that (and I quote from the Prime Minister's letter) "it will be of benefit in that limited jurisdiction".

Children in Queensland are no more or less vulnerable than children in Tasmania or Western Australia, and their abusers are no more or less predatory.

The fact that child abuse continues to flourish is a cause of shame for all Australian adults.

For this we need a properly constituted national inquiry.

The Queensland Government initiated the Forde Inquiry into institutional child abuse—it is now time for the Federal Government to take responsibility for this national scourge.

PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

4 May 2002

The Hon Peter D Beattie MLA
Premier of Queensland
PO Box 185
BRISBANE ALBERT STREET QLD 4002

My dear Premier

You wrote to me on 16 April 2002 expressing support for the proposal by the Archbishop of Brisbane, Dr Aspinall, that the Commonwealth Government establish a royal commission into the incidence of sexual abuse of children and the means of protecting children from abuse.

My Cabinet colleagues and I share the great concern in the community about the incidence of child sexual abuse and the devastating impact it can have throughout the lives of those who are abused. We have considered this issue carefully and have given close consideration to whether a broad, national inquiry would provide clear and lasting benefits.

It is the government's view that a royal commission at the federal level will not necessarily enhance our capacity to address these issues effectively in the future.

In recent times there have, fortunately, been considerable advances in dealing with abuse, including a greater preparedness to report perpetrators to the police and more sensitive and informed support for the abused. The community is now very aware of the issue of child abuse and is quite appalled by it. Although continued vigilance is critical, institutions and the community have already begun to take many of the steps that might otherwise have flowed from the holding of a royal commission.

You will no doubt also have observed that public statements reported in the media indicate that not all the institutions that have faced difficulties in relation to child sexual abuse would support a royal commission.

I have therefore written to Dr Aspinall advising that the government does not intend to proceed with a royal commission at the federal level. I have also expressed my hope that an inquiry of the kind he previously announced in relation to the Diocese of Brisbane will be of benefit in that limited jurisdiction.

Yours sincerely

(sgd)

(John Howard)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (9.49 a.m.), by leave: Last night the federal Treasurer gave us a glimpse at what he offers for this country when he takes over from John Howard as the leader of the federal coalition. He delivered an uninspiring budget that hit out at ordinary Australians and promised nothing for the future of Australians. To prop up the bottom line he has taken directly from the pockets of those who can least afford it—the sick, the homeless and the disadvantaged. He has wielded the axe at a time of relative economic prosperity in our country. I shudder to think what he will do if we do experience tough times and he has his hands on the leadership.

There are three key measures used to judge the fiscal performance of government in Australia—the operating surplus/deficit, the cash surplus/deficit and fiscal balance. In all three the Commonwealth is expecting to record deficits this financial year. Let us just have a look at one of these measures. The Commonwealth prefers using the cash surplus/deficit and, by this measure, since the publication of the Commonwealth *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook*, its 2001-02 position deteriorated by some $1.7 billion—a $1.2 billion cash deficit for 2001-02 compared to our

cash surplus of $223 million. This is despite Mr Costello promising four years ago that the budget would be in surplus by $14.6 billion by 2001-02.

Mr Seeney: What about your surplus?

Mr MACKENROTH: This is also despite his being the highest taxing Treasurer in Australian history. We will get to ours in a minute.

On the government's own figures, revenue has surged from $163.2 billion in 2001-02 to $169.6 billion in 2002-03. Ninety per cent of this extra revenue grab is extra tax on individuals. Unlike the low tax state of Queensland, Commonwealth tax as a proportion of national output is at a record high. Once we count in the GST, as we should, Commonwealth revenue will be $199 billion in 2002-03—a record. At over 26 per cent of GDP, current relative Commonwealth tax levels are at their highest since the mid-1980s.

Costello could not get his budget over the line despite high taxes and despite wholesale cuts to a complete range of social welfare programs. However, no-one can dispute that it has been a very difficult year with 11 September and the flow-on effects this tragic event had on world markets. Why, even Mr Horan said this morning that last year had been very expensive for the federal government and Peter Costello had done well. He went on to say that 'when you get that relatively small deficit in the midst of a war against terrorism and a border protection system, then I think the results are very sound'. Is this the same Mr Horan who stood up in the House this week and attacked the Beattie government for our predicted operating deficit of $148 million?

Mr Horan: You didn't have a war.

Mr MACKENROTH: 11 September and what has happened in the world is responsible for what is happening in the money markets. That is what he alluded to in what he said this morning. He also attacked me this week for using unusual fruit shop explanations like comparing apples with oranges—$148 million compared to the federal government, with a $3.6 billion net operating deficit for 2001-02. We have predicted a $148 million deficit at mid-year compared to $3.6 billion. That is comparing apples with apples. But Mr Horan says that the $3.6 billion deficit is okay!

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.53 a.m.), by leave: The smart countries of the world know that the key to a healthy, growing, thriving economy is a healthy investment in education and training. But make no mistake: our competitors understand this, but the federal government has utterly failed to grasp it. Education and training were largely ignored in last night's federal budget. Clearly, the Commonwealth is oblivious to the role of education and training and the importance of underpinning our economy with a skilled work force. The budget offers nothing in new initiatives for schooling in Queensland or indeed schooling in any other state.

Minister Nelson has failed his first test as a minister. He has come away from his first budget completely empty handed. There are no new initiatives in schools or higher education anywhere in the country. In fact, schools barely rate a mention in the budget. Dr Nelson seems not to have grasped the fact that unless investment is made in education and training we become a very vulnerable nation in an increasingly competitive world. If Dr Nelson has failed to grasp it, his colleague Liberal Leader Bob Quinn does not seem to have much of a better grasp. He said last night in relation to the upcoming federal budget that 'Queenslanders are set to reap the rewards for having re-elected the Howard government last year'. I am not sure what rewards he was thinking of, but they certainly do not appear in education. There were no rewards for schools or our universities.

Unfortunately, Minister Nelson has continued the divisiveness between the state and non-state schools that we first saw perpetrated under Minister Mr Kemp. Any hope that stakeholders might have had about a change in direction with a supposedly sensitive, new-age minister were completely dashed last night. The increase for the non-state sector is 9.2 per cent compared with that for state schools of 6.2 per cent. When student growth per sector is taken into account, the Commonwealth will continue to provide four times as much per student in a non-state school as in a state school.

There were many mean-spirited cuts in this budget, with very little policy coherence. One of the things in the budget papers that disturbs me is its confirmation of the myopic vision of the Commonwealth government, with its funding to cease for the National Asian Languages and

Studies in Australian Schools, or NALSAS, program. Once again, it is apparent that the new minister remains totally unaware of the significance of this program not only for our immediate relations with Asian neighbours but also its significance for our future competitiveness in the region.

There are a number of so-called new initiatives which are just previous announcements recycled. For instance, the Quality Teacher Program is presented in this budget as new, but the funds were included in the forward estimates of previous budgets. The funding for this is $47 million in 2002-03, but it will decline to $33 million in the following year. Funds for targeted programs are showing a decrease overall. Disturbingly, Commonwealth spending on education and training is projected to decline as a share of GDP from 1.8 per cent to 1.6 per cent, further decreasing below the OECD average. This clearly reflects the Commonwealth's utter failure to grasp the importance of education and training in an increasingly globalising economy. Education and training is about creating 21st century jobs in a diversified economy. It is about skilling and educating our people to be competitive in a globalised culture and economic setting. Queensland has grasped the nettle and taken great strides towards turning into a Smart State. With the lacklustre, moribund mob running the show in Canberra, our challenge is to achieve this in a national environment where investment in education is at best stagnant and at worst in decline.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Youth and Minister for the Arts) (9.57 a.m.), by leave: In a press release from the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training, Dr Brendan Nelson, reference is made to Commonwealth budget initiatives in the area of apprenticeships in information technology and in the area of school based apprenticeships. Those announcements are relied upon by the minister to support the contention which heads the press release—'A strong foundation for Australia's future skill needs'. But as Shakespeare once said, 'All that glisters is not gold.' When one examines the actual facts in the budget, the truth reveals a very different story.

Take, for example, the issue of Youth Pathways, which was the subject of a major report to the Prime Minister. It is a matter of great concern to this government that, despite the fanfare from the Prime Minister on Youth Pathways, this budget will cut funding for the Jobs Pathways program from $24.9 million last year to $22.9 million. Worse still, funding for Reconnect, a program aimed at homeless youth, recommended for expansion in the federal government's *Footprints to the future* report, has been cut from $20.2 million to $19.2 million.

Further, this budget is proposing to cease funding to the states for the Industry Training Advisory Body Network. Funding is to be cut by $5.1 million in 2002-03 and eliminated in 2003-04. The industry training advisory bodies are the voice of industry in the critical area of skills development for industry and yet, despite the rhetoric, despite the glittering promises, what we see in the budget is spectacularly different.

One area of profound concern to this government and to the Australian people is the issue of jobs. In this area, the Commonwealth government has been criticised, both by the Australian Council of Social Services in its report and in the draft report of the Productivity Commission, for failing to do what is necessary to reach out particularly to the long-term and disadvantaged unemployed. Yet what we see in this budget is that the Commonwealth is proposing to cut—yes, cut—$64.7 million over 2003-06 from the Jobs Network. This must raise concerns about the standard of services available to the unemployed. The budget proposes to increase the number of Work for the Dole places by 8,500 a year. Work for the Dole has been rightly criticised both internationally and domestically for a number of reasons, specifically in that it does not provide appropriate training for participants.

In contrast, the Beattie government has demonstrated through its community-based programs under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives that they achieve double the success rate of Work for the Dole in placing unemployed people into jobs or further training. The Australian Council of Social Services found that only 27 per cent of Work for the Dole participants were in employment three months after completion of the program. Outcomes for the Beattie government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives and Community Jobs Plan program are more than double that; 55 per cent of participants are in employment three months after completing the program.

So despite the glittering promises that issue from the Commonwealth government, the truth is that it is cutting in the area of Youth Pathways for that difficult transition for disconnected youth from school to the workplace. It is cutting in the case of assistance to homeless youth and it is cutting in the area of the Jobs Network, which provides assistance to the unemployed.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister Assisting the Premier on Women's Policy) (10.01 a.m.), by leave: The federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, had a golden opportunity last night to provide relief to public hospitals so that they can get on with doing their job—treating those patients with acute illnesses or injuries. There was an opportunity for Mr Costello to do so much for ordinary Queenslanders who need and deserve more in the way of medical services. So much was needed but almost nothing was given.

What I found a particular disgrace was that public hospitals did not rate a mention in the 2002-03 federal budget statement. With an increase of almost 30 per cent in the cost of essential medications offered through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Mr Costello's budget ensures that the sick, the elderly and the disabled will continue to suffer the most. Mr Costello confessed to a $288 million bungle in GST savings on medicines which—like most other GST savings—have never been realised and are never likely to be realised. Pensioners must pay for his bungle.

While Mr Costello slickly highlighted a few high-cost items as good value for money, he ignored the fact that the cost of many common, everyday items essential for the health particularly of the chronically ill keeps adding up and mounts into a blow-out for them. This could have the effect of causing people to stop taking their medication, meaning that they end up more seriously ill and a significant burden on the health system. With no apparent support from the Commonwealth, the increase in the cost of PBS medications is likely to add pressure on the public health system as more people access publicly funded medications. The attitude towards public health in this budget does not bode well for our upcoming negotiations with Canberra on the next health care agreement.

As I said previously, the budget offers nothing to relieve pressure on our public hospitals, particularly our emergency departments. While we welcome the $4 million per year for Queensland to provide extra private doctors to fringe metropolitan areas, there is no evidence of a much-needed increase in the GPs' general rebate for after-hours services that would have provided some respite to overworked emergency departments, which are now seeing huge increases in GP-type patients. Until we see a significant increase in the rebate, we will see fewer and fewer bulk billing services, even for lower income people, and a greater reliance on our public system.

Queensland spends about $100 million a year providing GP services in our public hospital system that should be provided by the federal government. This is a clear abrogation of its responsibility. Every member opposite complains in this House about the waiting periods for services in the public health system. Are they now joining me in criticising this budget, or are they out there supporting it? Members opposite should not ever talk about the waiting periods and criticise our hardworking staff if they will not come out now and demand a better deal for our public hospitals and our GPs. It is no wonder that two-thirds of the Liberal Party and half of the National Party are hiding today.

The federal Treasurer had an opportunity to address the great need for more GPs and more GP surgery hours, not only in outer metropolitan areas but also in Brisbane and other communities around the state. Toowoomba needs more GPs. More GPs are needed in Cairns, Townsville, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Wide Bay, Mackay and on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Anyone who does not claim that they need more GPs in their electorate should put up their hand. Wherever public hospitals are continuing to pick up GP services, particularly in rural and regional areas around Queensland, the shortage of GP after-hours services has been a burden on the public health system. It has meant patients waiting long periods to see doctors in our hospitals when they could be going to see their GPs. In the words of the president of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia, Dr Ken Mackey, the budget in terms of what it did for rural and remote areas was a national disgrace.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Brothels

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: I would like to further inform the parliament of the successes the government has enjoyed in relation to our crackdown on illegal prostitution. As members will be aware, we have the toughest prostitution legislation in this country. We legalised prostitution in order to improve health and safety and bring this activity out into the open. By doing this, we have greatly diminished the ability of organised crime elements to infiltrate the industry.

Our approach to this issue is twofold. We cannot create a legalised industry without moves to stamp out the illegal prostitution industry where crime has previously thrived. I am pleased to report that, as a result of Operation Alpha Champion, which ran between March and May this year, the Queensland Police Service's prostitution enforcement task force recently closed down 19 illegal brothels. At the closure of this operation last week, police arrested 25 people for 49 offences. These included procuring persons for prostitution, participation in prostitution and offences relating to premises being used by two or more prostitutes. A number of these people were illegal immigrants. In conjunction with this operation, restraining orders are being sought in relation to property to the value of $240,000. Investigators also seized cash and property to the value of $18,790. This follows on from our record last year in which, on average, one brothel was closed by police every week.

We do not bury our heads in the sand and pretend that prostitution does not exist. We have the most stringent legislation in Australia, which allows the operation of small boutique brothels in largely industrial areas. This preserves health and safety standards and deters criminality in the prostitution industry. The recent results of police operations into illegal brothels are further proof of our determination to strike out hard against illegal prostitution. The Beattie government's legislation, which has been before the Queensland people twice now, balances law enforcement with the strict regulation of a legal industry, and these results are testament to the effectiveness of the path we have chosen on this issue.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ethanol

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Environment) (10.08 a.m.), by leave: On the first of this month I travelled to Hobart to attend a ministerial council meeting of Environment Ministers from around Australia. It was resolved at this meeting to establish a working party to study fuel additives. The council noted the Queensland ethanol initiative. As honourable members are aware, the Hon. Minister for Public Works has used the Government Motor Garage to kick-start a market for ethanol in south-east Queensland. Queensland is the first and only state where the purchasing power of government has been used to deliver a green outcome. The national working party will report back to the ministerial council early next year.

Mr Schwarten: But we still own our fleet in Queensland. Other states privatised theirs.

Mr WELLS: As the honourable minister has said, we are able to do this because we still own our fleet in Queensland, whereas in some other states they have privatised their fleets.

My scientists are confident that the national working party will recognise that ethanol will provide a mechanism to address some important and pressing environmental issues—in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, particulates and sulphur dioxide. I am advised that if all the cars in Queensland configured for unleaded petrol were running on E10 we would each year release into the atmosphere one million tonnes less of greenhouse gases.

The Commonwealth Minister for Environment, Dr David Kemp, and the Minister for Agriculture, Warren Truss, are now working in the same direction and have agreed to fund a study to examine market barriers to bio-fuels, including bio-diesel and ethanol. The decision of the ministerial council in Hobart could pave the way for a national roll-out of the ethanol scheme and could provide an even bigger boost for our Queensland sugar industry.

As honourable members are aware, ethanol is a by-product of sugar cane production, making Queensland the logical place to establish large scale ethanol production. The production of ethanol is a wise step for Queensland and Australia, with ethanol providing a sound alternative to fossil fuels. Since April this year, 85 state government vehicles have started using E10, and a public trial has started across south-east Queensland. The director and general manager of BP

refinery at Bulwer has personally advised me, here at Parliament House, that within months BP will be making ethanol available to the wider public through regular unleaded petrol pumps. If all of Queensland's transport petrol were to contain just 10 per cent ethanol, we would need to increase our production to 350 million litres. If Australia decides, after further study, that it wants to mandate a 10 per cent ethanol blend, then we will need 1.8 billion litres of ethanol.

It is abundantly clear that Queensland farmers can play a key role in providing the crops necessary for ethanol. This will result in new permanent jobs and new service industries in nearby towns. The move to bio-fuels will benefit areas of Queensland's social, economic and environmental life and will make a significant impact on the government's commitment to sustainability in its triple bottom line. I am sure that members from both sides of this House will welcome the process of moving to Queensland grown bio-fuels and its consequences—reducing fossil fuel consumption, stimulating our agricultural sector and reducing greenhouse gas emissions throughout Australia.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Federal Budget

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (10.12 a.m.), by leave: After weeks and weeks of speculation and anxiety within the disability sector, the Commonwealth government has announced funding in its budget for the next five years under a Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement. In his budget speech last night federal Treasurer Peter Costello said—

> A new five-year Commonwealth State Disability Agreement is proposed, with the Commonwealth providing the states an extra $547.5 million over five years for unmet need.

This statement is dishonestly framed as a boost for people with disabilities. The government has claimed that existing funds for unmet needs, which it promised to include in future multilateral agreements, is new money. The federal Treasurer is calling old money new money. This $547.5 million over five years equates to the previous unmet need bilateral funding agreed to in 2000-02. What has been there for the past two years under a bilateral agreement has been carefully packaged for presentation, but there is no gift for people with disabilities in this federal budget.

The Commonwealth government knows that the population is growing and that need is growing. The funding proposed is grossly inadequate to meet current need, much less rising demand, over the life of the next CSTDA. All of the existing money provided by the Commonwealth is committed—to Queenslanders on support packages, to families and individuals who for the last month or more have been stressed by the Commonwealth's evasive tactics in relation to future spending on disability services. The only way this so-called new money can be used to fund additional services is by reallocating it from existing services. There is no new money for unmet need. When we should be talking about growth money, we are seeing more of the same. This budget and the disability pension cuts reveal the complete lack of regard of the Howard-Costello team for the needs of some of the most disadvantaged members of our community.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Giant Sensitive Plant; Heteropsylla Spinnulosa

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines) (10.14 a.m.), by leave: It is my duty to report to honourable members that Indonesia is about to be invaded by Queensland—not by a resurrected Queensland navy but by an army of little green bugs. This is no ordinary bug, and its intent is not to harm but to save Indonesia's maize and other food crops from devastation by weeds—indeed a smart bug. The tiny insect in question is heteropsylla spinnulosa, which has been responsible for the demise of the giant sensitive plant, or mimosa invisia, that for years has been a major pest affecting food crops in north Queensland.

This insensitive bug was first released in Queensland in the early 1980s following extensive research and testing by scientists working for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. The bug's feeding habits have proved so effective at stunting the growth of the weed and preventing seed production that today the giant sensitive plant is now considered only a minor weed in north Queensland. Following that success, the little green bug is about to be exported to

Indonesia to take on a massive infestation of mimosa invisia in that country. The giant sensitive plant is a major weed in maize and other food crops in Indonesia which can cause complete crop loss for peasant farmers who cannot afford chemical herbicides.

Natural Resources and Mines scientists have been cooperating with Indonesian researchers in the control of another serious weed, siam weed. Through these contacts the Indonesians heard about our miracle bug which controls the giant sensitive plant. This week, bugs were collected by NRM and local government pest officers in Cardwell and packaged for immediate shipment to Jakarta.

Mr Lucas: Will they be travel bugs?

Mr ROBERTSON: These travel bugs will be used by Indonesian scientists to establish a research colony for testing before they are released into infestations of giant sensitive plant throughout Indonesia. Hopefully the bugs will work as well as they have in Queensland and Indonesian farmers will be able to harvest their maize and other food crops without major losses. This is another great example of how the Beattie government's Smart State approach to technology is benefiting not only Queenslanders but also our neighbours in Asia and the Pacific Rim.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Restricted Dog Breeds

Hon. N. I. CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (Minister for Local Government and Planning) (10.17 a.m.), by leave: In December last year parliament passed amendments to the Local Government Act introducing strict new minimum standards for the keeping of restricted breeds of dogs—those breeds that the federal government has banned from importation into Australia. That legislation will come into force on 1 June. The legislation also gives councils the power to introduce even tougher standards if they choose, including total or partial bans on these breeds. A number of councils are pursuing that course. Owners of these restricted breeds will be required to obtain a permit from their local council if an outright ban has not already been imposed by that particular council. All permits will be subject to conditions, including dog identification tags, the need for the dog to be muzzled and under effective control by a responsible adult when in a public place, the provision of an enclosure, a public notice on the enclosure, and the requirement to notify a council if the dog is moved to another local government area.

There are other restrictions imposed by the legislation. Material for wall enclosures must be at least 1.8 metres high above ground level. The enclosure must have a childproof enclosure gate that is self-closing and self-latching. An appropriate weatherproof sleeping area must be provided for the dog. The enclosure must not be built or situated in a place where the general public could gain access when entering the front entrance of the dwelling or house. Also, these dogs must be de-sexed once they reach nine months of age.

This government has backed up the new requirements with tough penalties for those who flout the law. The conditions are tough, and so are the penalties—for a purpose. Unfortunately, we have seen in recent times just how necessary this legislation is. It is about public safety, and I make no apology for the tough stand this government has taken in relation to restricted dogs.

As I mentioned earlier, the standards imposed by the state government are minimum standards. Councils have the option of providing tougher standards still, and many are. A number of councils in Queensland have taken the opportunity to ban these dogs entirely from their city or shire. That is their right and a decision they have made after considering what is best for their local communities. Because the restrictions imposed on these breeds will vary from council area to council area, I urge all owners of these breeds of dogs to contact their local council to find out what they must do to comply with the new laws, which will come into force on 1 June.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Death of Father Peter Elson

Hon. M. F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland) (10.19 a.m.), by leave: Today I advise the House with great sadness that Father Peter Elson, who was until recently our Department of Emergency Services chaplain, was killed in a car accident on Monday night. Father Peter was transferred as a military chaplain to Wagga Wagga late in 2001. He was travelling back to Brisbane to be at the

bedside of his ailing father when the accident occurred. Father Peter was also until recently the parish priest at St Andrew's Anglican Church at Lutwyche.

Many DES staff joined in a morning tea to farewell Father Peter in the auditorium at the Kedron Park complex in December. All staff who met him will remember Peter with a great deal of fondness. As minister, I am very much aware of the work that Father Peter did. Indeed, I commended him on the occasion of his leaving in that regard. He was a regular visitor to Kedron Park and his unfailing courtesy and kindness were always in evidence. I offer my most sincere sympathies to Father Peter's family. He will be greatly missed by all at the Department of Emergency Services.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Unfair Dismissal Laws

Hon. G. R. NUTTALL (Sandgate—ALP) (Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.21 a.m.), by leave: The Federal Workplace Relations Minister, Tony Abbott, has announced his intention to change the Corporations Law to take over responsibility for unfair dismissals, the right of entry to workplaces and the management of disputes in all Australian workplaces. This is simply a cynical and cheap political attempt to take over the industrial relations jurisdictions of the Labor states and to bring us all down to the lowest common denominator. It seeks to exempt a significant number of workers from protection against unfair dismissal, exclude unions from workplaces and provoke further confrontation in Australian workplaces. When Mr Abbott's predecessor, Peter Reith, first floated the same idea four years ago, he received no support for national change, just as Mr Abbott is unlikely to receive any support for his proposal.

The proposal has serious flaws. It fails to address the many significant legal and practical difficulties that this approach would cause. At a basic level, even if the broadest view is taken, the corporations power can only be applied to employees of constitutional corporations. In Queensland, this would leave more than one-quarter of our workers not covered and we would still need separate state laws to protect those people. The result in this circumstance would be a more complex system of overlapping jurisdictions and extensive damage to existing industrial relations institutions. It would do irreparable damage to our workplaces and to our communities. The Queensland Labor government supports a fair and balanced approach to industrial relations, which includes protection for the low-paid and disadvantaged workers that the federal coalition seems intent on suppressing even further. Evidence of that is this state Labor government's in principle support for the Australian Council of Trade Unions living wage case application.

I was particularly pleased to hear that the Australian Industrial Relations Commission awarded its highest ever flat wage increase for federal award workers last week and the highest percentage increase in over 20 years. That is good news for low-paid workers, and I am pleased that this government has played some small part in that. In contrast, the federal government only supported a $10 a week increase in award rates for people employed up to the C10 level in awards, which would have excluded many workers who currently only receive minimum award rates of pay. The Queensland industrial relations system is working well. I invite the federal government to take a leaf out of our book and work with both employers and unions as well as the state government to improve its workplace relations framework based on the success that we have achieved here in Queensland.

The Queensland system has promoted stability and economic growth through a climate of industrial harmony. Under our laws, industrial disputation remains among the lowest of the Australian states, which helps to promote economic prosperity and jobs growth in this great state. In addition, unfair dismissal applications remain at an all-time low. Mr Abbott should go back to the drawing board.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Member for Robina; Comments in *Courier-Mail*

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (10.24 a.m.), by leave: I was not in the House this morning, but I understand that the Premier made some comments about an article in the *Courier-Mail* yesterday based on a press release that I issued the day before. Can I say that it was not my intention to compare the behaviour or the conduct of the Premier to that of Robert Mugabe, whose conduct I find, as most people would, totally reprehensible. I would in no way make that comparison. However, I do not resile from the fact that I made comment about the outcome of the election

campaign and the impact of optional preferential voting. I wish to make that distinction. If the Premier found any of those comments by me to be offensive, I do apologise to him. I make the point that I stand by the comments I made in the press release, but I had no control over the headline which the *Courier-Mail* put on the article. If the Premier was offended, I do apologise. No inference or comparison was meant.

Mr BEATTIE: Can I simply say that I accept that and I thank the honourable member for his decency.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Sugar Industry

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.26 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

That this house acknowledges the economic plight of the Queensland sugar industry as a result of the collapse in world sugar prices and previous adverse seasonal conditions and, recognising the failure of the State Sugar Industry Crop Re-Planting and Establishment Scheme, directs the Beattie Government to provide an immediate cash injection to assist the industry in the short term as well as long-term measures to encourage industry diversification and improved productivity.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Federal Budget

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.26 a.m.): The budget that was brought down last night provided a very strong base for Australia with security and a strong economy whilst at the same time providing a very strong component of care for ordinary Australians. This morning it was interesting to hear the government's expected but half-hearted attack on the budget. It was half-hearted because the members opposite know that all of Australia wants to see our borders protected. All of Australia wants to see increased domestic security in case of any acts of terrorism. All of Australia wants to see us fight the war against terrorism. Members opposite know it, and that is why they got thrashed at the last federal election. That is why their arguments this morning were so half-hearted.

Those opposite know that this federal government has had to repay over $60 billion of the $96 billion of national debt left behind by Labor—Labor with its banana republic. They know that we now have a strong economy, with interest rates at the lowest they have been for many years. They know that it is predicted that unemployment will come down in Australia, even though Queensland has the worst unemployment rate in mainland Australia. They know that inflation is being restricted. They know that the economy is going to grow at 3.75 per cent. That is why they were so half-hearted this morning.

No credit was given by members opposite for all the increases being provided in aged care. There are aged care subsidies for capital works to provide for more nurses and 6,000 aged care places. There was not a peep out of the Health Minister about increased funding for palliative care or the retractable syringes program. There was not a peep out of the Health Minister about that. There was not a peep out of the Employment Minister about the wonderful apprenticeship scheme for those apprentices undertaking apprenticeships in schools, the $750 grant and the fact that they can be retained in a job once they leave school. What about the baby bonus and the support that will give to young families in Queensland? It was only half-hearted objection—

Time expired.

One-Day International Cricket Matches, Cairns

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (10.28 a.m.): I am pleased to inform the House of the recent announcement by the Australian Cricket Board that a test match between Australia and Bangladesh will be played in Cairns in July 2003. This will be followed by two one-day internationals on 2 and 3 August, and the 2003 program will be just the first year of a five-year program. As members can imagine, the news has been very well received at all levels in Cairns. Someone has suggested that thousands of Cairns kids will be there chanting, 'Ooh, aah, Glenn McGrath.' But I have no doubt that the biggest 'ooh aahs' will be for my favourite player, Jim Maher—a Cairns boy who has more than made good. Jimmy is a fine young man and a great

ambassador for Cairns. It should be a very special occasion for him, as a member of the greatest cricket team in the world, to play in front of his home crowd.

Beyond the tremendous pleasure far northerners will experience in seeing the Australian team play, the opportunity is likely to be very appealing to many Australians who will at that time be suffering the rain, wind and cold of a southern winter. What pleasant relief in July and August to come to Cairns for a week or so of warmth, a boat trip or two to the reef and a few days at the cricket. We expect that the appeal of the cricket will also be international. We will take up the opportunities that arise from the, by then, frequent Australian Airlines flights between Cairns and six Asian destinations. I congratulate senior sporting leaders such as Russell Beer, Jeff Hopgood, Kevin Maher and Mayor Kevin Byrne, who have worked hard to make this happen. I join them and the ACB in the objective of making international cricket a major annual event on the Cairns calendar. In truth, we are seeking marketing assistance and promotional assistance at an international level through the Queensland Events Corporation. Sports tourism is a great opportunity for Cairns, considering the greater number of international-standard sporting facilities we now have thanks in no small part to the Queensland government's very significant financial contribution over recent years.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Federal Budget

Mr HORAN (10.30 a.m.): My question is directed to the Premier. Last night the Howard government delivered another example of responsible financial management. In a time of global economic downturn, the worst international terrorism the world has ever seen and with Australia having troops on the field in three fronts, to have paid back $60 billion of Labor's debt, to have the lowest unemployment rate since the late 1980s and to still have a growing economy, the federal budget is certainly something for the Premier to learn from. The exemplary financial management of the federal government has provided Queensland with an additional net GST windfall of $133 million. Will the bonus of these additional moneys to Queensland be eaten up in paying off the Labor government's $822 million bankcard debt from last year's state budget and the forecast multimillion dollar debt the Labor government has run up again this year?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Let me make one point very clear at the outset—we will be supporting Queensland families, not seeking to undermine them, which is what the federal government has done. I have made it very clear—and so has the Treasurer and the Minister for Families—that we are committed to helping ordinary Queensland families get a fair go. That is not what happened with the federal budget. There will be a stark contrast when our Treasurer brings down his budget. My second point is this, the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: No, you asked me a question; please show some manners.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: He is such a rude man. The Leader of the Opposition described the federal budget as a 'strong' budget, but it has an operating deficit of $3.6 billion this year. If that is the Leader of the Opposition's definition of a 'strong' budget, we hope that he never becomes Treasurer. Let us get this clearly on record. The Leader of the Opposition's definition of a 'strong' budget is one with an operating deficit of $3.6 billion. That is the Leader of the Opposition's definition of a strong budgetary position. In the history of Queensland I have never heard a conservative leader describe a $3.6 billion operating deficit as a 'strong' budgetary position. The Leader of the Opposition is a leader among conservatives and is leading them down the deficit road. The Leader of the Opposition will become known henceforth as Mr Deficit, because he believes that a $3.6 billion operating deficit is a good thing. Not only that, but the cash deficit is $1.2 billion. So, there is deficit, deficit, deficit. The Leader of the Opposition, Mr Horan, espouses deficit, deficit, deficit. That is how it works.

Mr Mackenroth: At least we still have money in the bank.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, that's right; we have a surplus.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Talk about it? Let us look at what members are talking about. I have already highlighted to the House that the federal government is cutting assistance to the rural community.

The Leader of the Opposition claims to represent the bush. Look at the cuts I spelt out this morning, namely, cuts in rural assistance, and the Leader of the Opposition supported that. Secondly, there are cuts in road funding to the state, and the Leader of the Opposition supported that. The Leader of the Opposition described it as a 'strong' budget. I have the Leader of the Opposition's written words in front of me and they are on the parliamentary record. I have a funny feeling those words will be referred to repeatedly. It is like having a bad meal. The Leader of the Opposition will have to deal with this on many occasions. This federal budget is a really bad meal and the Leader of the Opposition's comments about it will come back to haunt him again and again. Quick-Eze will not be good enough for the Leader of the Opposition to get over describing this budget as 'strong'.

Federal Budget

Mr HORAN: My second question is again directed to the Premier. I refer to the excellent federal budget announced last night.

Government members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr HORAN: Don't you like radiation oncology? Do you think that's funny? I refer to the excellent federal budget announcement from last night that six radiation cancer treatment units will be located in regional areas of Australia. Given that Queensland is being consulted on the location of these units and that radiation oncology units are already located in both north and south-east Queensland, will the Premier give his government's commitment to lobbying for a radiation treatment unit to be located in central Queensland to ensure the best possible access across the state and, if possible, a second unit due to Queensland being the most decentralised state in Australia?

Mr BEATTIE: As everyone in this House should know, we have put money into radiotherapy. We are not aware that any of these units will be located here. We understand that they will be located—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Will you give me a chance to answer your question?

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Hang on. I sat here patiently and listened to you ask both.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! We will not have a debate on this.

Mr BEATTIE: Good heavens, by the sound of it we had better get the Quick-Eze over there in a hurry! We understand that these units are likely to go to Victoria and New South Wales. The Leader of the Opposition asked me whether we will lobby for them—you bet we will. We will lobby for anything we can get for Queensland, but—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr BEATTIE: Will the Leader of the Opposition behave himself. We will lobby for anything we can possibly get for this state. We have shown a tendency to do that. We will take it with both hands and both feet. I will even take off my shoes and walk down there if it means getting something for Queensland; that does not worry me at all. I refer back to the federal budget, a budget now described by the Leader of the Opposition as a 'strong' and 'excellent' budget. The Leader of the Opposition is digging the hole a little deeper. But what is being done in Queensland? There has been a $52 million cut in overall funding for roads in Queensland. The Leader of the Opposition supports that. There is no funding for the Tugun bypass. The Leader of the Opposition supports that. There is a shortfall in funding for the Douglas Arterial Road, yet the leader says that is excellent. I give it a fail. The people of Townsville and of the Gold Coast will give it a fail when it comes—

A government member: He doesn't worry about the Gold Coast.

Mr BEATTIE: I know. The Leader of the Opposition does not care about Townsville or about the Gold Coast. Well, we do. The other thing we care about is ensuring that rural assistance is given. We have a drought. Large parts of this state are affected by drought. The Queensland government has been supportive of those who are in need, yet in 2002-03 the federal

government, which spent $303 million on rural assistance in 2000-01, cut the funding to $238 million. The projection for 2005-06 has it down to $27 million. Does that mean that Peter Costello is a Nostradamus who can predict there will not be a drought in Queensland? I hope he is right, and so does every farmer and every Queenslander. They are tearing out the heart of the bush, but the Leader of the National Party describes the budget as 'excellent'. Let me put on the record that we will fight for the bush to make sure that there is drought assistance. We will stand by Queenslanders. We will not let them go out the back door. What about the funding for housing?

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Listen to him bellow. The Leader of the Opposition does not bellow to his mates in Canberra; he makes excuses for them. After the budget last night, we will lose $109 million under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement. We are losing significant amounts of money. Queensland got the raw prawn last night, and it is strange to find the Leader of the Opposition describing the raw prawn as 'excellent'. Well, not at my barbecue!

Health Services

Mrs REILLY: Short of seeking a definition of 'excellent', I direct a question to the Premier. Can he please inform the House what the Queensland government has done and is doing to ensure that the Smart State is also the healthy state?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable the Leader of the Opposition for his questions previously and I thank the honourable member for Mudgeeraba for her question, because I know that she would support funding for the Tugun bypass and so would every other member in this state. The Commonwealth promised to fund 50 per cent and it has not delivered. As far as the government is concerned—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: The member wants to put the state in hock. He will become known as 'Hock' Horan when all this is over. The member is happy to see Australia in hock; we are not. I just say to the Leader of the Opposition that he can be 'hock' Horan; we want to keep running the state in a sound financial way.

As far as the government is concerned, health will always be a priority and that is not negotiable. The Smart State must also be the healthy state, with an excellent work force and ever-improving services and facilities throughout the length and breadth of Queensland. At a glance, our achievements in health show how serious we are about this issue. In four years, through a series of record budgets, we have allocated $14.74 billion in recurrent funds and $1.977 billion in capital funds. That is a total investment of $16.717 billion in the health of Queenslanders. Yet the federal Treasurer did not even think that federal health funding was worth any significant mention last night. Why? Because this federal government does not fund the states appropriately!

Our waiting lists for elective surgery are open and publicly available. Since July 1998, more than 408,000 people have received elective surgery. In our first two years in government, 20,750 more people underwent surgery than in the previous two years of the National-Liberal Party government. On any given day in Queensland Health, $11 million is invested in public health services, $1.1 million is spent on rebuilding and maintaining health services, 100 babies are born, 6,933 patients are cared for in public hospitals, 1,901 people are treated in emergency departments, 23,500 outpatients receive a service, 878 patients receive day only procedures in a hospital, 935 school age children receive dental treatment, 940 adults receive free dental care, 184 mental health patients receive treatment in the community, 1,729 people are cared for in residential aged care facilities and residential facilities for younger people with disabilities, 462 women are screened for breast cancer, 820 women are screened for cervical cancer, and 3,900 vaccines are distributed. That is what happens on any given day in Queensland Health.

We are improving cancer treatment with a $25 million radiation oncology services plan, which has seen the establishment of a new $8 million radiotherapy unit at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. We have almost completed the delivery of our $2.8 billion Statewide Health Building Program. There are new hospitals at Redlands, Logan and Caboolture. The Royal Brisbane Hospital, the Royal Children's Hospital, the Princess Alexandra Hospital and almost every hospital and health service from the Torres Strait to Coolangatta, the Gold Coast, Nambour, Caloundra, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay and Toowoomba has benefited from this program.

Speed Cameras; Police Resources

Mr SEENEY: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to the 103,600 hours that police have spent watching speed cameras since July 1999—time that police could have been spending on mobile patrols, responding to reports of crime. I refer also to a disturbing incident late last week when it took police 25 minutes to respond to an emergency call for help from a Logan resident whose home was besieged by a group of thugs threatening to break in and kill her and her husband and burn down her house. I ask: why is the minister so determined to ensure that highly trained police continue to spend large amounts of time watching speed cameras that could easily be operated by other people rather than responding to calls from Queenslanders who desperately need their help in emergency situations?

Mr McGRADY: I thank the honourable member for the question. I thought that we had this discussion to some extent yesterday. I just inform the House again that it was the coalition, under the member for Gregory when he was Transport Minister, that introduced speed cameras into the state. It was not the Goss government and it was not the Beattie government; it was the coalition government. The coalition government introduced speed cameras into the state and, as I said yesterday, it was the right decision and it is a decision that we are acting on now.

Any person in this chamber and any person outside can claim to know of instances in which the Police Service has been a little slow in responding. It is like the taxi industry: there are peaks and troughs. If someone rings up the Police Service at a certain time of the day, the chances are that they will be there within two or three minutes. Likewise, sometimes a person will ring up—and it could be at midnight on a Saturday night—and there will be other matters occurring. The police officer in the operations room dictates the priorities. It is not for the minister, the Premier or anybody else—any politician—to decide who goes where at what time.

Mr SEENEY: I rise to a point of order. Just for the minister's information, this was 6 o'clock in the evening, not midnight on a Saturday night.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr McGRADY: The real issue today is about police numbers and police resources. I have told this parliament on numerous occasions, and I am going to say it again today, that when the Beattie government came into office we gave a commitment that we will increase the number of police officers by 300 a year. That promise is set in concrete and we are delivering. That is the job of the government. That is the job of the minister. Where those officers are placed is the responsibility of the Commissioner for Police and his executive officers.

I return to the point made by the member for Callide. It was Mr Horan's government that introduced speed cameras into this state. What the hell does he want us to do with them? Does he want us to close them all down and then he will admit that he made a mistake? I am saying now that that was one of the correct decisions that the coalition made when it was in office and we have followed it through.

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the member for Toowoomba North, could I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Gladstone State High School in the electorate of Gladstone.

Queensland Regional Events Program

Mr SHINE: I direct my question to the Premier. Is there any proof that the Queensland Regional Events Program is working?

Mr BEATTIE: The answer is yes and I table for the information of the House the *Big Event*, which is a publication from Queensland Events, which is in my portfolio. I have asked for a copy to be distributed to every member. It sets out the program. Rod St Hill, the well-respected Associate Professor in Economics from the Department of Economics and Resources Management at the Faculty of Business at the University of Southern Queensland, has undertaken a study of the Australian Gospel Music Festival. He has reported on a survey of attendees and undertaken an estimate of the festival's economic impact—something that the honourable member for Toowoomba North would know very well because of his personal experience.

The fourth Australian Gospel Music Festival was held over the Easter long weekend. Rod St Hill reports that the total economic impact on the Toowoomba economy from expenditure by attendees to Music in the Park was $2.2 million. This is equivalent to the creation of 24 full-time jobs. It represents a 22 per cent increase when compared to the $1.8 million economic impact from last year. As the member knows, this is one of the projects that was funded and he was

present for the Queensland Events announcement launch. What is more important, 83 per cent of survey respondents from the Sunday Music in the Park element indicated that they will definitely come to the festival again next year and a further 14 per cent indicated that they might come to the Australian Gospel Music Festival again next year. Of the 12,000 people who attended Music in the Park, approximately 6,300 were visitors to Toowoomba and approximately 680 were interstate or international visitors. But it is not just the one event. The early indications from the Tarong Coal Wine and Food Festival are just as strong. The *South Burnett Times* of 15 March reported—

Record crowds and an influx of tourists were the result of the Queensland government's financial support of last weekend's Tarong Coal Wine and Food Festival.

More than 5,500 adults took part in the fourth annual event. The organisers attribute the increase of more than 10 per cent in attendance and 35 per cent in inquiries to the government's support.

These also sit well with the Global Infolinks Australian Nationals at Willowbank Raceway in Ipswich in January, which attracted a record summer crowd of 20,048—more than double the Castrol Summer Championships event in 2001. Yandina's Ginger Flower Festival in January recorded an increase in visitors and saw a record 10,000 plants sold over four days. Local businesses, information centres and organisers in Longreach, Winton, Ilfracombe and Barcaldine report that the Easter in the Outback event attracted the biggest crowds in its five-year history. There is more! Last weekend, a record 22,000 strong crowd turned out over the three days of the Australian Italian Festival at Ingham.

The third round of the program is now open and will close on 9 August. These will be for events up to 31 December 2003. I urge all members to call upon their events bodies to be considered for this program. 155 groups were applicants in the last round. From that, a further 22 events were added to this list in April. That adds to the first round of 16, making a total of 38 regional events which are now benefiting from government funding. The Regional Events Program is working.

Morning Glory, Noxious Weed

Mr WELLINGTON: I direct my question to the Minister for Natural Resources. Morning glory is out of control on the Sunshine Coast and in other regions of Queensland. This prolific weed is taking over valuable state-controlled land, council-controlled land and farmland. Will the minister support the inclusion of morning glory on the list of declared noxious weeds as part of a planned strategy to respond to this rapidly spreading weed infestation?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am aware of the problem of morning glory, although I must admit that I can neither confirm nor deny that I have witnessed the problem over the last 24 hours. Morning glory is an exotic vine which is a particular problem on the Sunshine Coast. I am also aware that the member made representations to the previous minister about this problem.

Currently, the problem rests with local government. It is not a declared weed because the problem is not a state wide problem. It has local impacts, so local governments are the best level of government to deal with it. I suggest that this matter could best be dealt with in a local government pest management plan or weed strategy. I will support any efforts of the member in representing this issue to his local authority.

Housing, Energy Efficiency

Mr MULHERIN: I refer the Minister for Public Works and the Minister for Housing to the state government's research house in Rockhampton, and I ask: what has been the public response to the project and what plans are in train for the future use of the house?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for the question. The smart house, as it is known—and there are a series of them throughout Queensland—is a by-product of this smart government, which has turned its attention to ensuring that we build in a smart way. In truth, over the last 30 or so years we have dropped our standards when dealing with our environment. The architects at the turn of the century certainly knew more about design and orientating buildings to catch the breeze and so on than we currently do. The Department of Housing is attempting to ensure not only that we provide decent accommodation for our clients but, more importantly, that we provide environmentally friendly accommodation which is friendly to our pockets when it comes to paying for airconditioning and so on.

In reality, this has been a sterling success. Some 4,000 people have been through the Rockhampton house. It is soon to be tenanted by a family from our waiting list and for the next two years it will be a test site for the Central Queensland University. A number of computers and products have been installed in those premises. It is certainly not Big Brother—a peeping Tom's paradise. We have no intention of turning the house into that sort of thing. We desire to see the products in the house tested in the marketplace to ensure that they work and that they are economically beneficial.

People in the industry and consumers tell me that they would like to try new products on the market but that they are unaware of the economic value of doing so. This project ensures that consumers—people who are buying homes—and builders will have that information at their fingertips. It will also mean that smart housing will be what the Department of Housing provides. We will make sure that we meet the latest standards for disability access and that we have the latest products for sustainability of low-maintenance housing and for water usage, ensuring that any product installed in that house uses minimal amounts of that very scarce resource, water.

All in all, this has been a very successful project which has gained international interest. It has been a real boon for the building industry. As I said, some 4,000 people have been through that house. The HIA and the Master Builders Association have been on board with this project, as have a number of Australian suppliers which are eager to showcase their products. I congratulate the CQU for its involvement in this project over the next two years.

Abigroup, Payment of Subcontractors

Mr HOPPER: I refer the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing to the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment project currently being undertaken by Abigroup Contractors Pty Ltd, a major government contractor, and I draw his attention to the fact that Abigroup is slow in paying its subcontractors. This would appear to be in contravention of the subcontractors charges amendment legislation, which is intended to secure timely payments for subcontractors.

I ask: what prequalification and financial criteria did this government require of Abigroup prior to awarding this major contract? What steps has the minister taken to ensure that subcontractors involved in the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment are being paid in a timely manner and are not financially disadvantaged by slow payment from Abigroup Contractors Pty Ltd?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am confident that our prequalification system ensures that we have a system at our fingertips which enables us to protect subcontractors. I am unaware that Abigroup is under any stress in that regard. I have certainly not been contacted by any subcontractors. If the member has that information, please get it to me today and I will ensure that it is dealt with forthwith. Abigroup has done a number of projects for us throughout Queensland and it has performed very well in the past. I have had very few complaints, if any, about its performance. The Roma Street Parkland is a classic case in point.

However, as I have said before, I do not have a system which will protect subcontractors 100 per cent of the time. Anybody who suggests that they have such a system is a liar, in my view, because it is simply not the case anywhere in the world. That does not excuse governments or anyone else—contractors included—from throwing their hands up in the air and allowing the law of the jungle to apply. I will not tolerate any company working for the government which does not pay its subcontractors. As I say, if the honourable member has that information, get it to me today and I will ensure there is some swift action in that regard.

Access Grid Technology

Mr RODGERS: I ask the Minister for Innovation and Information Economy: what is being done to help our regional universities better collaborate in research and development and share data with colleagues around the world?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for his question. I know he is very interested in this subject. In fact, the member for Burdekin was with me in Townsville two weeks ago when we launched new technology that will help put our universities in the research picture. Mr Speaker, think of all the times that you have seen a video conference and how frustrating it was, with poor resolution, poor frame rates, fuzzy pictures and long download periods. Imagine new technology that could enable digital video conferencing using high-quality audio and real-time video. This is known as access grid technology. When I was in Townsville, I launched the first of these facilities

in Queensland, at James Cook University. James Cook University is the best tropical research university in the world.

JCU has installed new digital video technology that lets groups of people in different locations interact simultaneously so that they can view and discuss multiple images or presentations at the same time in different windows on a large screen. At the launch two weeks ago, I took part in Australia's first access grid video conference. From Townsville we hooked up with the University of Sydney, which has Australia's only other access grid. So the first one in Queensland is at James Cook, which is the second in Australia. On one huge screen I could talk to a life-sized image of a person in Sydney and see many smaller screens showing graphs, moving pictures and words all at once.

Mr Schwarten: Did they get to see you, too?

Mr LUCAS: They did. This is a Smart State initiative up and running in north Queensland. The minister would be interested to note that they could see not only me but also everybody else in that large conference room. That is one of the beauties of this technology. Think of the benefits to the university. Its researchers can hook up to researchers around the world and load information on a screen that will allow both locations to discuss and analyse it at once.

Another five Queensland universities will soon have this technology and, when all six are online, Queensland will have the largest concentration of access grids in the world. This state government is providing $300,000 towards the cost of access grid facilities at James Cook, Griffith, QUT, the University of Queensland, Central Queensland University and the University of Southern Queensland. These are part of the Queensland Parallel Supercomputing Foundation. This government has put $10 million into supercomputing to build one of the most powerful supercomputers in Australia to link our universities in this state. More sites are planned as part of the high-capacity GrangeNet research network between Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane to be installed early next year. Already the Australian Institute of Marine Science is keen to use JCU's access grid to link up local researchers with scientists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in the United States so they can discuss coral reef images, models and data. This is a big step forward towards collaborative research and commercialisation in Australia.

The simple fact of the matter is that the Smart State does not begin and end in Brisbane, the Gold Coast or the Sunshine Coast. In north and far-north Queensland it is happening just as much. When the Premier and I are at Bio2002 with a number of our colleagues from the other side of the House we will be highlighting the research we are doing in Queensland. But it is not just about our biodiversity and science, we also have the infrastructure in place to facilitate that.

Ms E. Douma; Portability of Nursing Qualifications

Mrs PRATT: I refer the Minister for Health to the fact that Evelyn Douma, a level 10 nurse in the Netherlands with five years experience in intensive care units is currently working as a first-year nurse in a Queensland hospital. Her initial application to be registered at the highest level failed because of the ruling that the period between the last day of work in the Netherlands and the first day of work in Australia must not exceed three years. Evelyn missed the three-year deadline by 19 days because of processing delays and was relegated back to a first-year nurse. Evelyn recently returned to the Netherlands and was reinstated to and worked at her higher level 10 position in the hope that she would be permitted to work at her true level in Australia. She has now come home and has returned to work as a first-year level nurse. I ask: given our current shortage of nurses, will the minister review Evelyn Douma's position with a view to her being reinstated at a level appropriate to her training and experience, and will the minister ensure that other overseas nurses who come to Queensland do not receive the same treatment as Evelyn?

Mrs EDMOND: The Queensland Nursing Council is the statutory body responsible for the assessment of nursing qualifications and whether or not they should be registered in Queensland. They do an excellent job. They attended on Sunday when I launched a funded re-entry program for nurses who reach the standards required by the Queensland Nursing Council in their base qualifications but who have been out of the work force and therefore cannot be registered.

If nurses trained in Queensland have been out of the work force for five years, they have to go through a reregistration process. We are applying similar rules to people from overseas. I think that is appropriate, because we also indemnify our nursing staff in our public hospitals and we have to maintain the quality of care. The aim of the Nursing Council is to maintain that expertise and quality of care.

There are also discussions going on with the Nursing Council and experts on whether or not we take into consideration the time spent nursing before that gap in their practice. For example, somebody who has been working in nursing for 15 years before they have a break of five years, whether they be overseas trained or Australian trained, is more likely to be able to come back after five years with minimal loss of knowledge than somebody who has been qualified for only one year before leaving. Those negotiations are going on, but the Queensland Nursing Council puts first and foremost the need for quality care and a guarantee of that quality of care for its nurses.

Model Projects Grants Scheme

Ms MALE: I ask the Minister for State Development: can he provide details of what the government is doing to promote entrepreneurial thinking and business prowess by school students around the state?

Mr BARTON: I thank the member for the question. The member for Glass House always takes a keen interest in young people, schools and particularly my portfolio in terms of assisting young people to develop business skills. The youth of Queensland are an important asset to our future business community. That is why I am pleased to announce the availability of $120,000 in funding for the 2002 Model Projects Grants Scheme. The scheme is specifically designed to encourage business prowess and enterprise thinking by Queensland school students. This year's scheme follows on from the highly successful 2000 and 2001 programs that have seen the initiation of students from 72 Queensland schools and educational bodies into the world of business.

The Queensland government is committed to providing our students with every opportunity for growth and development and guaranteeing a successful and prosperous future for Queensland. We recognise that today's students are tomorrow's business leaders. These kids are our future and this is an investment that we see as worth making. The continued operation of a number of the projects initiated in the first round of funding two years ago demonstrates the inherent worth of the scheme. For instance, students from Blackall Range Independent School on the Sunshine Coast hinterland, in the honourable member's electorate, continue to run their small organic free-range poultry farm selling eggs to the local community while learning valuable business skills of planning, marketing and budgeting.

The Rural Horizons project initiated in 2000 by Loganlea State High School—I must say proudly, a school in my electorate—involved the development of a farm educational unit. It continues to function and tour the local region. These ongoing projects provide valuable hands-on business experience for students. Successful applicants will receive funding of up to $10,000 for major curriculum initiatives and up to $2,000 for in-school enterprise activities and will have 12 months to complete their projects. Interested schools have until Friday, 21 June 2002 to place applications, with all applicants being advised of the outcome in August.

Model Projects is a component of Enterprise Education, which is an initiative of the Queensland government's innovative strategy—Developing Skills Education. Over $278,000 has been provided to schools across the state since Model Projects began in 2000, highlighting the Queensland government's commitment to fostering business skills and enterprise education within the state's education system. These young people will go on to be the successful small businesspeople and ultimately the larger operators in Queensland in the future.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Mirani, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from the Kallangur State School in the electorate of Kallangur.

Public Liability Insurance; Surf Life Saving Queensland

Mr MALONE: I refer the Minister for Emergency Services to the multimillion-dollar payout to an injured surfer in Sydney this week and to the fact that last year Surf Life Saving Queensland had to go offshore to secure litigation insurance and use most of its state government grant to pay for it, and I ask: what provisions has he made to increase the grant to Surf Life Saving Queensland in light of the increased insurance costs and, further, what provisions does he have in place at present to ensure that the Department of Emergency Service's litigation risk is minimised?

Mr REYNOLDS: I welcome the question from the shadow minister and member for Mirani. As he would be aware, the Queensland government, through the Department of Emergency

Services, has an excellent rapport and relationship with Surf Life Saving Queensland and its CEO, Brett Williamson. Discussions were held with Brett Williamson and staff of my office yesterday in regard to the concerns that he has expressed to us. I think we should say first of all that the budget provided to Surf Life Saving Queensland is far greater than that provided in any other state in Australia. We are very, very proud of that. I went to the Australian championships a couple of months ago at Kurrawa. The discussions I had with surf-lifesaving people from across Australia proved that Queensland leads the way. Queensland has led the way in regard to the funding of surf-lifesaving now for a number of years under the Beattie Labor government.

In regard to the public liability question that the member has asked—we are very keen to ensure that our volunteers across the state are covered for public liability. I am very much aware that the policy we have for the Rural Fire Service and the SES is very important. They are part of the structure of the Department of Emergency Services. Both the Rural Fire Service and the SES are part of the statutes of this parliament. We cover their public liability in that way. We also offer a number of types of cover to Surf Life Saving Queensland. I look forward to discussing with Brett Williamson and Surf Life Saving Queensland that cover and their current concerns.

It is important to say that in many ways the surf-lifesaving movement shares the plight of local government and other community organisations as a result of the collapse of HIH. As a community, we are all facing those problems. Through the setting up of the insurance fund and the policy commitments that the Treasurer is taking to Canberra in late May, the Beattie government will be dealing with those issues as well. I say to the member that Surf Life Saving Queensland, local governments and other organisations share this problem and hold this concern. It is not just up to government to provide the solution. I can assure the honourable member that we will be discussing with Surf Life Saving Queensland its unique problems.

Queensland Ambulance Service, Goonyella Riverside Mine; Underground Mine Rescue Team, Blackwater

Mr PEARCE: I ask the Minister for Emergency Services to inform the House about the work of the Queensland Ambulance Service at the Goonyella Riverside mine. I understand that its work has been rated as world best practice. Could the minister also tell the House about our champion underground mine rescue team from Blackwater, which will attend the world championships in Canada?

Mr REYNOLDS: It is with pleasure that I answer the question from the member for Fitzroy. I thank him for the question. I am delighted to confirm today that the Queensland Ambulance Service's work with the Queensland mining industry has indeed been rated as world best practice. The member for Fitzroy, Jim Pearce, and the member for Charters Towers, Christine Scott, along with me, covered many miles visiting emergency services facilities throughout central Queensland just two weeks ago. What a great trip it was. We visited 13 towns in three days and saw over 905 people. Isn't that fantastic? During the trip, we came across this positive story about the QAS operation at the BHP Billiton owned mine site.

Goonyella Riverside was audited in mid-April by an international team of mining industry experts to assess the performance of the mine and its safety procedures. The audit team investigated operational procedures, in particular health and safety issues. The audit team recognised the work of the Queensland Ambulance Service in providing onsite pre-hospital care as being excellent and the integration of that pre-hospital care as world best practice. The audit team also recommended that the process and practices used by BHP Billiton and the QAS at Goonyella Riverside be used for all similar mining operations. This is an excellent example of the partnership that QAS has with a major Queensland industry in mining.

The audit team's recommendations were also a fitting recognition of the fine work being done by the region's QAS personnel. I want to name them today. The QAS pre-hospital care is provided at the Goonyella Riverside site by ambulance officer Stewart Webb, and the service provision is managed by the officer in charge at Moranbah QAS, Laurie Genrich.

Also during our trip we met with two outstanding auxiliary firefighters from the Blackwater Fire Station who are competing in the World Underground Mine Rescue Championships in Canada next month. Blackwater Fire Station's auxiliary captain, Bob Kelly, and auxiliary firefighter Alex Nimmo are two members of the eight-strong team which will represent Australia at the competition. They have shown the other states what a little Queensland age and experience can do. The youngest member is 38 years of age. The Blackwater team is more than determined to win the world championship trophy to add to its cabinet. In other words, it is by no means treating

this trip as a junket. The members of the team are highly skilled and motivated. We are very, very proud of them. The Department of Emergency Services and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines will contribute a joint amount of $1,000 to assist in the cost of this trip. I thank the Minister for Mines for that.

I also take this opportunity to recognise the top-quality work being done throughout central Queensland by all of our emergency services workers—the ambulance, fire and SES sectors. I am very, very proud of the work that they do.

Unemployment

Mr QUINN: I refer the Premier to the fact that last night's federal budget predicts that the nation's unemployment rate will hit a low of six per cent by the June quarter of next year and that this comes just two weeks after the Victorian state budget, which predicted that its jobless rate would also drop to six per cent in the coming year. I ask: can Queensland match the rest of Australia with a budget that will also forecast an unemployment rate of approximately six per cent? If not, what measures will the government implement to ensure that the entire nation does not blitz Queensland in the race to achieve a jobless rate of five per cent, which the Premier first promised to achieve within five years, the anniversary of which coincides with the day on which his budget is being handed down next month?

Mr BEATTIE: Eight and five equal 13. The anniversary falls in 2003, not this year. We came into office in 1998. If you add five years, it means 2003, so it does not correspond with the introduction of the budget this year. We are talking about money and figures. I thought we had better get the addition of eight and five right. I do not want schoolchildren thinking that eight and five equal 12. That would not be very good. We have to show leadership here. Eight and five equal 13. I thought it was important to point that out.

The budget will come down on 18 June. Job creation will be one of the priorities of the government, as it has always been. We will continue to pursue a number of programs. We are seeing them implemented through the Minister for Employment. We are seeing job strategies coming out of State Development, out of Innovation; we are seeing that across government. We are seeing it in the education area. Indeed, Queensland created a staggering 86 per cent of the 4,300 full-time jobs created in Australia in April. This is the ninth month in a row that we have recorded positive growth in full-time jobs. This has helped drive Queensland's trend unemployment rate down to 7.7 per cent in April. Overall, the latest figures reveal that 2,800 Queenslanders were able to get full-time or part-time jobs in the past month. That is great news for job seekers.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that Queensland has created more than 30 per cent of all the new jobs created in Australia in the past 12 months. In this period we created 47,300 of the 151,100 jobs produced nationally. This has helped to lower our unemployment rate from 8.6 per cent 12 months ago to 7.7 per cent today.

I remind the honourable member that when he was last a minister, he was part of a government that had unemployment levels at around 9.5 per cent. Under my government they are 7.7 per cent. I have pointed out why that is the case. It is due to participation rates. That is why Queensland has a higher level of unemployment than some other states. I want to make the point, however, that we regard the unemployment level as too high. We will work very hard to bring it down.

Let us talk about money. One of the matters that I need to highlight is the GST revenue. Queensland receives its guaranteed minimum amount. When GST revenue increases our budget balancing assistance payments go down. We have not been getting growth funding under the GST. Members understand how it works. There is a guaranteed amount that we are entitled to receive. When one goes up, the other comes down. It is like a pulley. When you sit on a seesaw, it goes up and down. Because Queensland is a low-tax state, we are not getting growth money from the GST. We will not have it for this year's budget, which will make it a tough budget for us. So there is no windfall GST. We are not yet getting any additional GST revenue. We will obviously insist on getting our guaranteed amount, but that does not mean that we will end up with any extra money. Hopefully in the future we will, but we have not to date. I want to make that very clear.

In terms of jobs, they remain a priority of the government. We have been generating significant numbers of jobs. We will continue to try to increase that.

The Little Black Book of Scams; The Hard Sell

Mr LAWLOR: My question is directed to the Minister for Tourism and Racing and Minister for Fair Trading. I have heard the minister on many occasions warn Queenslanders to be on the look-out for con men and business shonks. Just last week she raised in parliament the issue of the increasing number of written complaints lodged with the Office of Fair Trading. What are the latest weapons the Office of Fair Trading has added to its arsenal in the continuing battle against the shonks?

Mrs ROSE: I thank the member for the question. As a fellow Gold Coast based member of parliament, the member for Southport knows that many Gold Coasters have been the victims of scammers and he knows how important it is that the Office of Fair Trading makes sure information is available to consumers to help protect them from these unscrupulous operators. We cannot be too careful when it comes to scams and scammers. These people are professionals who have just one aim, that is, to become rich at the expense of innocent and trusting consumers. People need to be aware of the tactics these people use.

The Office of Fair Trading recently took delivery of copies of *The little black book of scams*, which is a consumer's guide to scams, swindles, rorts and rip-offs. It covers pyramid schemes, amazing offers and demands, door-to-door scams, investment and financial scams, medical rip-offs, Internet scams and self-employment scams. Scammers play on people's emotions. They think there is a sucker born every minute and they expect you to be the next one. They laugh all the way to the bank. *The little black book of scams*, which is available from offices of Fair Trading across the state, offers invaluable advice. I am arranging to have copies sent to members' electorate offices for distribution to constituents. Members should have them within a few days. Each chapter identifies a type of scam, explains how to recognise it and how it works and, most importantly, sets out what people can do to protect themselves.

Consumer education is a priority for Fair Trading. The Office of Fair Trading is also currently putting the finishing touches to its latest consumer publication, *The hard sell*. Unscrupulous sales people use high pressure sales techniques to make a quick dollar at people's expense. Customer satisfaction and service mean little to them. They want people's signature on a contract or their cash in their pockets, and they are not afraid to push, shove and sometimes even threaten to get their own way. They are persistent, and if their offers seem too good to be true then that is generally because they are.

The hard sell will help consumers understand their rights and responsibilities. It will cover mobile phones, used cars, credit, interest free offers, work from home schemes, door-to-door sales, unlicensed tradespeople, invoice fraud, pyramid schemes, real estate and the Internet. It tells people how to recognise the hard sell, outlines what the law says about these tactics and provides information on where people can go for help if they think they have been targeted in a scam. The booklet will fit snugly into a handbag or pocket. When this little booklet becomes available I will also make sure it is distributed to electorate offices across the state.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Keppel, I welcome a second group of students and teachers from Kallangur State School in the electorate of Kallangur.

Feral Pigs

Mr LESTER: My question is directed to the Minister for Environment. Recently the minister indicated that some 80 pigs have been trapped in the Berserker wilderness and Mount Archer National Park. Is it true that this figure is actually the total of trapped feral pigs over the last five years and includes fully grown pigs, piglets and unborn piglets still in the gut? Is it true that a shooter has recently been employed to eradicate feral animals in the Berserker wilderness who, as at this moment, does not possess a gun licence? What is the plan to urgently alleviate the growing abundance of wild pigs, dingoes and dogs which are wreaking havoc upon pawpaw farmers, Angora goat breeders and the public at large, resulting in walking tracks being closed and Rockhampton's prized gardens being ravaged?

Mr WELLS: My understanding is that the figure includes all pigs and piglets—the three little pigs that went to market and the whole lot of them. I also am unaware of the situation the honourable member suggested with respect to gun licences.

The advice I have received is that 80 pigs have been removed in the last few months. An additional trapper was put on. The department believes, on the basis of extensive experience,

that the most effective way of catching feral pigs is through trapping. It is more effective than other means that are available. However, this is an issue on which the honourable member can dine out for as long as he likes because in order to eliminate any species, including a feral species, it is necessary to get 95 per cent of the population of that species within a short period of time. Consequently, it is a very difficult thing to do. Nevertheless, I assure the honourable member that my department takes this issue very seriously and is prepared to apply whatever resources are necessary in order to make some sort of dent in the problem. Having said that, it is a very intractable problem by virtue of the fact that it is very difficult, as honourable members on the other side of this House probably know better than I, to eliminate a feral species. We will give it the best go that we possibly can.

We have put on an additional trapper. The issue of whether that particular trapper has a gun licence is a bit irrelevant as he is trapping rather than shooting, but I will write additionally to the honourable member to give him an update. I know that the Berserker Ranges are in his backyard and consequently he has a legitimate interest to raise this matter here. I will give him the latest briefing on the matter on a regular basis from now on.

Youth Justice Community Conferencing

Mr CUMMINS: My question is directed to the Minister for Families and Minister for Disability Services. Balancing punishment and intervention is very important, particularly for young offenders. One way of achieving this is through the successful youth justice community conferencing program, supported by this Beattie Labor government, and I ask: would the minister support the expansion of this program to other areas of Queensland such as the Sunshine Coast?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the honourable member for the question. I acknowledge his concern about juvenile justice issues on the Sunshine Coast and his concern that we have the proper processes available, both for the victims and for the young offenders. He is not the only member on the Sunshine Coast who is interested in the process of community conferencing. I have also had representations from the member for Noosa and the member for Nicklin about this very issue. They are right to be lobbying the government for community conferencing on the Sunshine Coast. Community conferencing has proved a very successful way of diverting young people from the formal criminal justice system. Community conferencing brings the victim face to face with the young offender. It allows the victim to play a role in decision making about how punishment should be meted out to the young offender. It allows the victim to confront the offender with the human face of their unlawful behaviour. It is very successful.

In the past four years the Beattie government has committed over $3 million to youth justice community conferencing. We currently have it available on the Gold Coast, in Brisbane south and Brisbane north, at Ipswich and in the Cairns and far north region. In the last 12 months there was a 72 per cent increase in referrals to youth community conferencing. Last financial year 219 conferences were held; 85 per cent of those referrals are now coming from the Queensland Police Service. The overall success of this program has been mirrored in the results of satisfaction surveys of community conferencing participants. I will share with the House some of the comments made by people who have participated in this community conferencing. One young offender said—

It felt better after talking to the victim and I would like to say nothing like this is going to happen again.

But the offenders are not the only participants to benefit or who value the process as worth while. Every victim of crime who participated during the last financial year indicated that they believed the conference was fair. Just over 98 per cent were satisfied with the agreement reached and nearly 90 per cent said that they would advise a friend to use the service. Members of the House can be assured that the Beattie government is committed to extending community conferencing throughout the rest of Queensland. At this stage, it is not possible for me to say whether we can extend it to the Sunshine Coast in the next year, but I thank the member for Kawana and other members from the Sunshine Coast who have made strong representations to me about this very issue. I will be doing all I can within the context of this year's budget to take that into account.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for questions has expired.

PRIVILEGE

Minister for Tourism and Racing

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (11.30 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege. The Minister for Racing has misled the parliament in her statement that the first selection panel had selected Mr Bob Bentley on a reserve list for the QTRB. The first selection panel has provided a statement which clearly states that Mr Bentley was not selected as a member of the board or any reserve list and, further, the panel did not sign off on any reserve list.

Mr SPEAKER: Is this a matter suddenly arising?

Mr HOBBS: Yes. No reserve list existed. The minister has misled the House. Mr Speaker, I ask you to refer this matter to the privileges committee.

ADOPTION OF CHILDREN AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 14 May (see p. 1613).

Mr FLYNN (Lockyer—ONP) (11.30 a.m.): In rising to address the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill, I acknowledge, as does my party, the primary importance of children and the need to assess and take into account their special needs. I am aware of the need to revamp the principal act, but I also believe that there are other ways in which we can address the growing demand in the adoption market. Whilst I appreciate the aim of calling for expressions of interest as and when the need to place children arises—and I accept that this will initially reduce the waiting lists that outgrow our capacity to process them—surely if we call for expressions of interest the list created could potentially be just as large. Whatever the outcome, what criteria will be used to identify an applicant's priority for assessment? What will it be? Employment and/or financial history or a previous demonstrated ability to successfully raise children? What will flag those for speedy assessment? The bill indicates that priorities will be made in accordance with the needs of children. That is fine, but it still leaves an examination of the qualifications of prospective adopting parents as a priority, which, as I said, begs the question: who will be brought to the top of the list and why?

I ask the House to remember the potential high emotion involved, as indicated by the member for Springwood earlier in the debate—necessarily, in my opinion—intertwined with this bill. I ask for understanding, not necessarily agreement, with my view when I say that many babies are aborted for one reason or another. I accept that this particular issue is or should be a matter of conscience. Whatever members' views, I beg that they consider the ever-stretching queue to adopt might be resolved by encouraging adoption as opposed to abortion, allowing life as nature intended and joy to new parents. In making that statement, I reiterate my appreciation that the topic is highly charged. I obviously have a set opinion, but these things must be talked about.

Recent information tells me that primary assessment for overseas children is conducted by the relinquishing country, which appears to be in conflict with the bill's statement that the assessment of prospective parents will be done here in Australia in the best interests of the children. There is great emotion in the hearts of those already on the waiting lists—some for between two and three years in this state—and suddenly moving the goalposts is almost inhumane. By this action, many may forever be moving against the shifting of sands. Perhaps we could at least phase in these changes—and I will acknowledge the explanatory notes in a minute—exhausting the existing list in the process, and thereby those who have hoped for so long will not be put back.

I note that the list of consultation groups does not include community groups or representatives of people already waiting to adopt, which is somewhat sad as they are major stakeholders in this issue. I have spoken briefly with Minister Spence on this amendment bill and flagged that I anticipate moving an amendment to section 13AC(1) to allow applicants presently on the list to adopt to be automatically included on the expressions of interest register until the original list is exhausted. She has indicated that this is her intent in any event, and I acknowledge that this is addressed in part in the bill's explanatory notes. However, in my opinion, this is not realistically reflected in the bill and I believe that existing applicants need to be included. Therefore, I have determined at this stage to move an amendment in the committee stage of the debate. I hope the minister considers this favourably.

Mr LEE (Indooroopilly—ALP) (11.34 a.m.): I rise to enthusiastically support the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002, a bill which will amend the Adoption of Children Act 1964 to provide for more efficient and child-focused adoption application processes reflecting contemporary adoption practices. The adoption process can be a very lengthy and stressful time for prospective parents. Many have described it to me as putting their lives on hold. This is unfair to both children and their prospective parents. There is no doubt that the process has been too slow, and the government is committed to improving this process. I know that the minister has met with intercountry support groups on a number of occasions to work on a series of initiatives designed to speed up the intercountry adoption process. This has resulted in a strong partnership between the department and these groups.

One factor that will be critical to modernising the adoption process is the lodgement of expressions of interest only when more families are required for children overseas. This will eventually shorten the waiting time for couples to be assessed and, if approved, for their applications to be forwarded to the relevant overseas adoption authority. Once an approved couple's application is forwarded to the overseas authority, it is for that adoption authority to then decide amongst all foreign applicants which couple will best meet an individual child's needs. Queensland has no control over whether overseas adoption authorities match children with Queensland families and how long this process will take. Once an overseas adoption authority proposes a match with a Queensland couple, the adoption authority in Queensland either approves or refuses the allocation on the basis of information about the child provided by the overseas adoption authority and the assessed capacity of the prospective adoptive parents to meet the child's needs.

The Queensland Department of Families approves the vast majority of allocations made by the overseas authority, but on rare occasions the overseas adoption authority may propose to match a child with Queensland prospective adoptive parents who have not been assessed as having the capacity to meet the child's needs. An example of when an allocation may be refused is where prospective adoptive parents have been assessed as having the capacity to meet the needs of only one child and the overseas adoption authority proposes to place siblings with those parents. All the department can do to assist Queensland couples being placed with a child by an overseas adoption authority is to conduct thorough assessments of a couple's suitability and forward applications of couples who meet the requirements and preferences of the overseas adoption authority. This means that the assessment and selection process used by the Department of Families must ensure that those couples best able to meet the placement needs of children as indicated by the requirements and preferences of the overseas adoption authorities and by research outcomes and experience are able to be assessed and their application sent overseas in the most proficient manner. The amendments contained in the bill will increase the department's capacity to do this by removing the requirement to assess couples in chronological order.

In response to representations by intercountry adoption support groups, a transitional clause for couples on the foreign children's adoption list at the time the act commences has been included in the bill. This will enable assessments of these couples to continue generally in chronological order. However, it provides much greater flexibility than is the case under the current provisions of the Adoption of Children Act 1964 by enabling the chronological order to be departed from in order to respond to the placement needs of children overseas as communicated by the overseas adoption authorities. This provides a legislative authority for the Department of Families to prioritise for assessment those couples who have the most potential to meet the requirements and preferences that overseas adoption authorities have for prospective adoptive parents of their children.

The transitional provision also requires the department to assess only current applicants until all current applications have been processed unless it is necessary to assess other persons in order to respond to the placement needs of children from overseas. For example, if there are no couples remaining on the register who wish to adopt a child from a particular country with which Queensland has an agreement, then expressions of interest may be called for from people who are interested in adopting a child from that country. The provision enables couples who have expressed interest in response to this invitation to be assessed. For example, where most of the remaining couples in the register who have indicated they wish to adopt a child from overseas have postponed their assessment because they are not ready to proceed, expressions of interest will be called for from the public, and couples who express interest in response to this invitation can then be assessed. Once it becomes necessary for expressions of interest to be called for

from the public, the requirement to take into account the date and order of those couples' expressions of interest will no longer apply. As with local adoptions, the department will then be able to invite couples to be assessed in accordance with couples' potential to meet the known general needs of children from overseas and the requirements of the overseas country rather than in accordance with date order. I note that there are only minor administrative costs associated with the implementation of this bill and that they will be met internally by the Department of Families. I also acknowledge that there has been significant consultation with the sector, including with the Commission for Children and Young People, Queensland Health, Disability Services Queensland, the Children's Services Tribunal, the Office for Women, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the Department for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and with representatives of intercountry adoption support groups, whose views have been taken into account. I commend the minister and am very pleased to support this bill.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (11.42 a.m.): I rise to speak very briefly in support of the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. I expect that other members of this place, like I, were lobbied extensively by constituents of their electorates in the lead-up to the introduction of this bill to the House.

Mr Strong: Not as much as you were.

Mr McNAMARA: The interest in this area of the member for Burnett is well known to all.

Let me place on the record, without naming anyone, how much I appreciated that input on this issue from my constituents. All the people who spoke to me were utterly genuine in their desire to see children, whether local or foreign, adopted into loving and appropriate homes. Not one of the people who spoke to me complained about the cost of satisfying suitability criteria and the adoption fees payable, which in many cases of course is thousands of dollars. Nor did I receive any objection about the complexity and effort involved in completing the very substantial paperwork requirements which continue on for at least a year after the adoptive child arrives in the home. But two matters that everyone did raise with me were a desire that the process be made quicker and that more children be assisted to join adoptive families. This legislation, while openly acknowledged to be transitional in nature, with a further review due in two years, will specifically assist adoptive families in those two areas. Most importantly, the new legislation continues and reinforces the philosophy that the welfare and interests of the child concerned shall be regarded as the paramount consideration.

In keeping with this philosophy, the bill removes the requirement for adoption applicants to be assessed in chronological order. Assessments will be able to be prioritised according to the needs of the children requiring adoption. Importantly, this provision will not unfairly affect those 471 couples already on the foreign children's adoption list. A transitional clause has been included in the bill so that those current applicants will have their applications assessed chronologically; so their goalposts have not moved. I note that this transitional provision does not apply to applicants currently on the general children's adoption list. Those applicants will be automatically transferred to the new expressions of interest register. The reason for this is simple and practical enough. As at last count there were 303 couples on the Queensland general children's adoption list, but the number of children requiring adoptive placements and able to be placed in Queensland is minute. I note that only eight such children required placements in the year ended 30 June 2001. Accordingly, there is no realistic prospect that that list will ever clear itself chronologically within the next two-year period.

I congratulate those couples and families who make the very significant decision to try to adopt a child. It is the greatest commitment a person can make—to take permanent, personal responsibility for the care and education, indeed for the life, of another person. To provide a safe and loving home for a child in need is a gift beyond measure and deserves our thanks and praise. I believe that couples wishing to adopt a child will understand and accept the amendments made by this bill being for the purposes of streamlining the process to allow faster assessment procedures for prospective adoptive parents. Most importantly, those couples will also support the overriding principle that the welfare and interests of the child concerned are paramount and that they are the driving force behind this bill. I congratulate the minister and her department on bringing this very important legislation to the House. Queensland's legislation in this area had not been reviewed since the 1960s and the minister is to be commended for producing a more efficient and child-focused adoption process that reflects contemporary adoption practice. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.46 a.m.): The Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002 will be the first of a series of changes to laws which have not been reviewed

since the 1960s. Under the previous laws, the Department of Families was required to accept all applications, producing a long waiting list. In the year ending 30 June 2001, 303 couples were on the Queensland general adoptions list and 471 couples were on the foreign children's adoption list. This bill puts children's needs and interests squarely at the heart of the application, assessment and selection process for prospective adoptive parents. The Adoption of Children Act 1964 requires that children's welfare and interests be the paramount consideration in decision making relating to the selection of adoptive parents. The objective of the act is to secure the best possible adoptive placements for children who need adoptive families. The amendments in the bill facilitate the achievement of this objective and ensure children's welfare and interests are paramount. It does this by removing antiquated processes and requirements in the act and establishing a process for the selection of adoptive parents that is in line with contemporary, child-focused adoption practice and the needs of children today.

The proposed interim amendments involve the establishment of an expressions of interest register and an assessment register to replace the current general children's adoption list and the foreign children's adoption list. All current applicants on these two lists will be automatically transferred to the appropriate register, depending on whether or not the applicants have been assessed for suitability as prospective adoptive parents at the time the amendments are enacted. Under the amendments, the department will be able to consider all existing applications when determining the priority in which couples will be invited to be assessed, rather than being restricted to those applicants at or near the top of the chronological order of an adoption list. They will be able to match children from Queensland who need an adoptive family with prospective adoptive parents based on their assessed capacity to meet the child's needs, rather than in accordance with their chronological position on the adoption applicant list. They will be able to call as needed for expressions of interest from members of the public if additional couples are required to meet the placement needs of the child or the children. The department will be required to consider guidelines provided in the legislation and be informed by contemporary research about children's needs when matching a child from Queensland with prospective adoptive parents best able to meet the child's needs.

Currently under the act, the chief executive of the Department of Families must have regard to the date order in which couples apply to adopt a child when making a decision about which prospective adoptive parents a child from Queensland will be placed with. Date order of couples' applications to adopt has no relevance to securing the best possible adoptive placement for children. This requirement is replaced by a comprehensive list of matters directly related to children's needs and welfare, which the chief executive must consider when making placement decisions for children. Following the passage of the amendments, applicants transferred to the expression of interest register will be requested to provide further details about themselves and their ability to meet the needs of children. For example, applicants who have indicated that they wish to adopt a child from a particular country will be asked to provide additional information relating to the country's specific requirements for adoptive parents and their knowledge and experience of that country. This will enable couples to enhance their application and will enable the department, in accordance with the requirements of the other country, to prioritise the assessment of couples whose information indicates that they have the potential to meet the placement needs of children from the country as indicated by the overseas adoption authority. This bill moves the focus of decision making about prospective adoptive parents away from the date at which a couple applied to adopt a child and places the focus clearly on the needs of children who require adoptive families. It puts children at the centre of decision making by enabling consideration to be properly given to identifying the prospective adoptive parents who have the greatest capacity to care for and protect the child.

If we think about the adoption process, starting a family does come easily to most of us, but some would-be parents face very significant obstacles. Adoption often becomes the option but it has a history of being complex. If we look overseas, there is no knowing exactly how many abandoned children live in orphanages around the world. In Russia for instance, children are abandoned to the state at a rate of more than 100,000 per year, according to the 1998 Human Rights Watch Report. The Chinese government acknowledges it has 100,000 orphans in its institutions. In Australia, these numbers are a source of considerable anguish and frustration, borne partly out of humanitarian concern. If one remembers the images from the Romanian orphanages a decade ago, one can understand why; but it is also about thwarted desire.

Despite Australia being a signatory to The Hague Convention on the protection of children and on cooperation in respect of intercountry adoption, which came into force in December 1998,

over the past decade the number of intercountry adoptions has fallen considerably. The process is not easy or straightforward. Another example is Lithuania and Poland. They are both Hague Convention signatories, but they do not have babies for adoption—only children aged over three, and those mostly have special needs. Adoption programs have not necessarily been inherently stable, either.

Also, as more has become known about the suffering of women who relinquished their children under pressure in the 1950s and 1960s, the voice of the birth mother has become very powerful. But now we have this legislation and within it Queensland couples wanting to adopt children from overseas will face higher fees but shorter waiting times, and the number of babies is expected to double. The reforms have been widely welcomed. The changes will mean that more babies will be available for more couples in Queensland and that the entire process will be faster. The couples who are willing to pay $2,000 will do so if it means more files going overseas and a dedicated unit within the department. So far, the current process has been very frustrating.

As I said before, historically adoption has been dying out in Australia as state governments reject a policy of legally separating biological families in favour of guardianship orders. A report released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has revealed that the number of adoptions plummeted from nearly 10,000 in 1971 to a record low of 514 last year. As I have said, the drop in the number of adoptions is mostly due to a steady reduction in the number of children within Australia being put up for adoption. The report found that, over the past three years alone, there has been a 30 per cent decrease in the number of adoptions. Fewer children are available for adoption because society no longer stigmatises unmarried mothers and there is income support for sole parents, which makes keeping a child more viable, and rightly so, too. Birth control and income support for single parents has also played a role.

An increase in childless couples has seen many turn to adoption to start a family, but the number of children needing homes in all of the categories has continued to show a marked decline. The proposals in this bill will improve the situation for Queensland couples who face the longest waiting list and the longest assessment time in Australia. The proposed amendments are designed to end delays and to bring this state's practices into line with practices in the other states. I congratulate the minister on her work in this area. I also, like the member for Hervey Bay, congratulate those couples who put themselves up for this adoption process to provide a safe and loving home for these children. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (11.55 a.m.): It is a great pleasure to rise in support of the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002, which amends the Adoption of Children Act 1964. This is an interim measure, because the act, which is now very out of date because it originates from the 1960s, is going to be subject to a far wider ranging review. The amendments contained in this bill are designed to deal urgently with matters that impede the objectives of the current act.

This is certainly the case, particularly since so much has happened in the world since 1964. Our society has changed so profoundly since 1964 in terms of our family structures, the way in which we treat children under the law and in our communities and in our families. Indeed, our whole approach to birth outside wedlock has changed. Certainly, the other very dynamic field of change is in the area of international adoptions, which I will deal with in some detail. We have seen an enormous change in the structure and the way in which adoptions have worked in Queensland and indeed throughout Australia. The other states have responded earlier to these changes than we have in Queensland. The fundamental change has been the reduction in the number of adoptions, particularly since the 1960s and 1970s, and the number of adoptive parents.

In my electorate I seem to have most of the main advocates and protagonists on any issue imaginable in the adoption debate. I respect all of those people immensely. They all have their own views that need to be heard very clearly by the minister. It has been my very proud role to ensure that all of those views have been heard in the course of not only the preparation of this legislation but also in relation to various other matters that go to the heart of the day-to-day administration of adoption, such as privacy protection.

This is important legislation, because it relates to those people in my electorate who have an interest in overseas adoptions. Throughout the preparation of this bill, I had some close contact with the minister's office. I thank the people from that office who responded very diligently to the concerns of my constituents who practically occupied my office at the time. It was a delight to meet so many of those children from various ethnic backgrounds in my office and to see the love, care and protection afforded to them. At that time, they cleaned out the electorate office of

biscuits. To the neighbouring offices, my office sounded like a child care centre. Those people certainly taught me a lot about their needs and their frustrations.

Over the years, I have had friends and constituents who have had personal experiences with overseas adoptions. I know the enormous amount of emotional investment those people place in the process of travelling overseas in sometimes futile attempts to obtain a child for adoption. Those ventures have ranged from being absolute disasters, which I know about personally, to being an incredible fulfilment. Over recent years, to see the results of those adoptions—to watch those children growing up in my community in the great love and care of their families—has been a very satisfying factor of my work.

The groups involved particularly in overseas adoptions are now happy with the arrangements that this bill will put in place. Back in March, I was very pleased to receive a letter from the minister that clarified a number of their concerns and particularly outlined that there would be the establishment of an intercountry adoption unit within the department. The various arrangements in terms of the processing of applications were explained in that there is an intention to process approximately 100 to 110 files per annum, subject to an increase in fees. There will be a report every six months to the intercountry adoption community on the number of files finalised. The lodging details on the adoption services web site have also been explained. That is a very good provision, particularly in terms of creating a fundamental filter to this process, because at the end of the day, the nub of the problem has been to ensure that there is an appropriate level of matching between the number of adoptive families and the number of children available for adoption, not only in terms of domestic adoption but in terms of overseas adoptions. Essentially, these new provisions will put in place better arrangements for the welfare of children. That is why I am sure that all members in this place are very proud to advocate this bill. It will ensure that unrealistic expectations are minimised and that a better process is put in place for matching children and their very important needs with parents who are able to satisfy those needs.

This is a very important piece of legislation. I wish the departmental staff well in the next phase, the review of this legislation. That is important because it will affect the happiness of many Queensland families and the welfare of many children within Queensland, interstate and overseas. During that process, the complicated issues pertaining to overseas adoption will need to be confronted. It is a very dynamic scene, but it will need to be confronted and some further resolutions found to the many new and emerging issues, such as the prospect of alienating children from their cultures. I mean 'new and emerging' in terms of recognition of those issues. They will need to be confronted directly and contemplated in the future review of this legislation. I commend the minister and her staff for their efforts and I commend the bill to the House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! Before I call the next speaker, I would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of students, parents and teachers from the Kallangur State School in the electorate of Kallangur.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (12.01 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. There have certainly been significant changes in social values and community views in regard to adoption over the past 30 years or so. The major contributors to this, I believe, were the introduction of easier and better contraception methods in the sixties and the easing of divorce rules in the early seventies, which hugely impacted on the traditional family unit to the extent that around half of all marriages now end in divorce. In turn, this leaves many of our children living with only one of their natural parents.

The introduction of social security payments to single mothers has resulted in most women who find themselves in the unfortunate situation of being single and pregnant choosing to keep their babies. They raise the child themselves rather than put it up for adoption, thus saving the agonising decision of whether to keep or adopt. Through social security payments, financial constraints were lifted enough that these mothers were able to afford to keep their children. Over the years, the stigma attached to illegitimacy slowly faded as more and more single parent families emerged, with divorce becoming more common.

Back in the old days, what a decision it must have been: to adopt or not to adopt—for a woman to go through so much and then, at the end of a pregnancy, to give up her child to an unknown and hope the child would be given a good home. As we know, most adopted children did find good homes and many did not even know they were adopted until they grew up. Some took it very hard when they did find out. These days there is more openness from an early age.

I know of two women who adopted out a child in the sixties because of the stigma attached to illegitimacy and because of their lack of financial resources. The fathers did not want to know

about the babies and soon disappeared. One woman left town to have the baby in Brisbane and no-one else knew about it. After the baby was born, she was asked to sign on the bottom line and the child was whisked away. Over the years, both these women went on to marry and have families of their own, while at all times wondering how their other child had fared. The laws changed and it became possible to trace adopted children and vice versa. Both women eventually found their respective daughter and son, who had been brought up in loving and caring families and had become well-balanced adults in their late twenties. That brought great peace of mind to both those mothers. Perhaps others were not so lucky.

One always feels sympathy for couples who desire to have their own children but, for various reasons, cannot. Until now, they could apply to adopt at any time. There have been four different lists of children to choose from. For example, special needs children, foreign children, relatives' children and general children. Nowadays, with a shortage of children put up for adoption in Queensland—and thank goodness for that—the chance of adopting a child from 'general children' is about six to one. The number of people who are ready to adopt foreign children also far exceeds the number of children requiring adoptive placements in Queensland.

The concerns raised by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee involve matters which may render a person ineligible to have their name entered on an adoption list or register. Under a number of provisions of the bill, these matters are to be prescribed by regulation rather than included in the bill. The committee believes that the more important of these, at least, should be incorporated in the bill. It is proper for issues so close to the core of the bill—who should or should not adopt a child—to be addressed in the bill. Regulation is inappropriate, especially when there are issues in terms of the availability of appeals processes.

Clause 13 raises the concern that while various other decisions of a chief executive can be appealed to a tribunal, the bill does not change the current situation whereby decisions of the chief executive to place a child with particular prospective adoptive parents are not subject to merit review. While arguments in relation to the privacy, and so on, of the child and the adoptive parents are strong, there is a need to provide some method of oversight or other confidential review process. Everyone understands that a child's future is a precious thing and is paramount in this debate. It is concerning that the most important decision affecting that future is without any form of review. It really does need to be addressed.

The statement in the second reading speech under Socioeconomic Change that there has been a move away from the view that children are the property of their parents is quite concerning. I would like the minister to explain that. Also of concern is the replacement of a chronological order of applications with a system whereby applications are effectively addressed in terms of the strength of their case. It has been described as a 'minor' change. It is not. This change will have a direct effect on hundreds of caring, generous Queenslanders who have applied to become adoptive parents. While there may be transitional provisions and they simply shift people's names to the new list, people who may have been waiting for years could see that entire commitment count for nothing.

This decision has been taken without any consultation at all with the broader community, which clearly includes prospective adoptive parents. The explanatory notes indicate that no broader community consultation took place because a comprehensive review of the act is to be undertaken this year. We are already in the month of May and there are not many more months before this process is in place. I question the need to bring in changes with such serious impacts on Queensland's prospective adoptive parents without consultation when a proper review process is so near. New section 74 expressly extinguishes any expectations a person may have had prior to the commencement of the bill's provisions in relation to their claims being assessed by the chief executive in chronological order.

A constituent of mine has expressed concerns in relation to this bill. These concerns include the time lost in the past four years while various changes have been made to improve the system. This is the latest attempt. Yet even as we debate this legislation, a larger review is on the cards. My constituent has a point. That person also questions the basic assumption in relation to foreign adoptions, suggesting that relinquishing countries do not request files, in contrast to the approach described in the explanatory notes.

Finally, no-one would deny that the welfare of an adoptive child is our highest priority and that the best and most suited adoptive parents should be chosen. I believe that nothing replaces natural parents or at least one natural parent. However, where this cannot be, the next best thing is adoption into somebody else's good home.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (12.10 p.m.): Today I rise to speak on the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. The Adoption of Children Act 1964 was drafted at a time when there were many Queensland children who needed adoptive families. Since that time, there have been significant social and economic changes and changes in community values which have resulted in most children who previously would have been placed for adoption remaining in the care of their birth families. The most pertinent of these changes has been the removal of the stigma of illegitimacy for children, greater social acceptance of single parents and the introduction of income support for single parents. In the year ending 30 June 2000, adoptive families were required for 24 infants born in Queensland. In the year ending 30 June 2001, adoptive families were required for nine infants born in Queensland, which is a decrease of approximately 67 per cent from the previous year. In contrast, in 1971-72, adoptive families were required for 1,774 children born in Queensland. The number of children born in Queensland requiring adoptive families decreased by approximately 98 per cent between 1971-72 and 1999-2000. There has not been a proportionate decline in couples seeking to adopt a child from Queensland.

In the year ending 30 June 2001, 303 couples were seeking to adopt a child from Queensland. However, the Adoption of Children Act 1964 still requires people seeking to adopt a child from Queensland to be assessed for suitability as prospective adoptive parents in the date order of their applications. It also still requires the director-general of the Department of Families to have regard to the date order of people's applications when making a decision about which prospective adoptive parents a child from Queensland should be placed with. These requirements may have been appropriate in the 1960s and seventies, when many more children needed adoptive families. They are no longer appropriate when there are so few children needing adoptive families and so many people seeking to adopt a child. These requirements, in the current context, militate against achieving the objective of the act to secure the best possible adoptive placements for children. That can only be in the best interests of those children.

The bill removes the requirement to follow chronological order when assessing the suitability of people who seek to adopt a child from Queensland. This will enable the Department of Families to use its resources for assessments more effectively to ensure that people with the most potential to provide the best possible adoptive placements for children are assessed more quickly. The department will obtain more detailed information from people who have expressed interest in being assessed for a child from Queensland much earlier in the process.

This information will be relevant to the known general needs of children requiring adoptive placements and will assist the department in deciding who to invite to be assessed. The bill also removes the requirement on the director-general of the department to have regard to the date order of applications of prospective adoptive parents when deciding which parent would provide the best possible placement for an individual child. The bill instead provides a list of factors that are relevant to ensuring a successful outcome for children which must be considered.

These factors include, firstly, the needs of the child, which relate, for example to the child's age and gender, the child's indigenous or cultural background, the child's medical and educational needs and the principle that it is generally in a child's best interests for the child to be the youngest child in an adoptive family; secondly, the characteristics of the prospective adoptive parents, including the age and gender of the child they have been assessed as having the capacity to parent, their indigenous or cultural background, their willingness and assessed capacity to parent a child with a known medical condition or disability or with a particular social background, and their willingness to participate in the exchange of non-identifying information about the child with the birth parents; and, thirdly, the expressed preferences of birth parents, including wishes about the child's religious upbringing, the characteristics of the adoptive parents and the composition of the adoptive family, their wishes to participate in the exchange of non-identifying information with the adoptive family and other preferences which promote the child's welfare and best interests. This represents a comprehensive list of factors which are much more relevant to ensuring that the objective of the act to obtain the best possible adoptive placements for children is achieved than the current requirement to have regard to chronological order of applicants which bears no relation to children's needs. While the act has always required consideration to be given to birth parents' wishes about a child's religious upbringing, these amendments now allow greater consideration to be given to birth parents' wishes about other matters relevant to the child's care and welfare.

Given that adoption is an option that parents who are unable to care for the child themselves choose, believing an adoptive family would be able to provide a better life for the child, it is only appropriate that birth parents are able to say what those matters are that they believe would

provide a better upbringing for their child and to have those wishes taken into consideration when a decision is made about which adoptive family a child will have. For example, a parent who is unable to care for the child herself may choose adoption for her child because her parents, the child's grandparents, are too old or infirm to be able to provide the level of care for the child, both in his or her childhood and into adulthood, that she believes the child needs. Her wish for the child to be brought up by parents younger than the child's grandparents should be respected and given consideration. Because of the current requirements of the act, by the time many prospective adoptive parents are assessed they are well into their forties or fifties and are, in some cases, older than a child's grandparents. The amendments in the bill will ensure a more focused approach for the adoption of children from Queensland and will ensure that the wishes of birth parents about the care of their children will be taken into account.

The amendments contained in the bill represent a major improvement on the current application process and, as always, the Beattie Labor government and this minister in particular are ensuring that best practice is implemented and that Queensland children's needs are looked after first and foremost. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12.14 p.m.): I am pleased to support the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill and commend the minister and the department for initiating some long overdue amendments to Queensland adoption laws. The current act is out of step with more contemporary arrangements in other states and currently does not allow the interests of the child to be as paramount as what is desired. The review over the next 12 months will address those issues more specifically.

There is no doubt that the desire to have and care for children is a powerful instinct. Many couples are unable to achieve that without help through programs such as the IVF program and also adoption programs. It is interesting to note the changing nature of the adoption situation over the past few decades. As many speakers have outlined, whereas the demand for prospective parents has remained relatively stable, the availability of children for adoption has reduced dramatically. Thirty years ago, in 1971-72, there were almost 10,000 adoptions in Australia, yet in 2000-01 there were only 512 and only nine of those in Queensland.

The Department of Families staff in particular have a difficult job. They have to manage the understandable expectations and desires of prospective parents, particularly during the delicate stages of finalising or arranging an adoption, they need to manage the difficult pressures arising from the hopes and dreams of the hundreds of couples sitting on ever-lengthening waiting lists, and also they face the enormous pressures of making proper decisions on placements that are in the best interests of the children available for adoption. I am sure that departmental officers in this field experience all the highs and lows that one would expect—the joy of seeing a child placed in a loving family, but also the pain of seeing so many couples and children's dreams not being realised. In my view, the workers in this area do a wonderful job and I commend them for their dedication and for the care with which they approach the task at hand.

This bill will assist in achieving the principal objective of the act, which is to look after the interests of children. The major change is in the application process. Queensland currently is the only state where prospective parents can apply at any time. The rapidly declining number of children available has led to long waiting lists and increasing numbers of disappointed couples. The current act also requires the department to assess suitability for adopting a child according to the chronological order on which couples list. That system needed to change to better reflect and suit the needs of the available children.

I note that a new expression of interest register and assessment register will be put in place to replace the current general children's adoption list and the foreign children's adoption list. Under the bill the chief executive of the Department of Families will be able to consider all existing expressions of interest when determining the priority in which people who have expressed interest will be invited to be assessed. The CEO can match children born in Queensland with prospective adoptive parents based on the parents' assessed capability to meet the child's needs rather than in accordance with their position on a list, and also can call for expressions of interest from members of the public when additional applicants are required to meet the placement needs of a child or children. Whereas the emphasis of the list will move to the suitability of the prospective parents, in cases where there is more than one couple suitable for a child I would expect that the time they have been on the list would be a consideration.

I note that over the next 12 months the government will be totally reviewing the act. There is one area that I believe needs review and reform, and that is in relation to the rights of de facto couples. It is an issue on which I have written to both the current minister and the former minister

on more than one occasion. Currently in Queensland to be eligible for the adoption list couples need to be married for at least two years, which on my understanding is not the case in other states. I cite the case in my electorate of a couple who have been in a long-term stable and loving relationship for many years and who have been exceptionally disappointed that they have been unable to go onto the adoption list in Queensland. They were so keen on adopting a child that they considered moving to another state to enable them to get on to an adoption list. Thankfully, they were accepted on to an IVF program. After much hope and trying, I am pleased to advise the House that the woman in question is now pregnant and the child is due in the near future.

The reality is that de facto relationships are recognised in a whole range of legislation in this state. I think it is timely for us to consider their inclusion in this act. De facto parents would, of course, have to meet the same standards and assessment as other couples, but if they are the best parents available for a child, their de facto status should not be a barrier. Couples who are selected to adopt children face scrutiny that no biological parents ever have to face. So whether it be a de facto couple or a married couple, if they meet the requirements of the department and the assessors, then they should be suitable parents and should not be precluded from applying. Whereas I have the utmost respect for the institution of marriage and the raising of children in marriage, there is no reason why a caring, loving de facto couple who meet all the requirements under the assessment which will be put in place under the act should be precluded from applying to adopt a child.

I want to conclude by making a couple of brief remarks in response to the member for Nicklin's belief that if a mother gives birth to a child who is born with a heroin addiction or other type of addiction, that mother forfeits her right to keep her child. The member for Nicklin referred to that as a 'one strike and you're out' policy. The bond between a child and its mother—or indeed father—is one that no third party should interfere with without good and exceptional reasons. There is no doubt that occasions exist where intervention is required. The Department of Families deals with this exceptionally difficult issue on a daily basis, where children are taken into care away from their parents. What is needed in these sorts of cases, particularly those outlined by the member for Nicklin, is first and foremost the provision of care and support to both the mother and the child in an endeavour to keep them together and to restore a proper parenting relationship. The department would always make assessments about the levels of support and/or indeed whether separation is required or might be required in the future. However, ultimately, decisions about rights to keep a child in a parent's care need to be made exceptionally carefully and in full consideration of the child's needs. The ideal outcome is always to have a child with a loving and caring parent, and every endeavour should be made to achieve that objective. The finality and lack of consideration of the individual circumstances of each case as proposed by the member for Nicklin cannot be supported. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.22 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill. I concur with the reasons given for the introduction of the bill, that is, the need to provide a more efficient and child-focused adoption application process. The Adoption of Children Act 1964 does not reflect present needs regarding the adoption of children.

The anguish of those who are unfortunate in not being able to have a child can be experienced only by a person in such a position. I would never presume to know how that feels, for I was blessed with three beautiful children. But to find oneself in such a position has had many couples exploring any possible avenue—often, in desperation, even the illegal ones. Desperation where children are involved, whether they be wanted or unwanted, occurs often. It is not unknown in many countries for mothers or a near relative to actually sell or buy a child on the black market.

Many people still rely heavily on adoption, but children for adoption are very scarce in Australia. I note that in the minister's second reading speech, the figures quoted were that in 2000-01 only 512 adoptions occurred nationally, with only nine of those in Queensland, compared with 10,000 children being adopted almost 30 years ago. A huge change in such a short time reflects the change not only in social attitudes but also in government attitudes in supporting unmarried mothers to keep their child. Unfortunately, where it was once frowned upon to keep a baby when the mother became pregnant out of wedlock, now the reverse is sometimes true, and many unmarried mothers feel they must keep their babies or else be frowned upon. Often for some, they keep the baby and struggle to cope. Unfortunately, many find this to be to the detriment of their own future aspirations. Some can cope well, but many fall into the welfare trap. Others see the child as a meal ticket. In some cases I have personally witnessed, some of the women and their partner—or partners—have a couple more children to increase their income.

Mr Mickel: Oh, what rot!

Mrs PRATT: Many government members will say this is rubbish, but they help no-one by putting their heads in the sand. It happens. If anyone denies it, they are not in touch with the real world or the real people who find it very—

Ms Molloy: They are the minority.

Mrs PRATT: They may be the minority, but it does happen. Those who find themselves with an unwanted pregnancy and who do not want to have a baby for whatever reason find that the attitude towards those procuring an abortion has also changed. There is now an acceptance of this option. This has had, I believe, the major impact on the availability of children for adoption.

Many people would say that these changes in attitude have seen a decline in our social fabric. It must be asked: is the trauma of giving birth and allowing the child to be adopted into a loving home any less than the trauma experienced by mothers who terminate their pregnancy through abortion? If we are to believe the reports of those who have experienced one or both of these events, one for some is as devastating as the other. But only one avenue has the chance of a possible happy outcome in the future where the birth mother can see her child again, and that is through adoption. This same trend is occurring throughout the world, and overseas adoptions are limited also, although there is a greater chance of adopting a child born overseas than an Australian-born child. There were a reported 40 overseas-born children adopted in Queensland compared with the eight local adoptions.

It often amazes me that governments appear to hold different attitudes towards one child compared with another. Through their adoption policies, governments limit—and rightly so—the adoption of children to heterosexual married couples. Obviously they perceive that this is ultimately the best situation for an adoptive child. I do not think anyone would disagree. Then those same governments put forward legislation which is interpreted by judges in our law courts in a way which contradicts other laws and permits a child to be conceived through the IVF program and raised in a same-sex relationship. Any law's resultant outcome in the courts must reflect the true intent of that law and not be undermined or overturned by other laws. IVF is an expensive and often last resort for couples who have been unable to conceive. Adoption is also a last resort. Both of these avenues must be reserved for heterosexual couples. The life of an IVF baby and that child's entitlements should be no less than the rights of any adopted child. No child's right to be raised with a mother and a father should be less than an adopted child's. It is up to governments to ensure that this form of child discrimination does not occur. If this decision is in the best interests of the adopted child—and we are told it is—how can it not be in the best interests of all children? Only in years to come, when perhaps this too is tested in the courts, will we know whether the government of the day will be branded discriminatory.

I applaud the bill's intention to make the needs of the child a priority. This is the way it should be. A child's placement in an environment conducive to that child's needs cannot always be accommodated by a pre-determined list of applicants, and the need to call for other applicants in the best interests of the child is essential. Although in the minister's second reading speech it is stated that those prospective adoptive parents already on the waiting list will automatically be transferred to the appropriate register, my concern is: what happens to those 300-plus couples in the future? The bill is designed to eliminate such large lists when there are so few children. I ask: will the couples who have waited what to them is an eternity just fade into oblivion once the bill has passed out of our minds?

I can, however, see how these changes will allow for flexibility in all adoptions, whether they be local or overseas. The bill also allows for a more efficient response to overseas adoption authority requirements. If this legislation can let the department function more efficiently, that in itself would be a major achievement. The objectives of the bill are to provide a more efficient and child-focused adoption application process suitable or applicable to present needs and to secure the best possible placement for a child. No-one could possibly object to those.

I believe that we have to get this legislation right. There has been a lot of bad press over the years about the way the Department of Families operates, and many of its decisions have been questioned. That may be because the department feels its hands have been tied, or it may be just inefficiency. But we are talking about the future of adoptive children and hopefully matching them with the right parents in a more efficient and effective manner. That is such an important issue, and many lives are affected by the adoption—not only the child's, who must at all times be the primary concern, but also the adoptive parents, the new grandparents and all associated extended family members.

I congratulate the minister on endeavouring to ensure that a more efficient process takes place which attempts to address society's changed position. But I reserve my total support of the bill until the various concerns raised in the House are responded to.

Ms KEECH (Albert—ALP) (12.29 p.m.): As a mother of three children I know that the most exciting time in a family's life is when they lovingly welcome a new child. However, for many Queensland families this emotion-filled event remains only a dream. For the majority of these people at present, their wish for a child of their own can be fulfilled only by turning to adoption. The Department of Families, under Minister Judy Spence, provides an efficient adoption service. After a person approaches the department expressing an interest in adopting a child, procedures are put in place to ensure that prospective parents meet all minimum standards. The person is then placed on one of four adoption lists. The lists include special needs children, foreign children, relatives' children and the general children adoption list.

Since 1964, when the Adoption of Children Act was proclaimed, there has been a 'first come, first served' process in matching children and adoptive parents. This method may have been appropriate in the sixties, when social and cultural values meant that young women bearing children out of wedlock were considered shameful and received no support from the men who had fathered the children; however, I am glad that we have moved to more enlightened times. Now mothers are supported in choices to keep their children as well as receive income support. Thus the number of Queensland children available for adoption has substantially decreased. In particular, the waiting lists for the foreign children's adoption list has grown rapidly, to 471 in the 2000-01 year. That represents 471 families waiting and waiting for that one phone call that will change their lives forever. However, I am pleased that the provisions of this bill recognise that not only does that particular phone call change the lives of the adoptive parents, it changes the lives of the children involved as well. It is a new start in a new family and often in a new country. I strongly support, then, the primary focus of this bill, which is to provide a child focused framework for adoption.

Adoption, as many members previously have stated, is a highly emotive issue. I remember in June 1980 when I was in the Mater public hospital at South Brisbane, basking in the warm glow of becoming a mother for the first time. However, for another mother in that same ward the birth of her first child was not so welcome. Being young, unemployed and without a partner's financial and emotional support, she was being actively urged by her family to relinquish her new baby for adoption. I will never forget the nights of tears and anguish as this young woman journeyed along the path to her final decision. The tears of joy the very next day as the adoptive parents welcomed this new baby boy into their family will also stay with me forever. This was a family that was able to realise its hopes and dreams through adoption.

Adoption, then, is a complex social, emotional and departmental process. It has become even more so with the increase in the number of intercountry adoptions. I believe that community attitudes towards adoptions will continue to change as the public are educated about the challenging effects of adoption on the children and the relinquishing parents. In commending the bill to the House I personally congratulate the minister and her hardworking staff who have been involved in the drafting of the bill.

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (12.30 p.m.): The minister has stated that one of the primary responsibilities of any government is to promote and protect the interests of children, the most valuable group in our community. I trust that no members in this House would ever disagree. The Adoption of Children Act 1964 is outdated and out of step with both contemporary practice and adoption legislation in other states. There are a number of problems with the current act that have been identified as requiring urgent attention. This bill addresses these problems.

Since the 1960s there have been numerous socioeconomic changes across our society. Some include the introduction of income support for single parents, the removal of the social stigma surrounding illegitimacy, a greater recognition of the value of different family structures and the development of modern family law and child protection legislation which provides for a variety of care arrangements to meet the differing needs of children. These changes are reflected in the enormous reduction in the number of adoptions throughout Australia since the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in 1971-72 almost 10,000 children were adopted throughout Australia. In 2000-01, some 30 years later, there were only 512 adoptions throughout Australia, including a total of only nine in our state of Queensland.

Despite the decline in the number of Australian children requiring adoptive placements, there has not been a similar decline in the number of people seeking to become adoptive parents. All other states in Australia have taken either legislative or administrative steps to ensure that the

number of people seeking to adopt a child who are registered with adoption authorities is proportionate to the number of children requiring adoptive families. In most other states the adoption authority invites people to lodge applications in accordance with the anticipated number of children requiring adoptive families. The bill will establish a similar system to that which operates in other states by enabling people to lodge expressions of interest in being assessed as prospective adoptive parents when a public call for expressions of interest is made by the chief executive of the Department of Families. People who make expressions of interest will then be invited to have their suitability to be adoptive parents assessed.

In order to provide the best possible adoptive placements for children, it is necessary to provide high quality services to adoptive parents. The amendments proposed in the bill will enable resources to be directed more efficiently towards doing this. The bill involves the establishment of an expression of interest register and an assessment register to replace the current general children's adoption list and the foreign children's adoption list.

While there is much I cannot agree with from those in opposition, one correct point they have made in this debate is that adoption is one of the most sensitive issues a government will ever deal with. I have received deputations and correspondence both critical and supportive of the bill, and I respect the views of the people. I wish to quote a letter from someone I would call a supportive Sunshine Coast resident. I have sought permission to do so from Peter Gardiner, the author. I found the letter quite moving and relevant, and I commend Peter and his family for making public their story. I seek leave to table relevant documents that complement the letter, which was published in the local paper.

Leave granted.

Mr CUMMINS: The letter, headed 'The case for overseas adoption' and written by Peter Gardiner of the Sunshine Coast, states—

There are people in society who oppose overseas adoption and I can well understand where their argument is coming from even if I don't agree with it.

As a person who has been through this life-altering experience I believe I understand the issues as well as anyone.

For starters I've been forced to face up to and think deeply about the incredible consequences that may arise from flying into a foreign country, touching down for a brief stay, breathing in an exotic atmosphere and then jetting back out with a baby with a different skin colour and culture.

Like all things in life, unless you've done something, it's hard to fully appreciate the complexity of such an experience.

But please understand: this is not Tom and Nicole paying $50000 for a quick-fix family.

When my wife Desley and I flew into a minus 10 Celsius Seoul on the eve of Christmas Eve 1999 for a week's stay that would culminate and meeting and later taking home our precious son Ben James Jin Soo Gardiner, it was a climax to a very testing two-years-and-a-bit assessment period.

And more importantly it was the start of a very long haul to give Ben a new life in Australia.

Unlike American-based movie stars, adopting overseas for Queensland couples is not easy, nor should it be. The world's orphanages should not suddenly become an open-door discount sale for people with a fancy to create or extend their family—a K-Mart for kids.

Australia and Queensland has a very exacting process for selecting couples who are suitable for the limited number of children in the world available for overseas adoption.

Personally I wouldn't have that any other way.

I might argue that there should be more resources thrown at the Family Services adoption office to help speed things up and bring Queensland into line with the rest of Australia, but then that supposedly is about to happen soon.

When you've been trying to have a biological child for 15 years and tried just about everything except voodoo and dancing naked in front of witch doctors—although doing IVF sometimes felt that way—anything that gives you a chance to be a parent is worth the wait.

Every time the impersonal medical procedures designed to make my wife pregnant failed, a little bit of hope died inside both Desley and I.

The promise of overseas adoption then, where the cynical might say you take a number, get in line, pay your dues and come out parents at the end of it, was compelling.

Right from day one, after we'd filled out all the appropriate forms and headed down to Brisbane from our home at Coolum Beach for the overseas adoption information day, the adoption officers made it clear to us who the most important person was in this highly personal odyssey.

The child of course.

That's why they put us through the hoops—lots of them. People who adopt overseas have to write reports, undergo background checks and extensive medical checks.

And they are forced to examine their lives and their motives from a whole lot of angles.

It boils down to having to pass a parent test that no biological parents have to sit for before delivery day.

It's not the Spanish Inquisition but it's not easy either and quite a few couples opt out along the way.

I believe what the Adoption Services people are looking for here is commitment.

People who have been through the emotional wringer of infertility and stayed together are about as committed as they come.

I've read reports where the potentially destructive failure to have biological children has a powerful bonding effect on many couples.

If you want to go to hell and back, it's best not to do it alone.

Adopting from overseas I believe is a selfish thing to do.

But then parenting any child is about self interest as much as it is about the urge to procreate and then get into lots of debt to give your child the sort of things you think he or she deserves.

My desire to have a child was not about immortality. My genes are going to die with me.

I believe parenting—the chance to nurture and shape another person's life—is the ultimate thing and that defines us as humans regardless of whether they look like you or not.

And I wanted to be a part of that.

Adoption was my only way of being a father.

The most common reaction when I told anyone Desley and I were applying to adopt overseas was: couldn't you adopt someone from Australia?

It's a pretty good question and not one as mildly racist as it first appears.

It mattered not to me what country my potential son or daughter came from or their skin colour, but down the track it could make a great deal of difference to the way they are perceived in Australian society.

The simple answer to the question is no, I cannot adopt in Queensland or Australia because I'm too old. The cut off is around 35 and the waiting period was, last time I heard, about 10 years and most likely getting longer as fewer babies are given up for adoption.

Adopting someone from your own ethnic mix makes good sense for the child.

For starters it means they are not going to have to be picked on growing up.

From having talked with the children who have been adopted overseas, the inescapable truth is that my son Ben will be taunted by other kids at school because of his ethnic background and the fact that he doesn't look like his parents.

All people who were adopted from overseas grow up feeling some degree of cultural dislocation, but from talking to some and reading about quite a few others, most handle it.

Many go on to be vibrant, productive people in their adopted country.

And they almost always say that they knew they were different, but they got by with the incredible amount of love and support their parents poured into them.

It's my hope that Ben will say that about Desley and I one day.

There are people who want to close down overseas adoption programs and liken what Desley and I have done to the Church stealing Aboriginal people away from their parents.

In their eyes we are well meaning but misguided people, alienating a child because we cannot come to terms with our infertility.

I will never fully come to terms with our infertility.

Barren certainly must be one of the bleakest terms in the English language.

But Desley and I have dealt with our infertility, put it behind us and moved on.

Ben is not part of a stolen generation.

His birth mother gave him up for adoption, because Korean society, as we understand it, does not take kindly to single mothers.

Had she kept Ben, he would have grown up with a terrible stigma.

So she chose to give him up.

Koreans also passionately believe in blood ties.

Therefore adoption for all but the rare exception is unthinkable.

Ben's fate, if the overseas adoption program did not exist, almost certainly would have been to grow up in an orphanage until he was old enough to make his own way in the world.

I'm certain that whatever social dislocation he experiences here has to be better than that.

I'm not condemning Korea.

I'm fascinated by everything Korean these days and loved every minute of my short stay there.

Desley and I will take Ben back there when he is old enough to appreciate his birth country.

If one day he wants to try to find his biological parents we will assist him in his search.

All adopted children have serious issues to deal with—feelings of rejection, longings to know where they came from and so on.

I have two cousins in the one family who are adopted.

They were never interested in finding their birth parents, believing the mother and father who raised them are all that they need in their lives.

Others choose differently.

Would the critics of overseas adoption choose to close down domestic adoption because couples want to give someone else's unwanted child a home?

How can that be wrong?

In the end, if the parents are carefully chosen and life is half kind to both the child and their adoptive parents their coming together should be mutually beneficial.

Right now I sit back and watch Ben, his limbs brown from the sun, his body incredibly fit for a boy just under three, running and chasing seagulls along Coolum Beach.

In an eye blink two years has passed since our two-year wait to get him.

As a newly-born baby, Ben had severe pneumonia.

I think back to Seoul and the smog that stings your eyes and say to anyone who listens: 'At least if nothing else we'll have given Ben fresh air to breathe'.

Deep down we hope to give him much, much more than that.

As a footnote may I add my two bob's worth about the proposed changes to the overseas adoption process.

From what I understand from the correspondence sent to me by the Families Department the main thrust of the reforms is to pool a certain number of applications for adoption and select the very best for the available children.

Which is an admirable goal, but I wonder how well thought out the approach described in the letter to my wife and I is.

I can see it creating major traumas for the applying couples and, from a practical point of view, tying up the department in messy and perhaps costly disputes over claims of bias or alleged unfairness.

Imagine you have been waiting for two years, or six months or six weeks and someone comes along who has been in 'the queue' for two seconds and gets allocated a child because they are deemed outstanding parenting material.

People who apply to adopt are usually very determined.

Many are professional people who make it their business to thoroughly investigate the process with a fine tooth comb.

If the Government were to bring in such a highly selective processes I have no doubt there would be legal challenges from people who think someone else had received favoured treatment.

And if this process is all about doing what's best for the children needing a family, having a child's placement delayed by litigation and court injunctions would be a disaster.

The current system where cases are handled in a set order as they come in and people know where they stand from day one seems eminently fair.

The only thing lacking are the resources for the highly qualified and helpful adoption service staff to process the applications more quickly.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the thoughts of a very satisfied parent.

I thank Peter Gardiner and his wife, Desley, and son, Ben James Jin Soo Gardiner, for their correspondence. Their story is one that was quite moving. It was in the daily papers on the Sunshine Coast. In closing, I commend the minister. I know that she takes a very good-hearted stand and works diligently in achieving the best outcomes possible. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.48 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill, I, like other members who have spoken in the debate, acknowledge the importance of children not only as individuals but also for their place in the family. John and I have been very fortunate and blessed with three daughters. They have been a real delight most days. We all have days like that, but they really are wonderful and they complete the family very beautifully.

I do not believe that children are the property of the parents. I know that in the minister's second reading speech she referred to changing attitudes and to the fact that children are not the property of parents, but they are our responsibility. We are given charge not only to provide them with the tangible needs of life—food and clothing—but also moral values, spiritual guidance and those other elements that ensure that as they grow up they develop into well-rounded, well-grounded and mature young men and women. A number of people have contacted my office and asked for their concerns to be put on the record, a number of whom are not speaking from a theoretical point of view.

As the member for Kawana read into *Hansard*, these are people who either have been through the process and are attempting to re-enter the process or have been on the waiting list for some time. The first letter to which I refer is from a family in Rockhampton who adopted a child from Ethiopia in July 1995. On that occasion, their file was sent to Ethiopia in December 1996 and they were advised that a child was available for them in September 1997. Their second application to adopt a second child from Ethiopia was lodged in June 1999. They said that currently their file is unlikely to leave Australia for another two years. So their concern is that already the wait time and the processing time for overseas adoption has extended. I quote from their letter at the beginning of this year—

Urgent amendments to the adoption legislation are being rushed through parliament ahead of a broad review of the Adoptions Act 1964. This is being done without any consultation with the public even though the amendments have far reaching implications for intercountry adoption applicants. These amendments are to compensate for the very slow processing of applicants' files and therefore growing waiting lists. 'Insufficient children available for adoption' has been the reason given for the very long waiting lists, but this is just a poor excuse for bad management. These amendments are not necessarily in the best interests of children waiting families.

The urgent amendments to go before Parliament in the near future involve the establishment of an 'expression of interest' register and an 'assessment' register to replace the current system.

They attached some background to intercountry adoption in Queensland in regard to the current situation and the upcoming legislation review. They went on to state—

There has been no public consultation with the public before these significant amendments are made to the legislation. These amendments will not have had the benefit of the adoptive community's knowledge available about adoption. I must ask if this is in the best interest of the children.

There has been minimal information made available on these important amendments. For example with less than one month before the legislation is presented to parliament, there are no details of what the assessment criteria will be and what checks and balances will be in place to stop the Departmental staff exercising personal bias.

The Department is speaking of these amendments as 'small changes'. There is already in place the review and completely new legislation planned for January 2003. Some truly small changes could improve the problems in Queensland adoption, but a pool system is a major change. In 1999 adoptions in Queensland were put on hold for six months to 'improve the system' and now there will be more changes in March 2002 to 'improve the system' and even more changes 'to improve the system' in January 2003. Is all this shuffling in the best interests of the children? The amendment says that an applicant will only be transferred to the assessment register if a relinquishing country specifically requests files. This is of concern as the relinquishing countries do not request files (with the exception of Korea) because it would be culturally inappropriate to do so. Adoption Services has relied on this to claim that there are insufficient children available for adoption where this is just not true and relinquishing countries will and do process and allocate files as they receive them. The amendment documentation claims that they will be able to better match children available. The relinquishing countries already do this matching NOT the Queensland department. The department have never met any of the children who are overseas and receive minimal information about them, i.e. height and weight. The department's role is to make sure that files are sent in sufficient number and diversity for the relinquishing country to be able to match. With only funding for 40 assessments per year (according to the manager of Adoption Services) and currently both the Philippines and Taiwan being willing to take more files immediately, is this in the best interests of the children waiting adoption and of the many families for whom intercountry adoption is the only way to form a family?

If there is wrong information in that I would be interested in its being corrected by the minister. Another couple from my electorate wrote to me and stated—

Couples who have made a two-year and over commitment to the process already in place are filled with fear. They have had the rules changed on them without consultation and been kept in the dark. A couple's opportunity to even be assessed will be indefinite. Instead of forming friendships with other waiting couples, which often benefit the children, they will be in competition with one another. Many Queensland couples (over 5 already) have moved interstate to take advantage of the motivated adoption systems in other states. None of the other states have pools with a waiting time of up to two years. New South Wales have an expression of interest system but within three months of application all applicants are invited for assessment unless they just will not meet criteria. This is a highly efficient system and with a written guarantee of time frames. All other states and territories succeed in assessing all applicants well within a year of application and send the files to the relinquishing countries soon after that. The pool proposed in the amendment will adversely affect the adoption community. There will be a competitive instead of supportive environment. Is this in the best interests of the children? Is any of this in the best interests of the children?

Again, a letter from a Brisbane couple states—

An urgent amendment to the adoption act has been prepared for the next sitting of parliament. It is our understanding that while this amendment 'sounds' good the implementation of it can and potentially will end intercountry adoption in Queensland. At best, it offers the staff in adoptions sections a subjective approach to determining the 'best applicants'.

This couple quote from a Queensland applicant whose name was withheld for privacy reasons. They state—

Today is the first day in over two years of the adoption process that I have cried. I have been stressed and concerned at the long wait but this morning I actually dissolved into desperate tears. As I piece together what has been said to us in letters, emails, newsletters and conversations, it has finally dawned on me that with the close of assessments for this financial year that nothing else will happen now until the amendments take place. Our names will then go into the expression of interest register. We're standing right at the door of being assessed and the door is being closed in our faces. What is worse in life than being unsure of what is going to happen? Waiting is stressful, but unsure is insecure. It could be positive for us, but it could be very negative if we are left in that list for any length of time.

The only way it could be positive for us is if we are more suitable applicants than others who have already been assessed or are waiting to be assessed. In the Dept letter re the legislative changes it says:

> "The changes will enable the Dept to consider people whose names are entered in either the expression of interest register or assessment register when seeking prospective adoptive parents best able to meet the particular needs of a child".

There are a number of other letters that express similar sentiments. In April this year Dianna Bagnall in the *Bulletin with Newsweek* made some very thought-provoking statements. She stated—

In Russia, children are abandoned to the state at a rate of more than 100,000 per year, according to a 1998 Human Rights Watch report. The Chinese government acknowledges it has 100,000 orphans in its institutions. In Australia, these numbers are a source of considerable anguish and frustration born partly of humanitarian concern ... but also of thwarted desire.

... In the United States, where adoption is supported unambiguously from the top down with the Bush administration last year increasing the adoption tax credit for expenses from $US5,000 to $US10,000 per child that flow is in flood. Between 1992 and 2000, intercountry adoptions to US families increased from 6,536 to 18,477 children.

... In Australia, however, the reverse seems to be happening. Despite Australia being a signatory to The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, which came into force in December 1998, the numbers of intercountry adoptions have fallen considerably over the past decade ... and far from being feted as heroes, Australians seeking to adopt talk of feeling embarrassed and guilty.

She goes on to talk about the different fees for adoption in Australia. In conclusion, I am unsure what position to take on this legislation, not because I do not care about children and not because I do not support adoption—I do wholeheartedly—but because of the amount of information made available to me of people in the process being frustrated, concerned and very worried about these amendments. I look forward to answers from the minister prior to making my decision.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McNamara): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Noosa, the chair would like to acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the deputy principal of Beachmere State School, Mrs Chris Nilsson, and school captains Isaac Menso, Kara Ireland, Sinead Burgess and Jake Granger from the electorate of Pumicestone.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Ms MOLLOY (Noosa—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of this bill and to say 'well done' to Minister Spence and her staff for tackling this issue and bringing this legislation before the House. In so doing, not only are Minister Spence and her staff bringing Queensland legislation into line with that in other states; they are also introducing changes to legislation that reflect contemporary values and that we as a society believe to be just and compassionate.

Contemporary society demands that government enact legislation that reflects contemporary values and, in so doing, delivers justice to those people whom it affects—in this case, babies and young children who are unable to speak for themselves. Adoption is a sensitive issue—sensitive for adopted children, relinquishing mothers and adoptive families over a range of pertinent issues. Adoption as we know it is a western socio-cultural practice whose heritage is steeped in harsh religious, often punitive practices wherein women who found themselves pregnant were punished. One only needs to cast one's eyes over the book *Damned Whores and God's Police* to gain an insight into these practices. Today, women have at least been liberated from those shackles.

The focus of this legislation is to ensure the promotion and protection of the interests of children. At no time should the focus be shifted to others. Certainly we need to address the needs of others, but with different guidelines and solutions. Because some problems with the now outdated legislation—it is some 38 years old—have been identified, changes are required and need to be given urgent attention. Those issues are addressed in this bill. Currently, there is a review of the act with the aim of developing new legislation that will provide an updated, child-focused framework for adoption practice and service delivery in the future. One of the previous speakers said that she felt that there was no community consultation and no research done in this area. I would like to refute those statements. One cannot possibly work in this area without having done research. I am sure that the research carried out over the past 30 years has been in depth. I do not think we need any brainstorming to come up with new ideas. I think the new ideas that have arisen shout for themselves.

I know that there are childless couples who may find the whole process of being scrutinised or processed extremely onerous, especially when we hear of children being abused or neglected and we see biological parents not subjected to the same scrutiny. It must be especially distressing for those couples to be placed on waiting lists as if there is a baby production line in the local hospitals. That was the case, but it is no longer so. Today, so few infants require adoption because we support our mothers and babies to enable them to stay together. That is perhaps the most humane way of handling this extremely delicate issue and in many ways it reflects the

current trend of mothers keeping their babies. In some ways it acts to not build up those couples' hopes of adopting within Australia because those bubs no longer exist.

The member for Woodridge related a woman's adoption story that left no-one in any doubt that, socially, we have come a long way. Whilst the member for Nicklin may be well intentioned in his belief that heroin addicts should have their bubs removed from them—the two strikes and you are out theory—he is misguided. Heroin addiction is a disease, as is alcoholism. The member does women a disservice to suggest that they are in some way to be punished for their addictions by removing their children. They need our help. So much for the prayers uttered in this place and Christian values purported by some! Also, I did not hear the member utter a word about those fathers who father numerous children and fail to be a father to them in the true meaning of the word.

As a society, we have come a long way socially and economically. We support our single parents who are often parenting in difficult circumstances. I think that most of us have given up our hypocritical, chest-beating attitude to single females who have children. After all, it takes two to make a baby. We have moved away from the attitude that children are property or that our children's children are disposable. We must celebrate that the churches no longer play a role in orchestrating the separation of children from their mothers and that the development of modern family law and child protection legislation provides for a variety of care settings to meet the differing needs of children. The list of our progress as a compassionate society goes on. I believe that that is reflected in this legislation.

This bill sets out in comprehensive detail the matters related to children's needs and interests that have to be considered by the chief executive, who must have regard to the best interests of the child when making placement decisions. This must be welcomed. After all, it is about the child's best interests. The bill reflects the social mores that we now see. It intends to establish a similar system to that which exists in other states by enabling people to lodge expressions of interest in being assessed as prospective adoptive parents when a public call for expressions of interest is made by the chief executive of the Department of Families. People who make expressions of interest will then be invited to have their suitability to be adoptive parents assessed. This is not intended to hurt those families who so desperately want a baby to love. It is merely intended to create a system in which infants are placed with their best match, not by a stroke of the numbers on the list. Also, when there are more children in need of a loving family, the chief executive will call for further expressions of interest.

These proposed amendments will operate in the interim until proposals for new adoption legislation that reflects contemporary community attitudes are introduced. I believe that other members have covered other aspects of this bill more than adequately. I would like to say how proud I am to be part of a government that shows this level of courage and leadership. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PURCELL (Bulimba—ALP) (2.36 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to rise to speak to the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. This bill will provide for the most efficient and child-focused adoption application process ever seen in Queensland. I commend the minister for the work that she and her department have done on this legislation. I know that it is not easy because of the number of different views on this issue. I have received different views and I have spoken to the minister. I know that people in my constituency have different views and concerns.

We often say that the most important thing that we ever do is buy a home. That is not really true. The most important thing that we ever do is have children. If couples cannot have children and they adopt children, that is the most important thing that they will ever do in their lives. I think that people who want to adopt a child approach that matter very well. However, as a state government we have to be very concerned about how adoptions are processed, who children are placed with and so on. In previous years, even with the best of intentions, the state has worked alongside church groups and other people and things have still gone off the rails.

The primary reason for this bill being introduced is to look after the interests of children who will be adopted. I know that it is a hassle for the parents, that there are long waits and there are fees that have to be paid. When there are no children available in Australia, these people would love to go overseas and pick up a child from an orphanage and bring it home. I know that they would lavish on that child all the things that Australian parents can lavish on children and that that child would be well looked after, nourished and loved to bits. However, certain protocols have to be put in place regarding adoption agencies, and that has to be done in certain ways. This bill has been drafted with input from all the members of parliament who have approached the minister's department in relation to it. It would not have been an easy task.

The objective of this bill is really to provide efficient and relevant adoption services, which currently are constrained by the outdated provisions of the Adoption of Children Act 1964. As we know, the world has moved on a long way since 1964. In 1964, many Australian children were put up for adoption and a person could become an adoptive parent without too much hassle. Those years are gone. These days, most women who have a child out of wedlock will keep that child. The natural mother will rear that child herself.

Every state except Queensland has proclaimed new adoption legislation to increase the focus of adoption service delivery on the needs of children requiring adoptive families. Since the 1960s, significant changes have occurred in demographics, social values and community views. Therefore, the government has commenced a comprehensive review of the Adoption of Children Act 1964. Parts of the current act have been identified as requiring urgent attention. These amendments will assist in ensuring the objectives of the act, that is, to achieve the best possible outcomes and placements for children. That needs to be kept in mind. A bit of tweaking or some changes may be needed from time to time, but the legislation will err on the side of the children. The amendments will promote greater efficiency and responsiveness in the delivery of adoption services.

The Adoption of Children Act 1964 requires that four adoption application lists be kept. They are the special needs children adoption list, the relatives' children adoption list, the foreign children adoption list and the general children adoption list. Applicants must meet minimum standards to be eligible for those lists. The act requires that applicants be assessed for suitability in chronological order of their applications. I have taken this matter up with the minister and her department because some people feel that moving away from this system means they may be passed over and will not have an opportunity to adopt a child. That was my opinion also. My view was: you get in line, you stand in line and you get your turn when it comes around. However, in order for the system to take care of as many adoptive children as possible, the minister and her department have persuaded me that the process provided for here is the right setup. It will make it possible to place the most children in family environments.

Many people undertake the role of foster parent. I encourage people who are wanting to adopt children to look at older children, too. Everybody wants a baby in order to mould it into their own family and to give it the little things that one gives to babies. My wife is cluckier now that she has grandchildren, and I cannot walk past a baby shop without spending a fortune!

Mr Copeland: How many grandchildren do you have?

Mr PURCELL: I have three grandchildren and another one on the way—and another daughter being married very shortly. I am very fortunate.

I know that people want a baby to care for and nurture. However, I encourage people who want to adopt children to consider children of any age. Whether kids are in primary school or high school, they all need parents and they all need nurturing. Adoptive parents would receive just as much love and affection back from them and they could mould those children into their family through the attention they give them.

Mr Lawlor: I want you to adopt me!

Mr PURCELL: I could very easily adopt the member for Southport—as long as he brought his income with him! I have a good play room for the member downstairs at my place. It could probably have its own bar, plus a swimming pool. Whatever he wants!

Ms Spence: You have to draw the line somewhere.

Mr PURCELL: No, we do not. We are never too old, that is what I am saying. I know how well the member would fit into the family!

Currently, as a result of legislative requirements and rapidly growing application lists, departmental resources are being diverted away from providing timely and optimum support to children requiring adoptive placements. Time needs to be spent on placing as many children as possible. Applications are made in good faith that a child will be placed with the applicants. However, a child may never be placed with them due to the disproportionate number of applicants compared to the number of children requiring adoptive placements. What I am really saying is that it is very hard to adopt a child and people have to wait years, which is very difficult for them. The amendments will enable management of adoption application lists to ensure that children are provided with the best possible placement in the most efficient manner. The amendments will establish an expression of interest register and an assessment register to

replace the current general children adoption list and the foreign children adoption list. The children come first. It is most important to find the right parents but the children must come first.

Transitional provisions in the bill provide for all current applications on those two lists to be automatically transferred to the appropriate register. The bill removes the requirement for applications to be assessed in chronological order. As I said earlier, I have been persuaded by the minister on this matter. For example, if a couple registers today and an adoptive child fits that couple, it is just the child for them, then that adoption should happen and it needs to happen as soon as possible. They should not have to wait until someone at the top of the list adopts a baby. Theirs will be out there somewhere; we just need to move it along. This will enable assessments to be prioritised in accordance with the needs of children and the flexibility needed to efficiently respond to the requirements of overseas adoption authorities. Once current applications have been processed, date order of lodgment of expressions of interest will no longer be relevant as persons will be lodging expressions of interest at the same time in response to a call for expressions of interest. Expressions of interest will only be called for when it is necessary to increase the number of applicants on the register to meet the anticipated placement needs of the children.

The bill also removes a requirement to match adoptive children born in Queensland with applicants in date order of their application. The amendments replace this requirement with a list of matters relating to needs and interests. Any fair-minded person will welcome this bill and will understand that, given a fair opportunity, in time it will work. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. J. FOURAS (Ashgrove—ALP) (2.47 p.m.): I am pleased to take part in the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill. I specifically wish to address issues relating to intercountry adoption. In debating this issue in 1979, I stated that in the past intercountry adoptions have stimulated both enthusiastic support and vehement opposition. The proponents see such adoptions as a direct humanitarian service to needy children, while the opponents argue that no child should be transplanted from its own culture, nationality and race to be asked to bear the burden of possible rejection and loss of identity, not to mention the prejudice that is running rampant in our society.

I have always supported intercountry adoption. However, in that debate I expressed concern that intercountry adoption is not a viable solution for children in emergency situations brought about by war or disaster in their homelands. Decisions in such situations tend to be hasty, inadequate and often political. Consequently at that time I urged our adoption services to be vigilant and ensure that overseas adoptions are free of corruption, commercialism, misplaced emotion and politics. In 1968 no children were adopted from overseas. In 1971 there were 55 children adopted from overseas by Australians, whilst in the same year almost 10,000 children were adopted throughout Australia.

Prior to the Vietnamese airlifts following the conclusion of the Vietnam War, intercountry adoption was very small numerically. In 1975, for example, 250 babies came to Australia in this manner, most of whom had to be placed into adoption. From memory, Queensland took a very small number—about 28—of them. An article in the *Bulletin* at that time gave some shocking examples of corruption in relation to these adoptions. For example, some Vietnamese orphanages kept stocks of birth certificates of dead babies which were allocated to live babies without birth certificates so they could be sold for adoption. We all know about the Korean babies sent in particular to America to be made into little capitalists in an attempt to flee communism. Some of those adoptions were disastrous. However, I still strongly support properly managed intercountry adoptions.

When it comes to overseas adoptions, importantly, the policy must be that we do not owe a lesser duty to children from another country than we do to children from our own. The other day in the House I said that human rights belong to everybody—to our children and other people's children. We seem to forget that. We can find billions of dollars to treat the children of other people differently than we would our own and, in doing so, shame ourselves in the eyes of the world and divide our country. I have always expressed the view that adoption is about finding families for kids and not kids for families. Consequently, families adopting a child from overseas should be the subject of a complete home study with special attention given to the family's attitude towards that child's race and culture and the methods to be used to help the child cope with prejudice and discrimination.

When the Families Department announced that it would be bringing in amendments to its adoption legislation, two members of an intercountry adoption support group contacted me to express dismay about the impact of the amendments they thought were being brought into the House. I presume other members were similarly lobbied. They argued that the establishment of

an expression of interest register and an assessment register to replace the current foreign children's adoption list was not only discriminatory but also based on flawed premises. In particular, I was told that the reasoning of the Families Department for introducing the proposed amendments—namely, to 'ensure that the gap between the number of people seeking to adopt a child and the number of children requiring adoptive families does not continue to increase'—was far from the truth with regard to intercountry adoptions. Their major concern was that the 260 applicants who had already spent two to three years on the waiting list to begin the assessment process would, without consultation, be placed on the expression of interest list along with all new applicants. I have no disagreement with that with regard to local adoption. I agree with the sentiments in the current bill that applicants will only be transferred to the assessments register if they display particular qualities, skills and attributes to enable 'best matching' with the child requiring adoption. That applies for local adoptions. It is a concept I agree with very strongly in this legislation.

However, it is totally different with regard to overseas adoptions, where there is the difficulty that the children from overseas requiring adoption are not known to adoption services and all allocations are made in the relinquishing countries. That is the important issue. The children to be adopted are not known to our agencies. This bears restating. The concept of best possible matching has valid application to domestic adoption but is difficult in the context of intercountry adoption, where Queensland Adoption Services does not even know the child requiring adoption and may have little or no knowledge about the character or culture of families. The responsibility of matching a child to the applicant should be on the relinquishing country and not on staff of Queensland Adoption Services, whose role should be to assess applicants as suitable and send the file to the relinquishing country of the applicant's choice and to ensure that the allocation made by the relinquishing country is appropriate given Adoption Services's assessment of the adoptive parents. It should be noted that relinquishing countries do not request files and for many it would be culturally inappropriate to do so. I think Korea is the only country, to my knowledge, that demands a file before it will allow an adoption. Adoption Services has relied on this to claim that there are insufficient children for adoption. This is just not true, and relinquishing countries will and do process and allocate files as they receive them.

I am delighted that, following consultations with intercountry adoption support groups, their concerns were listened to by the minister, Judy Spence, and I congratulate her on that. I congratulate the minister for including a transitional provision in these amendments which will continue the requirement for the date order of applications to be considered when determining the order in which the applicants will be assessed. I congratulate the minister also on the confidence she expressed in her second reading speech that these legislative changes will result in a faster assessment process for prospective adoptive parents.

A decline in local adoptions has been going on for some time. As I said earlier, 1,200 adoptions were approved in Queensland in 1971-72. This number declined to 350 in 1980-81 and a mere nine in 2000-01. With the decline in local adoptions there has been an increasing acceptance of the concept of adopting a child from another country and culture. However, I have been disappointed in Queensland's past responses to this changing phenomenon. In early 1999 we had a six-month freeze on the intercountry adoption process. No files were looked at for six months. It was stated that the processes had to be looked at to improve the system. However, no improvements were made. When intercountry adoptions were resumed, the rate was slower than it was prior to 1999. This has resulted in only 60 overseas adoptions being finalised in Queensland in 1999-2000 and a further decline to 40 in the 2000-01 financial year. Although the number of files being processed each year has reduced since the freeze in early 1990, the number of applicants has increased substantially.

The average waiting time in Queensland for a file to be sent to the applicant's chosen country is between three and four years. It is three years in Western Australia, 12 months in both New South Wales and Victoria, and between four months and 12 months in South Australia, Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory. We have a three- to four-year wait in Queensland, a three-year wait in WA, with the wait in all of the other states not being more than 12 months.

In conclusion, I commend the minister for her assurance that we will now have a faster assessment process in Queensland. I commend the minister for the way she has handled the issue of intercountry adoption and for listening to the support groups. Politicians often get accused of failing to hear, listen and understand community concerns. Minister Spence has shown that she is capable of doing that, for which I congratulate her.

I wish also to indicate my support for the establishment of an expression of interest register and an assessment register to replace the current general children's adoption list. I have no argument at all with the process initiated today for adoptions within this country. All this will do is allow us to catch up in that it will establish a similar system to those in other states. The primary objective of the Adoption of Children Act 1964 is to secure the best possible adoptive placement for children who need adoptive families. Minister Spence is doing that through this legislation. As I said earlier, it is about finding the best families for kids, not kids for families. That must always be the objective, with the needs of children being given precedence.

The fundamental premise of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Australia signed 12 years ago and on which our child protection legislation is based, is that at all times the rights of the child are paramount. When walking out of the chamber at the luncheon recess, I ran into the member for Kurwongbah, who will speak shortly, and we exchanged opinions on adoptions. I said that I always argued that in a lot of cases guardianship is just as good as adoption. The member for Bulimba asked at what age can somebody be adopted. We have debates about stepchildren adoption and so on. When we re-examine the 1964 legislation as a whole, we might look at that. Ultimately, it is not really about owning a child. People do not own children, they have responsibilities to children. That is the concept we should be underlining.

Guardianship is very important. The law is changing. Ultimately, we will have to move with the times. In relation to the secrecy provisions, I think of all the hours I wasted in this chamber in my first life in parliament trying to talk members opposite into doing something to give children the right to find out where their natural parents were and also giving natural parents the right to find out where their children are—for medical, emotional and other reasons. Of course, this process needed safeguards. It was happening through the back door, but we could not even get a contact register in Queensland when the National Party was in power. We could not get something as fail-safe as a contact register, which would involve the natural parent wanting to find the child and the child wanting to find the natural parent. If they struck gold, they could see each other. We could not even go through that process here. These are the issues that we have faced. There were people in the National Party cabinet who had adopted children, and they thought that they would not want their children to know. That is a disaster because when children find out, it causes serious problems. I think that it is important.

I came to Australia from Greece at the age of 10 to live with my father's uncle. He did not adopt me. I did not go back home for 23 years. I was nearly an old man when I went back at the age of 33 and I had three children. There was no need for me to be adopted. My uncle was my guardian. He could make decisions about things that were important to me. He did not have to own me.

I congratulate the minister. It is important that people get a fair go. This bill reflects that sentiment. I look forward with some enthusiasm to the full review and to us having legislation second to none, even though I may not be a member of this parliament when that occurs. Again, congratulations, Judy.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (3.00 p.m.): I am pleased to join with honourable members in supporting the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. It was very instructive to have the benefit of Mr Jim Fouras's long parliamentary career to be reminded of what this House has not done about these matters in generations past and also to have his perspective on what we are doing today. This is indeed a bill that is a sign of the times.

Through different experience, as I have not been in parliament so long, I too bring a history and therefore a perspective on the bill. When I was young, adoption was very much more common than it is now. That was because in my early adulthood, it was still a time in Australia when there were no single mothers' supporting benefits, when it was a shame to be a single mother, to have been pregnant prior to marriage. In those times, generally it was counselled by organisations as well as families that the best thing for a single girl who got pregnant was to go away somewhere secret and private, hide the pregnancy, then give up the baby for adoption to a loving couple who wanted children but were not able to have them and who would provide a better home than she herself could possibly supply as a single parent, shamed and unassisted as she would have been in society in those years. That meant, of course, that there were very many more children available for adoption. It was also a time when contraception was relatively new and still somewhat unreliable and not widely available. It was before women had the independence and standing that they have in society today.

There were good sides to that, as there always are on all social issues—good and bad sides. The good side was that for couples like an aunt and uncle of mine, who were not able to have

children, it was indeed a magnificent and wonderful gift from God as well as the social processes that they were able over the years to adopt two children, to love them and to bring them up very well; to bring them up, as the expression went, as their own. I want to return to that phrase at a later point and talk about the issue of guardianship and ownership of children, as it bears not only on what we are doing today but also on the full review of the bill that we will come to in the future.

We have heard already from others that the situation is very different now. The honourable member for Ashgrove told us that 1,200 Queensland babies were adopted in 1971, whereas in the last financial year, the number was eight. No wonder, then, that the lists are long; no wonder, then, that the lists of those interested in intercountry adoptions have grown dramatically.

This is also a matter of which I have had some personal experience. In the years when I was a young mother, a good psychologist mate of mine and his wife were not able to have their own children, and they adopted four children from different countries. All four of the children were much more dark skinned than are most Australians, and so it was obvious in that physical sense that those children did not come from those parents. Despite the prejudice and the ignorance of those years—which surely was worse than it is now—those children were lovingly and well raised, well taught how to be proud of who they were and how to be assertive with those who might have cast any aspersions upon their background or their family circumstances. While I am not as closely in touch with that family as I once was, they have all done just fine. Nonetheless, the number of children born overseas who were adopted by Queensland families last year was only 40 for the 471 couples on the list. We are therefore, through these amendments, hoping to increase the number of adoptions and reduce that waiting list.

I have some concerns about intercountry adoptions. These also come from the background that I have in psychology. I must, even on this occasion, refer to Dr Sigmund Freud, who was the world's first and greatest psychologist and psychiatrist and who wrote at some length about all kinds of matters close to the human heart that had not previously been tackled. Despite the lack of knowledge of genetics that we possessed then, he signalled that he believed by the end of his life—which was in the 1930s—that there was a kind of cultural imprinting on our genetic code; that generations of living in a particular society did in fact influence our genetic material and was thereby transmitted to the next generation. That, along with others of his ideas, was revolutionary at the time and denigrated and dismissed as the rantings of some kind of ratbag. But in fact, so far as we can prove cultural transmission, these ideas are more accepted today.

It is therefore very, very important for children who come from distinctly different cultures and are adopted by loving parents from another culture that the child's culture be maintained, that there be a genuine connection with and understanding of that culture. There should be some ways in which those connections, as the years go on, can still be kept, albeit that the child is now living in a country remote from the original culture. I know that the member for Algester is also a strong supporter of our ensuring that those who adopt children from overseas do not just go through the hoops of learning about a different culture for the sake of getting the child that they desire so badly, but rather that their commitments to follow through on maintaining cultural connections are indeed monitored, and maybe they should be so.

I want to speak briefly on the issue that the member for Ashgrove mentioned, which is whether or not guardianship would be sufficient, as it were. He pointed out that we do not own children and that there should not be that perspective. He reminded us that it is the children's rights, the children's needs that should be put first. I have nonetheless, I suppose, a word of caution about this. I know that children who are adopted at birth or close to birth and who are well loved, who feel a sense of belonging—and that is a word that they will use as they get older—and who know that they have a secure home to go to do just fine, even if there are genetic differences in the background or cultural differences in the background. However, children who are moved from home to home, who are not adopted till the age of seven or nine or 13, or children who, despite wonderful foster parents, are moved around to many homes during their growing up do less well. They report that they do not have a sense of belonging. They are nobodies. There are not two adults—or even several, in whatever roles—who represent the enduring and unconditional adults who love them. So while guardianship may be a legal concept, we should be striving in whatever form, if we possibly can, to settle children as close to birth as possible and with adults who will, so far as it is possible for us to predict, be the secure and lasting people who will give that child a sense of identity, belonging and love that will, more than any other kinds of characteristics—certainly more than money—protect them in terms of their future adulthood.

I am pleased indeed to support this bill and to give recognition to the timely move by the minister and her department. I look forward to the further changes that it will be necessary for us to make in future years.

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (3.10 p.m.): Every speaker in the debate so far has acknowledged that the process of adoption of children has changed considerably over time and that these changes, including the proposed changes we are debating here today, have been brought about by changing community attitudes concerning the adoption of children. In my contribution today I, too, want to canvass the changing attitudes to and the changed process of adoption.

In his contribution the member for Ashgrove told of an exchange he and I had earlier in the day, when we expressed our views in relation to the future of adoption and what would happen during the current adoption legislation review process. I personally believe that there will come a time in the foreseeable future when we will not have an adoption of children act on our books. I believe that we will no longer speak of adoption, that we will be speaking of the guardianship and the care of children.

I note that Victoria has already moved down this road and has introduced alternative legal orders which transfer permanent guardianship and custody—they still use the word 'custody', which has long gone out of the language in the Family Court, where they speak of residency—of a child to a person other than the parent. They no longer speak of adoption. I believe that will be a critical debate we will be having during the current adoption review process. I think it will be a challenging debate for all of us. I do not know that we as a party—I stand to be corrected—have a clear policy on adoptions, especially intercountry adoptions.

I think it is also critical to understand where we have come from. That is why in my contribution today I will approach the subject of the adoption process from a different angle than that taken by other speakers. In Queensland prior to 1921 most adoptions were private arrangements. They were private arrangements between citizens. The state had absolutely no knowledge of them and had no say in those arrangements. After 1935 the director of the then Children's Department was required to make adoption orders. By the 1960s, all Australian states and territories, in conjunction with the Commonwealth government, turned their minds to bringing about uniform legislation for adoption processes. While the states and territories agreed that uniform legislation was desirable, they never actually got around to achieving a uniformity of principles and practices.

By 1964 Queensland did replace its 1935 act to reflect more modern principles, and this is the act we operate under today. That is not to say there have not been amendments to the Adoption of Children Act in the past 38 years. In fact there have been significant amendments to the act in that time. The majority of these amendments reflect major shifts in societal values and attitudes during the past four decades. Most significantly, changes in attitudes have moved adoptions and the adoption process from being very private and very secretive to being public and open.

That adoptions were private and secret is demonstrated by the nature of the original provisions of the 1964 act and subsequent amendments to it up to the mid-1970s. For example, one of the major amendments made to the act in 1972 was to afford greater protection to adopted children and their adoptive parents against interference by a natural parent. This interference was extended to include interference in or influencing the upbringing of an adopted child or the relationship of the child to its adoptive parents and to prevent communication with the child or the adoptive parents by the natural parent.

We can compare these sentiments with those of the amendments made to the act during the late 1980s and early 1990s, from amendments which provided for the establishment of an adoption contact register to enable reunions between birth parents and adult adopted persons through to amendments which provided for information about both parents and adopted children being made available, except in circumstances where an objection is made to such disclosure—the so-called veto provisions. In short, we have moved from legislating for privacy and upholding secrecy, believing it to be paramount to a child's welfare, to a much more enlightened position of legislating for full and open disclosure, knowledge and an ability to have contact with birth parents, changing the focus away from the needs of the adults who want a child—any child—to the child's needs and to which placement and type of placement is in their best interests.

The reasons for this significant legislative shift from promoting secrecy to encouraging openness run parallel to the experience of adoption itself, changing community attitudes to having a child born out of wedlock and a better understanding of what is in the best interests of the child. I know that many other speakers have spoken about those changing community attitudes and the change in community morals towards single mothers. Another trend that I believe is significant to the change in attitudes towards adoption which I have not heard canvassed in this debate is a declining social pressure for people to have children. More and more women do not feel that they have failed in their life because they have not had a child. This has resulted in a substantial decrease in the number of adoptions since the 1970s.

Many other speakers have quoted the figures—the change from the 9,000 or so adoptions in 1971-72 to 514 adoptions Australia wide last year. While there has been a substantial decrease in the number of local non-relative adoption placements, the opposite has been the case with intercountry adoptions, although I do recognise that the number of these adoptions declined somewhat in the early 1990s and has remained relatively stable over the past eight years or so. Last year a total of 40 foreign children adoptions were made in Queensland, decreasing from 60 in the previous year. This may have had as much to do with the resources of the department as it had to do with the availability of children for adoption.

The countries of origin for children placed through intercountry adoptions have also changed over the years and no doubt will continue to do so as changes in attitudes occur in the originating countries themselves. Countries that once allowed their children to be adopted overseas no longer do so. Since 1990-91 the majority of children placed in intercountry adoptions have come from Colombia, India, Korea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Last year in Queensland there were nine adoptions from Ethiopia, one from Fiji, one from Hong Kong, two from India, 14 from Korea, one from the Philippines, three from Taiwan and nine from Thailand. In other states there were also adoptions from Romania, Sri Lanka and one from China.

Other points have been noted in relation to intercountry adoptions across Australia. Fifty-two per cent of children adopted were male while 48 per cent were female. Fifty-four per cent of intercountry adopted children were aged one to four years and 28 per cent were aged under 12 months. Twenty-six per cent of children came from South Korea, 14 per cent from India, 13 per cent from Ethiopia and 12 per cent from Thailand.

Under the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Act 1946 the Commonwealth strictly controls the adoption process for overseas born children and adoption acts in each state and territory. The Commonwealth, state and territory governments are jointly responsible for investigating and improving overseas adoption programs. A significant step forward was achieved in 1998 through the ratification and adoption into domestic law of The Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption.

For a child to be legally adopted from an overseas country the state authority responsible for adoption must have established a formal working agreement with the country in relation to adoption. A suitable central agency in the overseas country is required to administer the program in accordance with Australian standards. The number of children available from these countries varies, as do their ages. In addition, these countries impose their own eligibility criteria such as age, marital status, health and financial factors.

Over the past two years or so I have had the delight of meeting some families who have adopted children from overseas, particularly children from South Korea. These are wonderful people, and better parents you could not find. They are very conscious of the need to promote and encourage their children's cultural links with their birthplace and go to great lengths to keep those cultural links alive. It is through them and hearing of their experience as well as my own inquiries that I have learnt much more about what they go through. Some years ago Queensland developed a relationship with the South Korean adoption authority, the Eastern Welfare Society. This society sets a quota on the number of adoption applications it will process each year. According to the department, the South Korean adoption agency always places infants under 12 months of age. In the latest *Adoptions* newsletter—which, I might add, is an excellent and informative publication—it is reported that applications are currently being prepared for the South Korean program and, as in previous years, the department is honouring its commitment to provide 16 families for placement of children from South Korea who require permanent families. It has long been a criticism of the Queensland process that such adoptions take so long, and that criticism has been repeated in this chamber during this debate.

Last year the waiting times were brought to my attention and I undertook my own comparison of the time taken for South Korean adoptions in each of the Australian jurisdictions.

What I learnt was that it takes between one and five years to adopt a child from South Korea depending on the Australian jurisdiction involved. Between applying to adopt a child and actually having the child in one's care, there is a waiting period. The waiting time in Queensland is two to five years. In South Australia it is, on average, two years and five months. In Victoria and New South Wales it is about nine months for a domestic application and for an intercountry application, once the application goes to South Korea, it takes another three and a half to four months for it to be processed and the child to be placed in the care of the successful applicants. Queensland presently has nearly 500 applicants on the intercountry adoption list, but there were only 40 placements last year. I sympathise with those on that list and can understand why they became so frustrated and angry about the waiting period.

The changes being made by this legislation have now been welcomed by the Australian-Korean Friendship Group, for it believes that there will be a vast improvement on the present circumstances. It is now up to us to ensure that there is adequate resourcing for the department to implement these changes. I commend the minister for her commitment to making sure that the best interests of children requiring adopted families are met and that the interests of all parties to the adoption process are safeguarded. I congratulate the minister for taking hold of and showing great interest in the issue of adoptions. I again say that I look forward to the ongoing discussion on the future of adoption legislation and processes for Queenslanders.

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (3.22 p.m.): I rise this afternoon to also congratulate the Minister for Families in her absence, the Hon. Judy Spence, for indeed a very brave move in reviewing the Adoption of Children Act 1964. The minister has certainly taken on something quite difficult. As the honourable member for Bulimba said earlier, everyone has a different opinion on this issue. If you asked five people they would have eight different opinions on this particular subject. Although this amendment bill is only an interim measure, it is necessary to make amendments to the current Adoption of Children Act 1964. There have been substantial changes in society since the introduction of the original legislation in 1964 and certainly major overhauls are required of the legislation so that adoption procedures can be more up to date. Society in 1964 was certainly a lot different to that of today. I was obviously very young in 1964—in fact, five years old. I was very protected by my family. The only women I knew at five were my mother and nanny. I never realised that there were other women in the world until I went to preschool in 1964. I have learnt a lot more about women since then, I must say, which is all good.

Mr Copeland: Bet you're no wiser, though.

Mr CHOI: I take that interjection from the honourable member.

Things have changed over time. The truth of the matter is that 20 years ago society frowned upon single motherhood. It was something to be ashamed of and, because of that, more children needed to be placed with adoptive parents. This is no longer the case. Certainly, there are many other issues that Queensland has to catch up on as well. I respect people who do not want to have children. They are double income, no kids families.

An honourable member: DINKS.

Mr CHOI: That is right. They exist in Melbourne, Sydney and indeed Brisbane. I am not too sure why there are DINKS, because I think they deprive themselves of the joy of having children in the house. I suppose they have the freedom of being able to go anywhere they want at the drop of a hat and do not have the expenses of raising children. I read a report some years ago that to raise a child in Australia from the date of birth to their 18th birthday costs around $330,000 per child. I quickly did some calculations in my head. I have three children, so I need $1 million to raise my three girls. Children bring so much joy and hope to a family. I have three girls, as I said before, and they are certainly a very expensive exercise, let me assure the House.

Ms Barry: They're worth it.

Mr CHOI: They are definitely worth it. Honourable members will understand that the job we have is a job that requires us to be away from our families a lot. It requires a lot of our time. Usually when we get home we are very tired. I have to inform the House that I usually get very excited before I get home because my girls jump to the door and are all over me giving me kisses and hugs. I was extremely concerned of late about my second daughter because, at the age of nine, she started to become a little bit disinterested in me. I was a little upset and had a good talk with her. I came home one day and she presented me with a draft deed of agreement. I think her mother had a hand in this. She undertook in writing to love and willingly kiss me on request for as long as I shall live. I have that agreement locked away in a very, very safe place.

People adopt children for different reasons. I watched *Australian Story* on ABC a couple of weeks ago which showed a family who wanted to adopt another child. They already had three biological children and decided to adopt a fourth because they felt that they had made their contribution to the world's population. They wanted another child and adopted one from Ethiopia. I congratulate them for this very brave move. A cross-cultural marriage is very difficult; cross-cultural adoption is extremely hard indeed. But usually hard work comes with big rewards. They said that their biological children have learnt so much more from people from a different culture. Another family on the same program wanted to adopt a child because, unfortunately, they were unable to have a child of their own. People adopt children for very different reasons. From these examples we can see that we need to make adoption easier, not more difficult. We need to ensure that the act also reflects the social changes of our society, but that does not mean we should compromise on the selection processes for selecting suitable parents to adopt children.

In fact, it is very hard to qualify to adopt a child. Looking at the requirements, I do not think I actually qualify in many instances. One applicant on that program said that the department carries out extensive checks for the adoption process. Applicants have to have checks on their police records and criminal records. They have to be fingerprinted. They have to have medical checks, including chest X-rays. They have to show the status of their finances, where they live, how they live, how they intend to raise their child and how they intend to manage the relationship between different children in the family if some are biological and some are adopted. They even want to know how they will talk about the birds and bees to their children and how they intend to punish them if they do anything wrong.

As I said, it is certainly very difficult, but the welfare of the children is the top priority. Those standards should not be compromised. The fact of the matter is that the capacity of the Department of Families to provide efficient and relevant adoption services is constrained by the current outdated provisions contained in the Adoption of Children Act 1964 because they certainly do not reflect the contemporary context regarding the adoption of children. Some practical aspects are certainly being addressed by this bill. For example, the current legislation is also unsatisfactory from the perspective of applicants whose applications are made in good faith that a child will be placed with them, but a child may never be placed with them due to the disproportionate number of adoptive placements required by children in Queensland. This amendment bill addresses that issue. The amendments also enable the department to call for expressions of interest in being assessed by prospective adoptive parents when required to meet the anticipated placement needs of the children. This will ensure that waiting lists do not continue to grow disproportionately to the anticipated placement needs of children and will, once a current application has been processed, ensure a reduction in waiting times for persons seeking to be assessed as prospective adoptive parents.

Children are a very important part of our family fabric. Some members may remember that a few years ago I almost lost my youngest daughter. She was drowning in the pool at home; in fact, she was pronounced clinically dead when fished out of the pool. We administered CPR on her. I remind members of the House that the Minister for Emergency Services has organised a CPR seminar for tomorrow. I encourage all members of the House to participate in the seminar, because we never know when perhaps we can save one of our loved ones with this knowledge. Indeed, I exercised my knowledge of CPR and saved my daughter. The joy of watching her recover so that she was able to kiss and hug me brought me all the joy in the world. I would not want anything else but to have children. I understand that there are tears and difficulties and some sweat in raising children, but people who want a child should not be deprived of the opportunity if they cannot have their own and should be able to adopt from within Australia or from overseas. In view of that, I truly commend this bill to the House.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (3.32 p.m.): It is my great pleasure to speak today in support of the Adoption of Children Amendment Bill 2002. I must say that it has been particularly interesting to sit in the House this afternoon listening to the contributions of other members. A common theme is the personal contact that people have had in their recent past or during their lives with the situation of adoption, whether it be with an Australian-born child or an overseas-born child. I confess that my understanding of the significance of this legislation—and adoption generally—has been greatly improved by my contact with a number of people who have adopted children from overseas and who are very active members of the Australian-Korean Friendship Group. A number of couples in that group are also my constituents. I put on record my appreciation to them in terms of the contact I have had over about the last three years on issues concerning adoption processes here in Queensland and the difficulties confronting couples when

adopting from overseas. I add to that the fact that through my personal family circumstances I have become aware of how significant the issue of adoption is to people in Australia. I am also told by some of the people in the Australian-Korean Friendship Group that at least on anecdotal information my electorate is home to the highest number of couples living in Queensland who have adopted from overseas. I consider that a privilege.

Queensland is the only Australian state that has not reviewed its adoption legislation since the 1960s. In October 2001, cabinet approved the preparation of initial amendments to the Adoption of Children Act 1964 and endorsed the terms of reference for a further review of the act in the longer term. Queensland is the only state with adoption legislation that entitles people to apply at any time to adopt a child. Under the current act, the Department of Families is required to accept all applications and to enter applicants' names on an adoption list. This has resulted in a large number of people on the adoption lists and ever-increasing waiting times for applicants to be assessed. In the year ending 30 June 2001, there were 303 couples on the Queensland general children's adoption list but only eight adoptive placements required for infants born in Queensland. There were 471 couples on the foreign children's adoption list; however, only 40 children born overseas were adopted by Queensland families in that year.

Whilst there are proposals for a longer term review of the legislation, in the short term this legislation will endeavour to establish an expression of interest register and an assessment register to replace the current general children's adoption list and the foreign children's adoption list. This will bring Queensland's adoption processes into line with those operating in other states, including New South Wales and Victoria. In the longer term, there will be a two-year consultation process to deliver contemporary legislation overall. The most immediate impact will be on the intercountry adoption program, hence the interest of my local constituents in this legislation and the broader membership of the Australian-Korean Friendship Group.

A transitional clause has been introduced into the initial amendments to the principal act which will allow applications made prior to the commencement of the amendment, that is 1 July this year, to be processed generally in chronological order of the date of application as is currently the case. The intention of the legislation otherwise is to streamline the process to allow a faster assessment procedure for prospective adoptive parents. As has been noted by other speakers this afternoon, the extensive time taken for the processing of adoption applications in Queensland has been one of the critical issues causing frustration, anger and disappointment and, consequently, has resulted in active representations to members of parliament such as myself, the member for Kurwongbah and I am sure others. The shift to a new concept that will now allow faster assessment procedures for prospective adoptive parents has been well received, bearing in mind the transitional clause which will preserve the situation for those who have already lodged applications for adoption.

The amendments will have the impact of closing the lists from 1 July. A series of initiatives supported by the intercountry adoption support group representatives have been implemented to increase the processing of applications from 40 to 110 per year. It is estimated that it will take at least two years to clear the intercountry adoption backlog. In the meantime, people can still express interest in adopting an overseas child, but their application will not be progressed until the current list is cleared. Once all the existing applications have been assessed, those who lodge their interest will be the first invited to the information sessions. I am advised that an expression of interest will not be called until the current applications have been assessed. Having addressed the broader aspects of the amending legislation, I conclude by commending the good work done by the range of different organisations that are active around the issue of intercountry adoptions.

Ms Spence: They do a great job.

Mr WILSON: I take the minister's interjection as a positive commendation of their role, because this not only confirms my experience but also puts on the record the minister's experience in her many dealings with the various adoption organisations. In particular, I repeat my reference to the Australian-Korean Friendship Group. Over a period of several years I have had extensive discussions with many of its members, particularly local constituent Sue-Belinda Meehan, her husband, Bryan, and also Noel and Mrs Hatwell. I have benefited greatly from the many conversations that I have had with them, both in a formal setting and also informally when I have bumped into them in the electorate. I was involved in a meeting with the member for Kurwongbah and representatives of the group about 18 months ago when they were wanting to outline clearly their concerns about the lethargy that seemed to characterise the processing of their applications. I also benefited from their kind invitation to attend one of their association dinners and also to attend their AGM and barbecue at the end of the year about two years ago.

In meetings that I have attended with the former minister and departmental officials, those people have displayed an enormous ability to advocate very effectively and with great clarity the issues vitally affecting members of their group and also other prospective parents wishing to adopt from overseas.

It is apparent to all the members who have spoken in this debate how challenging the issue of adoption is for these couples. They have had to deal with the human reality of infertility. In a country with such a strong family based culture, the social expectations are that couples will, bar extraordinary events, raise a family. It has been the experience of many couples that they have been unsuccessful in having children despite endless medical tests and confronting the high hopes and the many disappointments in their efforts to have their own family. They are often confronted with the thoughts of will they ever have a family of their own, will they give up, will they try IVF, or some other medical assistance. Couples who have that sort of background and others come to the process of adoption and, in particular, the adoption of children from other countries.

In conclusion, I must mention the great value and information that I was able to acquire as part of an all-party parliamentary delegation to China and Vietnam last year. It was very instructive to meet with officials in China where they briefed us very fully on the processes that they have in place to manage and negotiate all of the difficulties associated with overseas adoptions from the side of the relinquishing parents and also to ensure, from a government position in China, that all the appropriate standards are being met.

Ms Spence: In fact, Sue-Belinda Meehan, who you mentioned before, and her husband are going to China on Thursday week to bring the first Chinese baby back.

Mr WILSON: I thank the minister for informing the House of that delightful news. I have not had a chance to speak with Sue-Belinda for a short time. I am delighted for her and Bryan. There could not really be any better advocates for the parents and the issue of adoption than Sue-Belinda Meehan and her husband, Bryan. I congratulate them on the work that they do and also on the work done by the members of the Australian-Korean Friendship Group. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (3.43 p.m.): I rise to support the bill before the House. The social and economic changes that have occurred since the 1960s mean that many of the provisions of the current act are outdated. That is why the changes in this legislation are critical. We need to provide those children who cannot live with their birth parents an opportunity to live in a stable, loving family. Hopefully, in the end, it improves their opportunities in life.

There have been significant community changes since the early 1960s. The difficulty facing all governments has been to ensure that the legislation reflects those changes. The difficulties occur when legislation is allowed to languish too far behind community attitudes. These changes are reflected in the enormous reduction in the number of adoptions throughout Australia since the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in 1971-72, almost 10,000 children were adopted throughout Australia. Within my own family, I have had personal experience of this in that my sister, Patricia, who is a Mercy nun worked at the Mercy Centre at Wooloowin. At that time, the greatest number of people whom they cared for were unmarried mothers. These were young girls who were shunned by society, in many cases thrown out of their family homes, and certainly were provided with no financial or other support to care for their child.

Things have changed in 30 years and a place like the Mercy Centre at Wooloowin is no longer needed to cater for those young women. The changes that have occurred in that particular centre highlight the changes that have occurred in our society which this bill is trying to address. For example, just 12 months ago there were 512 adoptions throughout Australia, including a total of only nine in Queensland. Despite the decline in the number of Australian children requiring adoptive placements, there has not been a similar decline in the number of people seeking to become adoptive parents.

All of the other states in Australia have taken either legislative or administrative steps to ensure that the number of people seeking to adopt a child who are registered with adoption authorities is proportionate to the number of children requiring adoptive families. In most other states, the adoption authority invites people to lodge applications in accordance with the anticipated number of children requiring adoptive families.

The amendments proposed in this bill will operate in the interim until proposals for new adoption legislation that reflect community attitudes are in place. In the meantime, the amendments contained in the bill represent a major improvement on the current application process. A number of members who have spoken before me have outlined what those changes

in the application process will be. It will establish a process that ensures that waiting times for adoption applicants are moderate and will enhance the capacity of the Department of Families to achieve the objective of the act, that is, to secure the best placement for children who need adoptive families.

Of course, the big debate in our society is what is the best for children. In each person's life, one of the key questions that we face is: who am I? Throughout society in literature we see famous quotes that have reflected this, such as 'To thine own self be true,' and 'Know thyself'. The essential question in anybody's life is: who am I? We see this reflected in the search for family history—the need for people to return to their roots, for people to learn about generations past to find out who they are and their family story.

When the issue of adoption arises, there are a great variety of opinions. To me, the classic conflict comes in the notion of to know or not to know. What is confidential? What should be known? There is no easy solution, because for as many people who are involved in adoption or who are asked their opinion on adoption, there is that same variety of opinions. There are some who believe that the birth mother's right for confidentiality takes precedence. There are some adopted children who say, 'I don't want to make contact.' There are others who want to make contact. There is a great combination of ideas and opinions. That is why there has been no easy solution throughout Australia, because there are such complex, personal and strongly held attitudes and opinions on this matter. It is not easy. Because the issue relates to the basic notion of who the person is, the feelings and emotions are extremely strong.

I can only hope to guess by observing in my own and other families the relationship between a mother and child. There is something unique about that relationship of having nurtured, cared for and given birth to a child. To then have, for a variety of social or other reasons, the necessity or the decision to break that relationship cannot be easy in anyone's life. I do not pretend to understand it. I know from family experience and that of close friends that they are extremely delicate decisions and very complex issues to consider. If I were to express my opinion, it would be that I believe that the child's right to know takes precedence over other matters of confidentiality. In this case, the child was not the one making certain decisions. The child had no say as to whether he or she was born. If I had to give an opinion on the notion of confidentiality, or availability of information, I would come down on the choice of children to find out their origins if they wish.

But there is a variety of opinions and I have seen good and bad situations of adoption. Within my own family, I have adopted nieces and nephews. Very close friends of mine have a similar situation, including international adoptions. The experience of my own children in having as playmates three children from Russia, who were adopted and who have grown up in Brisbane and have been friends and good mates to my children, has been a very worthwhile one.

I believe that in many ways the choice is not what is the greater good for the child or what is good for the child; in many cases it is choosing the lesser of two evils. Just recently there was debate among some of my colleagues when we were talking about international adoptions. Some people said, 'But they lose their culture. They lose this, they lose that.' I know of some children who, if they had been left in the orphanages in the countries from where they were adopted, at the age of about 12 they would have been turfed out onto the streets. The girls and the boys often turn to crime. That is their only means of survival because there is no social support. So in many ways I am not talking about what is best for the child; I am talking about an awkward choice of the lesser of two evils.

This is a complicated matter and I believe that the minister has done an excellent job in coming to the conclusion that she has to bring this bill before the House. I support the legislation.

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) (3.50 p.m.), in reply: I congratulate and thank all members who have contributed to this important debate. As members have indicated during the debate, we all appreciate that the whole issue of adoption is a very emotive and sensitive issue. It can be difficult and challenging, and for some it can be a very traumatic process. On the one hand, we are dealing with people who, for whatever reason, are unable to have a family; on the other hand, we are dealing with children who are unable to live with their birth parents. As minister, I have set out to modernise an antiquated process and to minimise the trauma that may be suffered. I also want to ensure, where possible, that the interests of the couple seeking to adopt a child and the child's best interests are protected. I believe that the community expects nothing less from us.

I will now address a number of the issues raised during the debate. I appreciate that there are some concerns about the amendments we are proposing. I turn firstly to the issue of consultation that went on before these amendments were brought to the parliament. One or two members read out letters from their constituents who claimed they had not been consulted and were unsure about what the amendments meant. Last year, the department wrote to every single person on the foreign and general children's adoption lists, indicating that we were likely to make changes to the adoption legislation along the measures proposed today. As a result of those letters, I started to receive some fairly intensive lobbying from the overseas adoption group. Since about November last year I have had a number of meetings, particularly with overseas adoption groups, to discuss their concerns about the program and how we could improve the system that the department uses to process their files and send them overseas. The amendments being put forward today come out of the many discussions I have had with those groups.

Earlier this year I attended an open public meeting which was organised by the overseas adoption groups, and a couple of hundred people attended that public meeting at Indooroopilly. I explained these amendments at that public meeting and took questions from the floor. I think most people at that meeting welcomed these changes to the legislation and appreciated that the intention behind these amendments was to streamline the process to ensure that their files were in fact processed more speedily and sent overseas. On the issue of consultation, the department and I, as minister, have certainly done all we can to communicate with all those people on waiting lists about what we are proposing here today.

There are several other points I want to make clear before proceeding. There is no agenda to close down the adoption process, either the domestic or the intercountry. These amendments are particularly aimed at improving the process for people waiting on intercountry adoption lists. Obviously we want to improve the process for people on the general adoption list, but at this point in time we have 40 people on the general adoption list who have been assessed. Given that there were eight or nine babies adopted out in Queensland last year, we have enough couples assessed for the next few years for Queensland adoptions. The overseas adoption list and our assessment processes are the main cause of concern to people, and that is what these amendments are designed to improve.

Some members have questioned the timing of these amendments, given that I have signalled and we have commenced a general review of the adoption legislation. The general review of the adoption legislation will take some time. This is the first time in 38 years that any government has done a general review of the adoption legislation. This will not happen quickly. With all the speed and goodwill in the world, it is unlikely that we will have new adoption legislation before this parliament before the end of next year. In the meantime, I was not prepared to sit back and do nothing while people on the overseas adoption list continue to complain about the process. These amendments give those people a good two years head start to get those lists in order before we have new adoption legislation in this state. We have to be realistic about this. I did not want people languishing on adoption lists when we could do something about it. In terms of the general review of the adoption legislation, we have established a community reference group made up of community members, including adopted people, birth parents, adoptive parents, academics and representatives of relevant government agencies, who will instruct the way that review is undertaken in the coming months.

I want to set the record straight regarding some of the claims made by the member for Cunningham and by other members of parliament who read out letters from their constituents. There was no freeze of the intercountry adoption process in 1999, in spite of the obvious fact that many people believe that there was. It is true that applicant files were not sent to Ethiopia for a period, due to processing difficulties in that country. I am advised that those difficulties have been resolved. State authorities report that they are satisfied with the management of files sent to Ethiopia. The system appears to facilitate the management of allocations in Ethiopia using a rotating files management system where files are replaced with a new file from the relevant state once an allocation has been made by the Ethiopian authorities.

The member for Cunningham has raised concerns about section 13AB dealing with the calling for expressions of interest. The section does not prevent specific calls for expressions of interest for people interested in being assessed as suitable to adopt a child from overseas, or specific calls for people interested in being assessed as suitable to adopt a child from Queensland. The chief executive can do separate calls or do them together. The calling for expressions of interests will be handled in a similar fashion to other states, requiring public advertisements. People who have lodged an interest on the web site will be contacted and

informed when those expressions of interest are made. People will be able to lodge their names on the adoptions web site. When expressions of interest are called for, it will be advertised publicly throughout Queensland and we will also contact those people who have lodged their details on the web site at the same time. Hopefully that will put people at ease. Some people have had concerns that if they miss the Saturday advertisement in the *Courier-Mail*, they might have missed out for another three years on expressing an interest. We certainly do not intend that to be the case.

In terms of the member for Cunningham's concerns about section 13AC, I make it clear that the eligibility and assessment criteria in the Adoption of Children Regulations 1999 will not change. Certainly the member for Cunningham is not the only person who has expressed this concern. There have been others who have expressed concern. I invite all members to obtain a copy of the Adoption of Children Regulations 1999. They are not changing as a result of this legislation being debated today. However, they will quite rightly be the subject of review. If the review process determines that we have good regulations, we will leave them as they are. If the review process determines that we should change them, we will look at that next time around. But they will not change as a result of what happens today.

Also, some concern was expressed that if someone under the criteria set out in these regulations is ineligible to adopt a child from overseas they can be removed from the register. That is what happens at the moment. That is not changing. There also appears to be some ongoing concern about the use of the lists. A number of members expressed that concern. Members need to realise that under the current system we have four lists that are compiled into one database. All that is being suggested here is that the expressions of interest register becomes a database within which expressions of interest relating to intercountry adoption can be isolated from all other expressions of interest and which can be searched using a range of different variables. For example, the department will be able to search the database list to look at all couples seeking to adopt a child from overseas who were applicants prior to the commencement of the initial amendments in chronological order of their date of application. Alternatively, we could search for all couples seeking to adopt a child from a specified country—Korea or Ethiopia, for example—or we could search for all couples who meet a particular criterion required by an overseas adoption country, and there are particular requirements in different countries. We live in an age of advanced technology. To suggest that we need two separate databases is to suggest an unnecessary and expensive duplication. One database can contain many lists, and we control that database for many lists. That is what we intend to do.

There also seems to be some concern that the exchange of non-identifying information between adoptive and birth parents as mentioned in the legislation is somehow a back door to open adoption. That is not the case. It applies to the adoption of Queensland children. It is in the interests of children and commonsense that where both adoptive parents and birth parents wish to exchange non-identifying correspondence, this should be a factor to consider when making placement decisions. Exchange of non-identifying information does not undermine the legal relationship between a child and adoptive parents and does not breach section 28 of the act, which is about the legal effect of an adoption order. Given that we are generally talking about overseas adoptions here, I point out that some overseas countries encourage the exchange of non-identifying information between birth parents and adopted children. Recently, I had the privilege of meeting and hosting a small function for delegates from Taiwan who are in charge of all Taiwanese adoptions. That is a practice they encourage for parents in Taiwan who send their children overseas.

In relation to the issue of sole prospective adopters, let me point out that under section 12(3) of the Adoption of Children Act an adoption order may be made in favour of one person as opposed to a married couple in exceptional circumstances. Again, I draw the attention of all honourable members to the regulations where that is spelt out. Inclusion of sole prospective adopter in the meaning of prospective adopter in this clause merely reflects the provisions in current section 12, which have not been amended. Under The Hague Convention, both the sending and the receiving central authority must approve the proposed allocation of an individual child with prospective parents. This means that when an overseas adoption authority matches a child to a Queensland applicant the department must review the proposed allocation to ensure the characteristics and/or needs of the child are consistent with the applicant's assessed capacity and expressed preferences. This includes considering a much broader range of factors than the age of the child and the number of children alone. These matters will vary from case to case but might also exclude specific developmental, educational or medical needs of the child and the

applicant's assessed capacity to meet those needs. This is to ensure a collaborative approach between countries and to provide appropriate matches are made. In the end, that is the objective of both parties.

We have all read stories about and seen pictures of orphaned or abandoned children. Today a suggestion has been put forward by some members of parliament on behalf of their constituents that there is an unlimited number of children overseas available for adoption to this state and that, if only this government or department had better processes for getting at files overseas, we would be getting more children from overseas. I wish to set the record straight on that and I think it is worth while doing so today.

We have signed agreements with 13 countries for overseas adoptions. I wish to go through the adoption status in those 13 countries. For example, last year China received 12,000 intercountry adoption applications but could place only 7,000 children overseas. China is currently operating, and the waiting period for allocation is approximately 13 months. So when we get the files overseas, our parents will have to wait at least 13 months to hear something from China. They have placed limits on the number of applications they will accept from some countries, and they have advised that they will be considering placing limits on the applications of Australians in the future. As I said before, the first baby to come to Queensland from China is likely to come in the next month. But if we are to continue to receive children from China, we will have to work very hard at that relationship. That is why I was pleased to lead the trade delegation and visit the Chinese authorities in charge of adoption—the director of Chinese adoptions—last year and talk up Queensland as a great place to consider for overseas adoptions. As a result of that visit, the Chinese officials came to Queensland two months ago, looked at our adoption section in the Department of Families and met many of the Queensland families interested in adopting a child from China. We will have to continue to undertake those sorts of goodwill exercises if we are to ensure that the Chinese government continues to consider Australian applications in the future.

Briefly, Colombia is operating, and adoptive parents are required to remain in the country for eight weeks to complete the adoption process. Ethiopia is operating, and the waiting period for allocations is approximately 12 months. They will accept only five Queensland applications at any one time. We all have to remember that Queensland is competing with every other state in Australia when looking to send our applications overseas. Fiji is inactive at the moment. Couples approved for older children may be considered on a case-by-case basis. Couples of indigenous Fijian descent are most likely to be accepted. Hong Kong accepts applications for those with special needs only. Therefore, many are precluded from entering Australia on health grounds, and preference is given to Hong Kong nationals.

India is inactive. Mexico is operating. It has a new program. Applicants will have to wait three years for allocations and are required to live in Mexico for three months while bonding with the child. South Korea is operating. It sets an annual quota for Queensland applicants and there are 15 applications by Queensland couples each year. The Philippines is operating after a period of inactivity due to HIV concerns. Romania has been suspended until October 2003. Sri Lanka is active. Preference is given to Sri Lankan nationals. Taiwan is operating, with limited numbers. Thailand is operating and the approximate waiting period is 13 to 15 months.

Although we have signed agreements with 13 countries, at the moment seven are active, one is restricted, four are inactive and one has been suspended. The argument that we often hear from people about unlimited numbers of children overseas who are waiting to come to good homes in Queensland does not do justice to the facts. We have agreements with only 13 countries and many of those are inactive and the others all limit the number of applications that they will receive from Queensland. Having said that, I do not want to walk away from the fact that I think we could perform better as an adoption unit, as a government, in ensuring that active files, assessed files, get sent overseas. I think I am realistic in saying that, in some years, the Queensland adoption section has performed very well in getting those files overseas, but more recently we have not kept up with the performance of other states. That is why the changes to this legislation are required today.

I turn to address some more specific issues that have been raised by members. I want to address some of the issues raised by the member for Gladstone, who expressed the concerns of some of her constituents that they would lose their place on the list as a result of the amendments that we are debating. The legislation clearly says that anyone who is currently on an adoptions list, particularly the overseas adoptions list, will not lose their chronological order on the list. We will continue to process the current list in chronological order. However, once we have

gone through the 300 or 400 names on each list, we will abandon the chronological order system of placing children with parents.

The member for Gladstone said that her constituents were told that we have funding in the adoption unit for only 40 assessments each year. That has actually been fairly accurate in the past. Along with the changes to this legislation, I have clearly said to the intercountry adoption community that we will be raising fees. At present, Queenslanders pay $700 to have their applications assessed. That is well short of the true cost of assessing a couple. I have said to this community that I cannot take money out of child protection or other needy purposes in the Department of Families to fund assessments for couples seeking intercountry adoption. They have said to me that they are very willing to pay higher fees to properly cover the real cost of their assessment. So we intend to increase those fees from $700 to $2,000. This means that Queensland will still have the cheapest assessment fees in Australia, because some states are charging up to $6,000 and $7,000 for assessment, but it will also mean that we will be able to complete more assessments each year and ensure that more files get sent overseas each year. I have given the intercountry adoption people a commitment that we will process in the future between 100 and 110 files each year and that we will report to them half yearly on our progress in processing those files. As I said before, once those files are overseas, the Queensland government has no way of ensuring that the overseas country processes its files speedily. But what we can do is make sure that these people are assessed and their files sent overseas.

The member for Gladstone and others mentioned that a lack of trust in the adoption branch of the Families Department has been expressed by many of their constituents. I certainly have heard about those issues from people as I have been talking to them in the last six months. I have also said to the intercountry adoption people that when the changes to this legislation take effect from 1 July and we increase the assessment fees, we will also establish a separate Intercountry Adoption Unit in the Department of Families. That unit will have the sole focus of looking after intercountry adoptions in the future.

During my reply I have hopefully summarised the major concerns about the legislation that we are proposing. It is certainly not the intention of this legislation to disadvantage applicants. What is being proposed today is to modernise an archaic process and bring it into line with processes in other states. I particularly want to pay tribute to the staff of the Department of Families who have worked so hard on this legislation: in particular, the director, Heather Nancarrow; principal policy and legislative officer Joanne Linde from the Adoption Legislation Review Branch; and my own senior policy adviser, Ross McSwain. I want to particularly thank the 24 or so Labor members of parliament who have spoken on this legislation in the last day or so. I really do not have time to summarise and commend each and every individual on their contributions to this debate, but I think it says something that a third of the members of our caucus are obviously very knowledgeable and aware of the issues surrounding adoption and want to ensure that this government introduces adoption legislation that is appropriate for the new millennium. Besides the 24 Labor members, seven other members of parliament spoke and made worthwhile contributions to this debate. I thank them for those contributions. I look forward to a new era in adoption policy in this state from 1 July.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services) in charge of the bill.

Clauses 1 to 5, as read, agreed to.

Clause 6—

Mr COPELAND (4.16 p.m.): I thank the minister for addressing many of the concerns I raised during the second reading debate. They were concerns that had been relayed to us. The best way to try to address them is to put them on the record so that everyone can read them in *Hansard*. I appreciate that most of those points have been addressed. There are a number on which I seek further clarification during the committee stage, if possible.

The minister referred to advertising through a newspaper circulating throughout the state—and that is included in the legislation—plus other means as the chief executive sees fit. The minister has noted that anyone who has logged their name on the web site as wanting to be notified will get notification when expressions of interest are called. I think that is a good way of

doing it. For those who are not technologically connected, are there any other ways that they may stay involved in the process and register their interest in receiving the notifications to make sure that they do not miss out? Even looking for jobs advertised and those sorts of things can be a stressful time. This process could be very difficult for them.

Ms SPENCE: I have great sympathy for those who do not troll web sites and use the Internet as a means of communication. Just by phoning the department and talking to people, or even writing, they should be able to register their interest and have their names recorded and be informed when the expression of interest is advertised.

Mr COPELAND: The other matter that was raised by a number of members was the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee report regarding the eligibility criteria, which suggested it would be desirable to include some of the criteria in the legislation. Could the minister provide the reasons why she has not done that? I notice she has said the regulations will not be changing at all until the review, and perhaps not even during the review, but the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee suggested that that should be considered.

Ms SPENCE: I have replied to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee. I think there is a lot of merit in its suggestion. Basically, my reply said that these are actually quite minor amendments to the legislation that we are passing today; that I think there is merit in having the major characteristics of the regulation in the legislation, but that would really be the subject of the total review of the legislation. It is something that seriously should be looked at in the new legislation.

Mr COPELAND: I note that the minister has given a commitment to intercountry adoption support groups that the department will be aiming to process 100 to 110 files. I think that is a good aim. It is good that that will be reported back to them so that everyone will be quite clear on how that is going.

Given the limitations on the countries we already do business with, so to speak, in relation to adoptions, another aspect is actively seeking out other countries. I note that the minister said that the first Chinese baby will be arriving in the near future. What will the department do to extend the list of countries or agencies we deal with?

Ms SPENCE: I think that is a good point to bring up. I have certainly talked to the intercountry adoption people about this. The adoption unit in the Department of Families has been underfunded for a long time. Our officers have never been sent overseas to actively engage adoption agencies in other countries. While adoptive parents go overseas, learn a lot and bring back valuable knowledge, our own officers have never had that opportunity.

The fact that we are raising the fees from $700 to $2,000 means that the department will no longer have to bear the burden of making up for assessment fees and the department will be better funded in the future. More importantly, the fact that we will have a separate Intercountry Adoption Unit means that we will, for the first time, have public servants who are working exclusively on intercountry adoptions and not general and other kinds of adoptions. For the first time we will be able to develop a unit of experts who can proactively go out and seek arrangements with other countries along the lines the member has suggested.

Mr WELLINGTON: Clause 6 states in part—

> However, the chief executive must remove the person's name from the register if—
>
> (a) the person is, as prescribed under a regulation, ineligible to have the person's name entered in the register; or
>
> (b) the person does not comply with a requirement prescribed under a regulation.

The minister indicated a willingness to look at the issues. Is there any reason we cannot actually have these things stated in the bill instead of dealt with by way of regulation?

Ms SPENCE: As I said before, I think the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee's proposal has merit, but what we are doing today is making some fairly minor amendments to the adoption legislation. The eligibility criteria are not changing. But I think if we are to include those sorts of eligibility criteria in legislation the proper time to do that will be in the total review of the adoption legislation, which is going on now. When we have brand-new adoption legislation before the parliament it should be considered at that time.

Mr WELLINGTON: So when that legislation comes before parliament we may see these regulations moved into the bill?

Ms SPENCE: I am certainly not going to give that commitment today. Who knows when that legislation will come before the parliament? Hopefully it will in the next two years and I will be here

to have carriage of it. I think the suggestion has a lot of merit. A lot of the detail is included in the regulations, and I think it is quite proper that we consider including that level of detail in future legislation.

Clause 6, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 7 to 15, as read, agreed to.

Clause 16—

Mr COPELAND (4.24 p.m.): During the minister's reply to the second reading debate she spoke about voluntary participation in the exchange of non-identifying correspondence. She said that that will be just one of the criteria taken into account. As I said during my speech at the second reading stage, the intercountry adoption groups do not have as much concern about that particular issue as do the domestic support groups. One of the fears is that pressure will be placed on prospective relinquishing parents and prospective adoptive parents to agree to that criteria simply to be put on the list. Can the minister give a guarantee that that will remain voluntary on the part of both parties?

Ms SPENCE: We have not heard of any concerns from individuals on domestic adoption lists about this particular issue. My understanding is that that has been in since the 1991 amendments, so we are not making any changes.

Mr COPELAND: I thank the minister. That point followed on the concerns about moving towards open adoption. It was seen in that context. Following on from that is the fear that section 18 is inconsistent with section 28 of the adoption act, which states at paragraph (1)(b)—

... the adopted child ceases to be a child of any person who was a parent (whether natural or adoptive) of the child before the making of the adoption order, and any such person ceases to a parent of the child ...

If that has been there for some time, then perhaps there is no reason for those people to be concerned. Could the minister allay those fears?

Ms SPENCE: I am advised by my legal advisers that there have been no changes in terms of that part of the legislation. The exchange of non-identifying information does not impact on the legal standing of adoptive parents or children.

Clause 16, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 17 to 19, as read, agreed to.

Clause 20—

Mr COPELAND (4.27 p.m.): As I said during my speech at the second reading stage, the introduction of the transitional clause to provide that intercountry adoptions are still dealt with chronologically has satisfied a lot of people on that list. On their behalf I thank the minister for inserting this provision, because that was the major concern relayed to us when the draft legislation was first circulated. A lot of adoption support groups now know that some chronological aspect will be considered in the adoption process. However, people seeking domestic adoptions will not be dealt with chronologically. All existing applicants will be transferred to the new expressions of interest register. A lot of those people will obviously be very upset by that and will perhaps even be disadvantaged by it. A lot of them have been on the list for a very long time and will be moving towards the upper age limit for adoptive parents. This change could work against them, trying to match children to those families. That will be a concern for those people and is something that will have to be managed by the department. Can the minister give any ideas about how that process will be managed?

Ms SPENCE: I can appreciate the concerns, not that we have heard much from those people. This change could work in some people's favour, because they actually could get a child more quickly. It is unlikely that we will abandon chronological order when placing a child with parents, unless there is good reason to do so. If, for example, we had an indigenous child and we had indigenous people on our list, then we would be obliged to look at them, if they had been assessed, before non-indigenous people. Looking at ethnic characteristics, for example, we would be likely to assess someone more favourably out of order. I think that for most people on the current general children's adoption list, everything else being equal, we would be choosing the next lot of adoptive parents in chronological order.

Mr COPELAND: The chief executive has the power to override that chronological order for a number of reasons. Will there be anything put in place to ensure that the chronology does remain effective, notwithstanding that there are reasons that can be bypassed by the chief executive? How will it be administered, because it does appear to be very difficult to administer and it is

something that will have to be very closely guarded? I guess having the dedicated staff in the stand-alone unit will, to some extent, address some of those concerns. But there will still be a very difficult administrative task to ensure that the chronology does stay in place.

Ms SPENCE: I can give the member my commitment today that, as I just said, everything else being equal, people will continue to be assessed in chronological order. As I said before, 40 couples have already been assessed on the general children adoption list. Maybe we will have eight children adopted out again next year. Unless there is a specific reason to do with the child, we will still use—and I will give the member my commitment today—the chronological order.

Mr COPELAND: I thank the minister very much for that commitment. Finally, proposed section 74 refers to the extinguishing of expectations, and that is referred to in the minister's second reading speech as well. Even though they have read the explanatory notes and the second reading speech, there are a number of people who are still very concerned that, in the terms in which the bill is written, from now on any previous expectations will be extinguished. Most would say that they did have some sort of expectation that they would be able to adopt, but that under this legislation those expectations will be extinguished from the commencement of the bill. There may not be anything for those people to worry about, but the explanatory notes and the second reading speech have not really allayed some of the concerns of those people in that any expectation they had to be able to adopt from here on in is extinguished.

Ms SPENCE: I can understand people's concern about that particular provision in the amendments. I was trying to get the particular legal opinion, but I do not seem to have it. The reason we had to include that in the legislation was on the advice of Parliamentary Counsel because of a particular case that happened in Corrective Services legislation. This provision has been included as a result of the Supreme Court decision in Tyler v. Tullipan and Ors in which it was held that a right or privilege accruing to a prisoner in relation to eligibility for home detention under the Corrective Services Act continued after the Corrective Services Act changed and stopped prisoners being eligible for home detention. It is really a legal issue and Parliamentary Counsel has advised us to put that in despite the fact that it is the intention of this legislation—and it is clearly spelt out—that we continue to process existing applicants in chronological order.

Clause 20, as read, agreed to.

Clause 21 and Schedules 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Ms Spence, by leave, read a third time.

CRIMINAL LAW AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 6 March (see p. 379).

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (4.35 p.m.): At the outset, I indicate that the National Party opposition is generally very supportive of the principles outlined in the Criminal Law Amendment Bill before the parliament. There is one concern, however, which we have and which I will come to a little later, and that relates to part 6 regarding amendments to the Evidence Act specifically to do with DNA testing. Many of the amendments contained in the bill being debated today are commonsense and very much overdue. There is little doubt that the community at large has a very strong belief that we should have a justice system which is effective and efficient.

Of course, a part of any justice system is to ensure that the people who allegedly perpetrate crimes are detected and arrested and there are systems in place to ensure that there is a speedy and fair dispatch of justice—a system which ensures that the victims of crime have their issues of justice addressed and also that the accused are dealt with fairly by our courts. At the end of the day, we are significantly restraining the liberties of those people. It is important to ensure that we have a court process which works fairly as well—that is, a process where jurors, judicial officers and witnesses do not feel any degree of intimidation. I have long held the view that legislative provision should exist in Queensland to ensure that jurors are not threatened—that jurors are not put at risk in any way whatsoever—and that witnesses do not feel that they are under any threat because of their actions.

In relation to threats against judicial officers, a while ago I was talking to a former Supreme Court judge. As members of parliament we do feel a degree of fear towards our family's safety from time to time. When pursuing matters in parliament—especially in my portfolio, which deals with a whole range of things including outlaw criminal motorcycle gangs and people who do not generally do nice things in our community, people who certainly are not of the same degree of integrity and character as members in this parliament—there may potentially be some degree of recrimination against a member or their family. I asked this former Supreme Court judge if he had ever felt any sort of adverse potential retaliation in his life and he said only once. He was under guard and that was it. Judicial officers have a very difficult job to do because they are often in the public eye and they often deal with some of the most unsavoury criminal elements in our community—people who do not think twice about harming somebody or even killing somebody. When those officers pass sentence and judge somebody, at a future time upon release that person may come back to get even.

We are very fortunate that this is something that has not manifested itself to any real extent or any great extent in our community. I am very pleased that the amendments relating to the Criminal Code introduce a new section 119B which creates a new offence of retaliation against judicial officers, jurors, witnesses or their families. That will do a lot to underpin confidence in our justice system and ensure that the people who are so integral to the court system so that it works efficiently and effectively can go about their jobs without any fear of retaliation.

There are many things that do happen that we do need to be aware of. I have watched with some degree of interest—and no doubt the Attorney has as well—developments over the last couple of years, or probably even a little longer, in terms of people's access to information which the community feels is its right to know about and which should be circulated in the community at large. In many cases that information relates in particular to child sexual offenders. Those circumstances, which very much started in the United States, have been reflected by some more reasonable attempts here in Australia in relation to the community's right to know and to be protected against people at risk of offending, particularly against children.

Certainly, there are groups out there that do publish criminal information—that is, information against somebody who has previously offended—on the Internet and in other forums. As well, many of these people may not have offended only once but on numerous occasions and may have allegedly offended again. Therefore, they are facing the justice system. It is extremely important that by law jurors have some onus not to seek information on the accused person on whom they are sitting in judgment. In Victoria, information was actually published on the Internet and people who wished to do so were able to gain access to it.

The accused does have the right to be judged on the facts available to the court at the time and not have to suffer any prejudice that may come from a juror or jurors who may do some research on the Internet or in some other way to gain information which may lead them to the wrong or, in some cases it might even be the right, conclusion that that person is guilty or otherwise. Nevertheless, we need a process in place that acts as a deterrent to those jurors. That is something which this bill before the parliament certainly does facilitate. As I mentioned before, there are amendments with regard to corrupting or threatening jurors.

Another issue of some importance to me, coming as I do from the land, maintaining an interest in the land and because of the significance of the cattle industry in my electorate, are the new offences relating to stock. I commend the Attorney-General on recognising the government's commitment prior to the last state election not only to increase the penalties for people involved in stock stealing but in relation to other actions against stocks in terms of using registered brands with criminal intention, killing animals with the intent to steal, unlawfully using cattle, suspicion of stealing cattle, illegal branding, defacing brands, being in possession of an animal with a defaced brand, et cetera. The legislation also ensures a more contemporary, modern and easier way of understanding what in fact stock are and includes circumstances of aggravation with regards to stealing property to the value of more than $5,000. Stock is included in that category. That is extremely important.

A lot of people underestimate the impact of stock theft in this state. I note that, in a briefing paper prepared by the Parliamentary Library, the value of stock theft in Queensland is estimated at $2 million a year. I would have thought that that is a significant underrepresentation of the real value. That is a personal belief, but I suppose the issue is how one effectively quantifies the value. When one considers that, with the good cattle prices of late, a good steer is worth $700 or $800, one need steal only a couple of thousand Queensland wide to exceed that amount. I dare say that $2 million is a significant underrepresentation of the value of stock stolen in Queensland

each year. I know that the member for Callide, the shadow minister for police and corrective services, who also has a very great interest in this area, would probably concur in the view that $2 million is an underrepresentation. There are a lot of people who lost stock who do not report the stock as being stolen. There is also stock that goes missing. If one has large numbers of stock, one might miss five or six that have been stolen, but one cannot be sure that they have been stolen. If it is a large property, maybe they have died somewhere, got over the fence or have gone elsewhere. Certainly, people may not report these incidents because in some cases the Stock Squad does not have the resources to effectively and efficiently investigate such reports of stock theft and the other offences against the criminal provisions we are considering today.

There are limited numbers of Stock Squad officers in Queensland and I dare say that those officers who do exist do an excellent job, but with an area as large as Queensland with over two million square kilometres there is a lot of stock and a lot of area for a few people to cover. Whilst these provisions are extremely important, the doubling of fine provisions on many occasions and the increase in maximum penalties of up to 10 years jail in other circumstances, the only way that this will really work as an integrated deterrent is for people to be deterred not only by what they might read and by what might be publicised but by the real threat of being caught and prosecuted. That is the real deterrent to come from this legislation. It is good to have these provisions. The courts have an additional and extra tool to convict these people and to ensure that the penalty imposed will reflect the magnitude of the crime. However, the officers to do the job, the investigation and the detection out there need to be well resourced.

Another important issue to be able to ensure that the anti-stock theft mechanisms work properly is appropriate testing and more effective, readily available DNA testing of animals suspected of being stolen, because not all animals which are stolen, as the Attorney is well aware, are actually branded or marked in one way or another. If a young animal has been stolen prior to branding, it can be a little difficult to identify it. There have been circumstances in my electorate where such an incident has been reported and a blood or tissue sample is relied upon by Stock Squad officers to progress and further investigations to recommend a prosecution. If we are dealing with one or two animals, there is a cost effectiveness issue. In some cases, such incidents are just not investigated because they become a little bit too hard. That is an extremely important matter to consider when one looks at the overall and long-term application and effectiveness of the new penalties. Nevertheless, they are commendable.

My other concern is that unfortunately a romantic notion permeates the community with regards to stock theft. It is almost a Ned Kelly type thing where somebody who may have done something wrong becomes idolised and romanticised as time goes by. A lot of people joke about poddy dodging or cattle duffing, as it is called, and some of the fantastic horsemanship and the wiliness of these characters involved, but at the end of the day they are criminals. They set out to deprive somebody of their livelihood and to gain something by criminal activity. I was told a story a couple of years ago—and apparently it is true; it is on the court record—of a situation a few decades ago in north-western Queensland where one of the notable local characters of some standing was actually charged, appeared before the court and a jury empanelled. After the jury deliberated, the judge asked, 'How do you find the defendant?' and they said, 'Not guilty—as long as he hands back the stock.' That actually happened. So it is something that people do not seriously—

Mr Lawlor: You pinched my story.

Mr SPRINGBORG: The member can think of another one. I think that there is a big problem in actually getting people to understand the seriousness of the issue. Unless that is understood, this romantic notion about these people who engage in this sort of activity devalues what we are trying to achieve in parliament. Nevertheless, it is a good step in the right direction and I commend the minister very much for doing that.

I would like to make a few comments about some of the general provisions of the bill because they seek to amend a number of pieces of legislation—the Criminal Code, the Evidence Act, the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act, the Criminal Law Amendment Act and others. I am not going to comment on every provision in this bill, because I think that most of them are commonsense amendments. Some of them are very substantive; some of them are incidental to the changing way in which we operate. Clause 29—and I am not speaking specifically to the clauses—refers to the penalties that judges are guided to impose. If a person is found guilty of a number of charges, then the maximum penalty is the same, but, as I understand it, the judge is duty bound to enter a conviction for the offence that attracts the lesser penalty. Under this

amendment, a judge will largely have the discretion to enter a conviction for the offence as he or she sees fit. I think that is certainly a step in the right direction.

I would like to comment on the amendment to the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act or, as most people know it, the drug courts act. I have supported this initiative over a long period. I actually talked about it in parliament prior to the government implementing it. I know that the Attorney-General is keen on this process, but I want to raise again today in this parliament some concerns that I have about the effectiveness of the approach, not because it does not start from a very fine and well-motivated basis but because I just do not believe that the way in which it has been established and the processes that are followed through the court really impose upon those going through the program as great an obligation as there should be to ensure that as many of them as possible graduate.

We in Queensland are only two years into this trial. But I understand that in the United States there has been far greater success in terms of the graduation rate than here. I will leave my final judgment until the trial is reported on, but some time ago a person said to me that it is fine to have a process whereby drug-addicted offenders are taken to court and told that rather than being sent to jail they will get a suspended sentence to get their life in order, to get rehabilitation, counselling, life-building skills—all of these sorts of things—and then to report back to the court in a little while, but there is not the peer group pressure. There is still not a real, effective discipline. The person who said that to me has been an alcoholic and is very much an advocate of Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous in that people who are addicted to alcohol or narcotics go before a group of their peers on a regular basis—in some cases every night or every second night—and they sit down and talk through their problems. Through that process, they remain alcohol or drug free. This person said to me that if he did not do that at least once or twice a week—and he has been off alcohol for a number of years now—he could feel himself lapsing back into alcoholism. In the United States, as a matter of course the courts order that a person must attend Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous on a regular basis—daily, or once every second day, or a number of times a week. That is a more effective way of ensuring that we have not only rehabilitation in the form of a methadone program or some other process but also peer pressure, so there is an obligation to have greater discipline. I think that that is the sort of thing that we are ultimately going to have to consider. But I wait with a great degree of interest to see what the final report indicates when it is released some time later this year or early next year.

Mr Welford interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think that the Attorney-General is probably aware of the person I am talking about. He has written to the Attorney-General with regard to the involvement of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous as a way of not only having the traditional approach of ensuring drug rehabilitation but also having this discipline on participants to go through this process of attending meetings regularly. That occurs in the United States and it seems to work effectively. I am just saying that we need to look outside the circle. Whilst those processes are not part of the options that are used by our drug court magistrates, when we are evaluating the effectiveness and the efficiency of this program—which is a good program—to make it work better we need to look at those sorts of things and to consider overall the wider experiences of jurisdictions not only in Australia but also world wide.

The amendments to the Evidence Act are the parts of this bill that cause me significant problems. They relate to DNA certification. I note that the Minister for Health is present in the chamber. She has an interest in this issue because the certifying officer will probably be under the jurisdiction of her department and the work will be performed at a departmental facility in Queensland, the John Tonge Centre. When I first read the bill, I thought that there was nothing extremely remarkable in it that caused me concern. They seemed to be just sensible amendments being made not before time. But as I read about this issue of DNA evidentiary certification, I became more and more concerned. I understand that the legal profession also has some significant concerns about issues of procedural fairness and issues of natural justice that I do not think that we can palm off. I think that it is important that we reflect upon some aspects of the minister's explanatory notes, which state—

A DNA evidentiary certificate must be made by a DNA Analyst (appointed in section 133A of the Evidence Act 1977) in an approved form. It may include information that a stated thing was received at a stated laboratory on a stated day, that the thing was tested at a stated laboratory on a stated day or between stated days and that a stated DNA profile was obtained from the thing. The certificate can also state that the DNA analyst examined all the relevant records of the storage and testing of the thing and confirms that the records indicate quality assurance procedures were complied with.

A DNA evidentiary certificate in the prescribed form and signed is evidence of a matter.

A party seeking to rely upon a DNA certificate must give a copy to another party at least 10 business days before a hearing and also call the DNA analyst.

Any party to the proceeding may request, in writing, a copy of the laboratory records relating to the receipt, storage and testing of the thing. The chief executive must provide this copy to the requesting party within seven business days.

A party challenging a certificate is also required to give notice if challenging a certificate. The court must give leave before a witness can be called in relation to the storage, receipt or testing of a thing. The criteria for granting leave is if the court is satisfied that an irregularity may exist in relation to the receipt, storage or testing of a thing or it is in the interests of justice that a person be called. The provision also includes a presumption of accuracy of equipment used in testing and a definition section.

I have particular concerns about this. There is no doubt whatsoever that a person's DNA profile is generally unique to them. If members around this room were DNA profiled, it is highly unlikely that there would be another person in the world with the same DNA profile. There may be a couple, but the chances of two people having the same DNA profile and coexisting is highly unlikely, almost improbable.

DNA is an extremely useful and important crime-fighting tool. It is extremely important in addressing a range of other issues in identifying people and establishing paternity, and so on. There is no question about the theoretical science behind it. My concern is the capacity of people involved in investigating and testing—that is, laboratory technicians—to get it wrong. I am not saying it is commonplace, but it can happen. There have been enough cases around the world, in our own country and in our own state where that has happened to demonstrate that point. Not enormous numbers, but a few. That should give all members cause for alarm. We need to be extremely careful about this legislation. I am not sure what motivated the inclusion of this particular provision in the bill. No doubt the Attorney-General will provide a reasonable explanation. However, I will take a fair bit of convincing that I should support this particular amendment in the bill.

DNA has been a very effective crime-fighting tool. It will be far more effective than fingerprinting, which has been a fantastic tool. So much can actually be established by having a DNA database of places where fingerprints might not be left, but places where hair samples or skin have been and the cells are left. It is extraordinary.

Not only is DNA useful in proving a person's guilt, it has been very useful in proving the innocence of people who have been found guilty and who are languishing in prison. It has a fairly important application in our justice system not only for convicting people but also for acquitting people. Members need to be aware of that. People speak about the miscarriages of justice which can occur with the use of DNA and conveniently forget that it can also correct miscarriages of justice.

I want to know why this will not necessarily perpetuate a problem. The Minister for Health might have some concerns about what I am about to say. What if an issue of quality assurance arises? Notwithstanding how good the technicians at the John Tonge Centre might be, they are still open to human failings. Any person is open to human failings. With all the quality assurance in the world, things can still go wrong. We cannot have an evidentiary certificate signed by an officer which just presumes that everything has gone right, because it is a desk auditing process. You are presuming that the people—

Mr McNamara: We do it every day with the Drugs Misuse Act. They have certificates of analysis, and so on.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I want to come to a range of those matters. The issue of identification of drugs is another problem. Members would be aware of media comments in relation to an electorate near the member for Hervey Bay with regard to a lack of timeliness. What the honourable member says is right; there are certain presumptions in other aspects of criminal law. There are presumptions when a person is charged with drink-driving.

I have a general concern about this. What is at stake here could be far greater than a person who might be dealt with summarily on a drugs charge. Of course, it may be more serious, depending upon the nature of the drug. However, what is at risk here can be far greater if one is dealing with a charge of murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape, attempted rape, or whatever the case may be.

I do not know to what extent people are concerned about this. The figures I have seen indicate that on about nine out of 10 occasions the quality and the accuracy of the DNA evidence provided in court is not contested by the defence; it is only in instances where they have identified something serious—a potential serious breach of natural justice or where the quality assurance

process may have fallen down. I am not amenable to an argument that our courts are being held up and clogged by unnecessary argument over the accuracy of DNA evidence. By and large, that does not seem to happen. Most criminal lawyers, whether they be solicitors or barristers, seem to generally accept what is presented by way of DNA evidence. I do not think that is a legitimate argument.

My concern is that if there is an identified problem, if there is a quality control issue—and there have been some problems identified at the John Tonge Centre and at other facilities—then a certification process such as this can perpetuate a problem to the extent that if there are process problems and if it is assumed that the quality assurance is up to date by these evidentiary certificates, then I do not think there is enough focus, urgency or self-discipline imposed by the process to ensure those people will rise to the high standards.

Whenever a human being is doing something—myself included—things can go wrong. Whilst there is a process in these amendments for a party to challenge the DNA evidence, it is more difficult than that which currently exists because of the presumptions involved. That is something we cannot step away from. Honourable members opposite may be comfortable with it and they may have a very reasoned argument as to why they should be comfortable with it, but I just cannot be comfortable with it. It is a recipe for miscarriages of justice and we need to be very careful if we pass this legislation.

I hope that this is not an excuse for cost saving. Has there been some embarrassment or have some issues been identified with DNA testing at the John Tonge Centre which this particular amendment addresses? If so, is it being addressed in the correct manner? The minister has said that there have been some resourcing issues there for a long time.

Mrs Edmond: We poured in buckets of money. There was a resourcing issue when you were in government and we addressed that in 1999. In February 1999 we poured in a whole lot of extra money. We brought in a lot of extra scientists, equipment, training, et cetera. Since then, there has been quality assurance programs implemented and national accreditation was done by NATA, the national body that tests these laboratories.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I am happy for the minister to say that, because I think she should have the opportunity to address what she has done to correct the concerns in relation to John Tonge. My issue is that, notwithstanding what she said—if what she said was 100 per cent correct—there are still issues beyond that, including cases that have postdated those resource allocations. For example, some drug matters have been thrown out of court since 2000 because there has not been a timely analysis of samples.

Mrs Edmond: We rely on the police officers and the court involved to let us know when a trial is coming up so that we can prioritise it and get the testing done before that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: There are police issues.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: But what about simple drug offences—some of them might be more serious—where it is taking more than a year, in some cases, for those samples to be analysed? That is of concern to me. That is a matter of public record. I have read newspaper reports—

Mrs Edmond: Do you believe everything you read in newspapers?

Mr SPRINGBORG: I have read reports of court cases where magistrates have made rulings when they have been waiting for analyses to come back from the laboratory, and it has taken about a year.

Mrs Edmond: Of the ones I have seen, they have requested DNA testing on 1,000 items and they have done 997 but they have not done the last three.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That may be the case. Notwithstanding those sorts of things—we can cast blame about who is responsible and so on—there are issues of resourcing. It may be fair to argue that no matter how many resources we put into this area there will always be a desire for more.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Quality control is extremely important. The minister is indicating that she has enhanced the quality control procedures. That may be the case. But notwithstanding the best quality control procedures, there is still the capacity for human error. My basic concern with respect to what we are debating at the moment is that it still makes a presumption through this certifying officer that all of these procedures have been properly and correctly followed. We know

that a range of things can go wrong in a testing laboratory, including inadvertent cross-contamination between a sample from a suspect and a sample from a body, if the probe being used to gain access to those samples is cross-contaminated in some way. That can lead to a miscarriage of justice down the track and to a person who should have been convicted being acquitted or vice versa. That is something we need to be concerned about. I would be very surprised if members opposite from a practitioner background have not heard of these concerns amongst lawyers or civil liberties people. This is something of which we need to be aware. We should retain the status quo. What is wrong with the status quo?

Mr Welford: Give me a chance to mention it first.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I will give the Attorney a chance. The Attorney will have 30 minutes when he is summing up and a few occasions when we debate the clauses. I will be interested to hear what he has to say.

Other amendments to the Jury Act are worthy and the Attorney-General needs to be commended for them. I refer to the provisions for ensuring that when jurors are empanelled only the locality of the juror will be made available, not the juror's residential address. That is sensible. All we need to know is that a juror is from X, Y or Z suburb or town, not the juror's street number. The information provided through the identification of a person's locality is good enough for the defence to be able to ascertain the capacity of a person to be an impartial juror.

Mr Lawlor: Like the example of the Joh jury.

Mr SPRINGBORG: We can talk about all sorts of examples, if the honourable member wishes. I note that the government of the day did not seek further legal action. We can go right back to the Boer War, if the member wants.

Mr Cummins: You know who he supports now.

Mr Lawlor: Swung him over.

Mr SPRINGBORG: It all started back in the days of the little deal behind the cow shed and the relationship has blossomed ever since. What was the real reason behind all of those things?

The amendment which provides for only the locality to be revealed is very good. As I indicated earlier, it prohibits jurors making inquiries about the accused person, and is a very sensible amendment. Other amendments covered in the bill concern direction hearings and in particular giving magistrates the power similar to others in higher jurisdictions to make directions rulings prior to the matter coming to court—for example, where alleged victims have the capacity to know that their evidence may be able to be given by closed-circuit television or screen. As the Attorney accurately pointed out in his second reading speech, this is important in ensuring that any anxieties of witnesses are considered. They are extremely vulnerable people. They are the ones who wake up at night in a cold sweat. They need to know early on how they will be treated by the court process.

There are other amendments of a minor nature which nevertheless are a step in the right direction. As I indicated, the National Party opposition has no reservations in supporting most of the intent behind the bill, but we reserve the right to express our concern and to oppose the amendments to the Evidence Act 1997 with respect to DNA evidentiary certification.

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (5.16 p.m.): I rise to support the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2002. This bill amends the Criminal Code, the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992, the Evidence Act 1977, the Bail Act 1980, the Jury Act 1995, the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1945 and the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act 2000. I will refer only to certain sections mainly of the Jury Act.

This bill shows that the system is responsive to the needs of those people who engage or come into contact with the criminal system and the civil law system. The purpose of the bill is to protect the criminal justice system and make it responsive to the needs of our citizens, judicial officers, particularly jurors, witnesses and also the victims of crime. The Criminal Code contains provisions which protect witnesses before and during a trial or criminal proceedings, and also jurors after the conclusion of judicial proceedings. This struck a chord with me. Many years ago I acted for a client in the Supreme Court in a civil jury trial and, unfortunately, the client lost. After the trial he contacted each of the jurors. There were only four, because it was a civil jury. He contacted each of the jurors because he was able to; he had the names and addresses on the list supplied for the trial. Eventually, one of the jurors contacted me and I spoke to the client about it. That should never happen. There will be a maximum penalty of seven years. At the moment, there is no specific offence that deals with people who take revenge or make reprisals against

witnesses after proceedings because of what the witness has done or said. There is also no protection for judicial officers.

Jurors should have the full protection of the criminal law, as should judicial officers. Anyone convicted of doing or threatening to do an injury to such a person or their family should be dealt with severely because this behaviour strikes at the heart of both the civil and criminal justice systems. Without jurors and without judicial officers, the judicial system breaks down. The maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment should certainly get the attention of those who have that sort of conduct in mind. If an actual assault or murder is carried out, naturally the Criminal Code would come into effect.

It is a fundamental principle that justice is administered in open court. I mention to the member for Southern Downs the case of the Joh jury in which we saw an example of the American practice of vetting juries. There is a huge industry in America where consultants go through a jury panel with a fine toothcomb and advise both the prosecution and the defence who might be a suitable juror for the offence with which a defendant is charged. We have to get away from that system. By deleting the addresses of jury panel members from the list—remembering that there are normally about 40 potential jurors—it should make it more difficult to obtain those sorts of details. The penalty for corrupting jurors has been increased to seven years, to be consistent with the offence of corrupting witnesses in section 127. I have already alluded to the matter of street addresses. The main concern regarded people who are self-represented. Although the judge's associate would recover the jury list from a self-represented accused after the jury was empanelled, the danger still existed that notes could be taken and so on. The proposed amendment to section 37 means that a jury list will still acknowledge a juror's occupation and residential area, which allows an informed challenge to be made to a potential juror and also protects a jury panel member's right to privacy. It is an acceptable compromise.

I turn to the issue of jurors being able to obtain the antecedents of accused people. There is a concern that jurors could readily access a defendant's criminal history through the Internet. Firstly, there is no guarantee of the accuracy of that information, but there is a more important principle involved here, which is that a defendant should be tried on the facts of the particular case, and therefore his previous criminal history—except in exceptional circumstances—is kept from the jury. In the example of an assault charge, if it was made known to the jury that the accused had previous convictions for assault, the jury would be inclined not to listen to the evidence and simply convict on the antecedents of the accused. It is proposed that an offence also be inserted into the Jury Act that prohibits jurors making such inquiries. That should prevent that sort of information being obtained during the course of a trial. That prohibition will operate from the time jurors are sworn in for a particular trial until they are discharged from their oaths.

Another amendment relates to binding pretrial rulings. In 1997, amendments to the Criminal Code gave judges in the District and Supreme courts the power to make pretrial rulings. This bill extends that power to magistrates. It is a fairly logical extension of that power. I imagine it would take the form of a directions hearing at which the magistrate would hear submissions on how evidence should be given at the committal hearing—for instance, by closed-circuit television—and can make those rulings. Being able to give evidence in that manner would remove the anxiety that many witnesses suffer awaiting a trial. It also eliminates a fair bit of expense from the system. With the anxiety that witnesses suffer, very often trials are aborted because they are not available due to illness.

Amendments to section 20 of the Bail Act and section 84 of the Justices Act will allow a magistrate to excuse a legally represented offender from appearing on administrative mentions. This is very important. In about 1985 I acted for 17 SEQEB workers who were charged with harassment at the time when all the SEQEB workers were dismissed from their employment by the Bjelke-Petersen government. Because the charges were fabricated, and were ultimately found to be so—

Ms Keech: I can't believe that!

Mr LAWLOR: The member should believe it. There were eight remands of those 17 people. So on eight separate occasions, about six or eight weeks apart, they had to attend at the court and sit there while the magistrate agreed to the prosecution's submission that it was not ready for trial and granted a further adjournment. Finally the charges were dismissed and we obtained costs against the police. These people were not working at the time, but they had to take time off whatever they were doing—

Mrs Lavarch: There's also the emotional trauma.

Mr LAWLOR: There is emotional trauma for all their families. This went on for almost 12 months. It was an absolute disgrace. At least this amendment would avoid the need for defendants to attend when they have legal representation. This reflects the practice in higher courts.

The member for Southern Downs stole my thunder regarding stock stealing. I will not go into that issue in too much detail because there are people in this House who are much more qualified to talk about cattle duffing than I am.

Mr McNamara: What, because they've done it?

Mr LAWLOR: No, they have probably heard of it. I am not suggesting that they are engaging in it, but they have probably heard about it. This bill elevates the offence of stock stealing to a serious offence, and that is a reasonable thing to do. As the member for Southern Downs has already mentioned, it may avoid the normal finding that is returned in those country towns by a jury: 'He's not guilty but give the cattle back.'

A government member: Boom boom!

Mr LAWLOR: That is an old legal joke, I know. I apologise, but I am an old legal bloke.

The other issue is a small but vitally important amendment to the Evidence Act. The effect of this amendment is that a certificate signed by a DNA analyst, properly appointed, is prima facie evidence of the matter stated in the certificate. That relates to the day that the sample was received and matters such as that. The member for Southern Downs expressed some concern about this provision. The idea is to try to avoid professional witnesses sitting around all day waiting to give evidence. It does not negate the ability of a defendant to challenge the certificate. Of course, that would require the leave of the court.

Mr Springborg: It makes it more difficult to challenge the presumption.

Mr LAWLOR: If a defendant wants to challenge the certificate, they can get the leave of the court.

Mr Springborg: But in practice it makes it more difficult.

Mr LAWLOR: If there is a real question at issue, I am sure that the leave of the court would be obtained. Any party seeking to rely on the certificate must, of course, bring along with them all the records and so on. So it is not proof of the comparison between one lot of DNA and the other, because the analyst must make that comparison when giving his evidence. So the certificate itself does not prove the comparison; the evidence of the analyst does that. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (5.28 p.m.): There are few more difficult tasks for a parliament than to set in a fair, balanced and effective way the laws which govern the sentencing of criminal offenders. There is no area of the law which attracts more public and media comment and no area of public policy which can be more easily manipulated for party political purposes. The House is debating an omnibus bill implementing a raft of changes to the state's criminal laws. The objectives of this bill in amending the Criminal Code, the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992, the Evidence Act 1977, the Justices Act 1886, the Bail Act 1980, the Jury Act 1995 and the Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act 2000 are to improve the responsiveness of the criminal justice system to the needs of persons, including jurors, witnesses and victims of crime. The bill also increases penalties for stock theft, provides a mechanism to ensure persons detained pursuant to section 18 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1945 cannot be released without supervision, and includes a number of amendments to correct drafting anomalies.

In all cases the changes proposed by this bill are of themselves relatively free from major contention, but the changes do give this parliament the opportunity to look at the ways our laws and courts are operating in the criminal justice field. In my contribution to this debate I would like to focus on the role of the court in administering criminal laws and sentencing offenders. In doing so I will canvass two matters: firstly, the role of judges and the values which are applied in the judicial function; and, secondly, the dangers that can arise from misguided public opinion about leniency in sentencing leading to bad laws and consequent social harm.

Twenty years ago, when I was studying for my law degree, it was still quite usual for the role of judges to be viewed in a strict Dicey model that had parliament making the law and judges applying the law. That is, judges only administered and interpreted laws made by the parliaments and did not themselves make the law. Of course there was the common law, which came about through decisions of courts generally over long periods incrementally inching principles forward.

However, as Queensland had a parliamentary created Criminal Code then, there was not any scope for judges to make criminal law.

It is now well acknowledged that this analysis is flawed. Judges do make law. They even make criminal law where parliaments have codified the applicable law. And in making law judges have to apply a range of values. Let me explain. Sir Anthony Mason, the former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, explained the ways in which judges make law in a lecture to the James Cook University back in 1996. Sir Anthony described judicial law making as occurring in three ways. Firstly and most commonly it occurred in the application of settled legal principle to a new fact situation not previously considered by a court. This adds to the body of law by deciding if a principle applies or does not apply to a particular circumstance.

Secondly, higher courts do depart from settled principles in some cases. For instance, the High Court in the decision of R v. L in 1991 found that a husband could be guilty of the rape of his wife. The old settled principle was that a wife had to provide sexual services to her husband. The High Court, not the parliament, changed this rule. The High Court also rationalises general principles into more unified structures, as has occurred with the law of negligence. Thirdly, statutory interpretation is often law making, as inevitably the court is called upon to decide on the meaning of a statute and circumstances not clearly envisaged by the executive or the parliament and where two or more quite plausible interpretations are open. In making law a judge applies a set of values. As Justice Stephens said in Onus v. Alcoa Australia Pty Ltd, courts necessarily reflect community values and beliefs. Of course, as we all appreciate, determining community values is a difficult mix of moral and ethical values, policy considerations and a vast continuum of attitudes.

Sir Anthony Mason describes the values to be applied by judges as values of an enduring kind. He contrasts this to transient attitudes, however popular at a particular time. He specifically canvasses community attitudes in favour of harsh and repressive sentences to combat crime and concludes that it would not be for judges to give effect to these irrational and irresponsible attitudes. Indeed, a judge, according to Sir Anthony Mason, has a responsibility to ignore attitudes of that kind, whether transient or not.

This then leads me to my second point; that is, the gulf between public perception and reality in criminal sentencing. The danger this gulf creates is twofold, in my view. Firstly, public confidence in the courts is greatly diminished if it is wrongly believed that judges are too lenient and out of touch with community sentiment. Secondly, continuing public agitation about perceived lenient sentencing, fed by sensationalist media reporting, is too much of a temptation not to be front and centre at the party political level. This means law and order auctions between the major parties and possibly laws which are not justified in the first place. Such laws, like mandatory sentencing for property offences, can lead to manifestly unfair and unjust results.

The current Chief Justice of the High Court, Murray Gleeson, last year summarised the result of public opinion polls about sentencing in Australia, the United Kingdom and North America. He said—

> When people are asked whether they think the sentences imposed by judges are too lenient, too severe, or just about right, most say the sentences are too lenient. However, when they are then given the facts of individual cases and asked what sentences they think themselves they would have imposed, a majority come up with sentences that are more lenient than the sentences that were actually imposed by the judges. The same results have shown up in similar surveys in other countries. When people are questioned more in depth and are made to think more closely about an issue, their responses change.

The misconception about the leniency or otherwise of sentencing is further compounded by the widespread belief that crime, particularly violent crime, is always increasing. The truth is that the number of violent criminal offences is relatively stable and that an individual's chance of being a victim of a violent crime is actually very small. This is particularly so in the case of the elderly, yet most people appear to believe that the exact opposite is true. The reasons for these widespread misconceptions are complex, but a principal reason is the way in which the media reports crime and criminal trials. The 'if it bleeds it leads' editorial policy of news reporting, coupled with the sensationalist style adopted by tabloid newspapers, shock jocks, television news and those absolutely appalling commercial infotainment based current affairs programs, creates and perpetuates these misconceptions about crime and the criminal justice system.

Of course, the political process is equally at fault, as is the media. In politics it is much more effective to feed and build on pre-existing perceptions, rather than try to change those perceptions in the first place. This means that the temptation of building support by playing on fears about crime is often overwhelming for political parties. This has resulted in bidding wars

about which party is tougher on crime. The whole thing is a vicious circle which continually feeds itself—and, as always, truth, balance and fairness are the casualties in this media-political cycle.

The judges, however, themselves do not often assist in breaking through the fog of community misconceptions about the criminal justice system. Reasons for their decisions are given in writing. There are no summaries, no interviews, no press releases, no press conferences, no angles, no spins, no public explanations. For a journalist or media outlet operating on a ridiculously short deadline, it is all too hard to digest and analyse decisions and why a particular sentence was handed down. It is better, more dramatic and more usual to feature the distressed victim or the victim's family than to be bothered with the balance of factors which a judge must consider and weigh up in sentencing an offender.

The courts have belatedly begun to try to communicate better through the use of media officers and by occasionally producing summaries in some major cases, but much more needs to be done. In my view it is important for governments to support this through adequate resourcing of the courts to incorporate media and communication strategies and initiatives. If each court had a media unit this would go a long way to increasing the community's understanding of how decisions are arrived at. As Justice Michael Kirby recently said—

> The criminal law helps define the type of society we are. It reflects the extent to which checks are placed on the power of the State, in order to prevent wrongful convictions.

His Honour noted in a speech last year—

> Through the criminal law runs what lawyers call a golden thread. The accused who faces the great power of the State has certain basic rights. The right to be presumed innocent. The right to have accusations proved beyond reasonable doubt to the satisfaction of the judge or jury. The right to be free of forced self-incrimination. The right to confront accusers and to test their evidence.

It has been a little unfashionable to speak about these rights in recent times. It is now so easy to have it levelled at anyone defending these rights to be portrayed as being soft on crime or paying too much attention to the rights of criminals and not enough to the rights of victims of crime. The media/political cycle has led us to impose harsher penalties, increased rates of imprisonment and introduce mandatory sentencing in some jurisdictions. In updating and revising our criminal laws and criminal processes, let us not lose sight of the central importance of the criminal justice system in defining the type of society we are. Let us give respect, compassion and support to those who are victims of crime, but let us also ensure that our system always presumes a person is innocent until proven guilty and that judges are able independently and dispassionately to sentence the guilty person and match the punishment to the crime.

Mr McNAMARA (Hervey Bay—ALP) (5.40 p.m.): I rise to support the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2002. As a former lawyer with a fair bit of experience in the criminal jurisdiction, I have had plenty of opportunity over the years to consider the competing and complicated issues which the Attorney has had to balance in drafting this bill. I congratulate the Attorney on the outcome which we have before us tonight. There are many conventions in the criminal legal system and some are part of our everyday language. The member for Kurwongbah just mentioned the presumption of innocence. Many of these have passed into everyday language and it is easy to reel them off—the right to a fair trial, the right that that trial be held with jury, the right that the jury be a jury of our peers, and justice having not only been done but seen to be done. There are many others and some of them are conflicting. It is a matter of balance.

This bill deals with issues from both ends of the bar table. In a practical sense, it contains wins and losses for both accused persons and for the prosecution in our system. Looking first at the bill from the point of view of the accused, I strongly support the restriction on jurors accessing untested and possibly wrong and dangerously prejudicial material from the Internet. Members will be aware of the existence of online criminal history sites such as crimenet.com.au which, for a small fee, provide a criminal history detail of serious offence convictions from all states and territories. It is not exhaustive and nor is it guaranteed to be correct. This service has already led to one criminal trial in Victoria being aborted just by its very existence. The Attorney is quite right to amend via this bill the Jury Act to prohibit jurors making inquiries about an accused in this way. Not only is there the very real threat of prejudice, but it means that we can avoid the very unfair position of some jurors being in possession of information—right or wrong—which the accused, other jurors and even the judge have not heard. That is a win for the accused and for fair trials in our information age.

Importantly, this bill also serves the vital purpose of encouraging jurors and witnesses to do their duty to the law and the community by increasing the protection which they are afforded at law. Other members of this place have already canvassed at some length the specifics of the

legislation. Suffice it to say, I strongly support the restrictions on the disclosure of information about jurors. As someone who has combed through jury lists in my time trying to work out who is who in the zoo, this particular trait in our legal system needs to be restricted. Protecting the privacy of jurors is in the public interest. Jury duty is onerous enough and it is a very serious and important community service provided by thousands of Queenslanders every year. But their addresses do not need to be disclosed on the jury list. Similarly, and probably more importantly, the proposed amendment to the Criminal Code to create an offence of causing or threatening any injury or detriment to a judicial officer, juror, witness or their families is very welcome. All members will agree that reprisals against people who are only doing their duty to our legal system strike at the heart of our civil society and are abhorrent.

Finally, I note the proposed amendments to the Evidence Act allowing DNA evidence to be put in by way of certificate, and I support those amendments. The member for Southern Downs canvassed the competing issues involved in supplying evidence in that way. Of course, many of the points that he made are valid, but they are competing arguments. One of the great criticisms which is frequently levelled at our trial system in the criminal courts is the issue of delay and the issue of cost. Again, one of those maxims that floats around frequently is that justice delayed is justice denied. It is a matter of balance. While the issues that the member for Southern Downs raised are very important, these sorts of provisions which allow for evidence to be put in by way of certificate significantly speed up the process.

There are significant costs involved in having to have officials and scientific officers present at court to swear in evidence. It is not unusual at all in our judicial system to have technical evidence in particular, which would otherwise require scientific officers who frequently have to travel from across Queensland to get to regional centres where trials are being held, put into evidence in this way. The bill provides for the DNA analyst to be called with leave of the court if the accused or the Crown have concerns about any matter stated in the certificate. I believe that this is a sufficient safeguard for a reform that will make trials speedier and cheaper, and they are both worthy aims in themselves and worthy of being counted in the balancing of this bill. On balance, this is a very good piece of legislation. I congratulate the Attorney and his staff on bringing it to the House. I commend the bill to all honourable members.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (5.45 p.m.): I rise to speak briefly on the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 2002, a bill that amends a number of Queensland acts which will improve the criminal justice system and respond to the needs of people involved in that system such as victims of crime, jurors and witnesses. This bill and the Penalties and Sentences (Non-Conduct Orders) Amendment Bill 2001 together with other victim support services offered by various government agencies form part of the Beattie Labor government's whole-of-government commitment to supporting and protecting victims of crime. This bill is responsive to the needs of victims. In the Magistrates Court, the magistrate will have the power to make binding pre-trial or pre-committal directions. This will allow victims to find out at the very beginning how they can give evidence. They may be able to give evidence by closed-circuit television or perhaps be screened. We are already seeing this in the District and Supreme Courts. This bill takes the anguish from the waiting time for victims, as they will no longer have to wait until the day of the hearing to have the magistrate decide.

Clearly the Beattie Labor government's commitment to support victims of crime is demonstrated by the Penalties and Sentences (Non-Contact Orders) Amendment Bill, this bill and victim liaison officers. The Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions has a victim liaison officer in every regional office in addition to the seven officers based in Brisbane. VLOs provide information and assistance to victims in all stages of the prosecution process from the time of arrest to the time of sentence. Jurors and witnesses as well as victims of crime need to be protected and feel secure in their duty. This bill will achieve these results without impacting on the administration of fair, impartial and lawful justice.

We have been hearing concerns from the community about protection for witnesses, jurors, judicial officers and others involved in the justice system from threats and/or acts of revenge. Today there is no offence or provision for protection of witnesses after a proceeding from those who take revenge or reprisal against them, nor is there any protection for judicial officers against acts of revenge or reprisal. I am pleased that this bill addresses these concerns. It is important not only to fully protect people doing their civic duty; it is extremely important that the integrity of the judicial system is also protected. By protecting witnesses and jurors, we are protecting the judicial system.

This bill takes it one step further and makes it a crime punishable by seven years imprisonment for a person without reasonable cause to cause or threaten to cause injury or detriment to a judicial officer, juror, witness or member of the family of a judicial officer, juror or witness because they were party to a judicial proceeding. I am very pleased to see family members also being protected by this bill. I am sure family members also feel the strain of having a member involved in the judicial process, and they deserve protection as much as the person involved. This is another example of the Beattie Labor government caring about families.

Another concern raised by jurors and the community as a whole is the information on jury lists. Many people believe that the information available to accused persons not being represented by lawyers reveals too much personal information. They believe that this information can be used for unlawful purposes and enhances opportunities for threats and acts of reprisal. This amendment changes the definition for the address to be a locality address defined as a suburb or a town. I am extremely pleased to see this. As the current lists include names, street addresses and occupations, this amendment definitely strikes a balance for relevant information and the juror's right for privacy.

Information technological advances have certainly impacted on our everyday lives. They allow us to access information freely and quickly. Information on nearly any topic is available at our fingertips. While this information can provide education, facts and entertainment, it also has the potential to compromise the judicial process. While empanelled on a jury, jurors will be prohibited from making inquiries of the accused, and this includes Internet information. This will commence from the time the juror is sworn in on a particular trial until they are discharged. As information is more readily available to the public, I believe we will always be assessing how we can achieve the right to freedom of speech, the right to individual privacy and the right to a fair trial. Once again we see the Beattie Labor government doing more for not only victims of crime but also for those people who are doing their duty because they believe in our justice system.

As I stated earlier, this bill will amend a number of Queensland acts. Many of the changes will respond to community concerns regarding the criminal justice system. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (5.50 p.m.): The bill before the House is designed to change various provisions of the criminal law with a view to making aspects of that law more relevant to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today. The amendment bill covers such areas as stock theft, interference with jurors, the supply of certificates relating to DNA, the widening of sentencing options, reforms to the Magistrates Court so far as certain sections of the Justices Act 1886 are concerned and changes to the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1945.

Time will not permit any detailed commentary on all areas covered by the bill, but some I will mention. For example, the changes to the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1940 currently affect only a relatively few people who have been detained at Her Majesty's pleasure following a judge's declaration that they are incapable of exercising proper control over their sexual instincts. These people have been found guilty of offences of a sexual nature committed in relation to a child. Currently, the only mechanism for release with respect to those people is that the Governor in Council decides it is expedient to do so. I understand that the two are very old, in wheelchairs and are somewhat sadistic paedophiles. I understand that the amendments do not allow them to go free but merely provide a mechanism where conditional release under the provisions of the Corrective Services Act 2000 is possible if the corrections board is satisfied that they are not a risk to the community. As I understand it at the moment, if the Governor in Council decides that it is expedient to release these people, no conditions as to supervision can be imposed. The effect of these amendments is that such conditions of supervision can then be imposed so as to ensure, as far as it is possible, that no reoffending will occur. As such, the amendments are sensible and I commend the Attorney-General in that regard.

The reforms with respect to the Magistrates Court relate to pretrial or precommittal directions. At a directions hearing a magistrate can determine in advance of the trial how for example evidence can be given, that is, by way of closed-circuit television or in the traditional manner in open court. The advantage here is that witnesses will not have to wait until the last minute to know whether or not they have to face an open court, and in a lot of cases lengthy periods of anxiety can be avoided. Likewise, at that hearing a magistrate has power to hear arguments and make orders with respect to the ordering of the supply from one party to the other of a medical or psychiatric report or statements, can order psychiatric or other medical examination of the defendant and can receive evidence or submissions by way of telephone, video link or other form of communication, bringing the courts, in this regard at least, into the 21st century. I note that it is

proposed that a direction thus made must not be subject to appeal but may be raised as a ground of appeal against conviction or sentence subsequently. I presume that this has been inserted to prevent unnecessary delays in trials taking place because of pretrial appeal procedures. However, at the end of the day I wonder whether this is beneficial as opposed to subsequent appeals and possible retrials as a result of a successful appeal. One provision which will be well received by the legal profession is that if the defendant is represented by counsel or a solicitor, the defendant need not be present at some of the administrative mentions that now take place. I know from practice that the time and energy involved in making such a client turn up for a mere formality is an economic waste to the person concerned as well as to the court officials executing bench warrants.

The bill also seeks to amend sections of the Penalties and Sentences Act 1929 in that it will provide sentencing options to the court by allowing 12 months imprisonment to be combined with three years probation. At the moment, only six months imprisonment can be so combined. Further amendments to this act have the effect of reviewed times for indeterminate sentences where the nominal sentence of life imprisonment is being increased to 15 years and to 20 years. Amendments to the suspended sentence provisions will allow the court to reimpose an operation period when a suspended sentence has finished.

One of the points I missed with respect to the Magistrates Court reforms in terms of the Justices Act relates to the power now given to police who can grant bail in the watch-house now under this bill having the power to substitute notices to appear if they believe this is appropriate, for example, with respect to an offence of intoxication. To avoid a person being guilty of the serious offence of breach of bail, it is preferable that they receive a notice to appear in court as an alternative.

I turn now to the amendments proposed with respect to stock theft. Members will be aware that historically it has been very difficult to obtain convictions for cattle stealing in Australia, particularly in Queensland. The member for Southport mentioned that well-known case of cattle stealing at Roma. No doubt there were historical reasons why western or country juries were not inclined to take the side of a wealthy grazier as opposed to the alleged perpetrator of the crime. Whatever may have been the case in years gone by, the incidence of cattle theft has grown quite astoundingly and the effect on the efficient and profitable running of any cattle enterprise can be bordering on disastrous. The incidence of the crime has increased in recent years, coinciding with the rise in the value of cattle, long awaited though that has been. The increased penalties, the subject of the amendments, clearly demonstrate both the agitation from the industry and its concern for the situation but, more importantly, the response of the government to the calls of industry organisations and individuals. By way of example, the penalty for dealing with animals with an intent to steal is doubled from $25,000 to $50,000. Likewise, previously existing fines of $5,000 have been raised tenfold to $50,000. This applies for example to the offence of suspicion of stealing cattle. Again, this increase in penalty from $5,000 to $50,000 is repeated with respect to amendments to section 447, that is illegal branding, and section 448, defacing brands. Likewise, where imprisonment for one year was the applicable term, in the main this has been increased to five years, a fivefold increase in the penalty.

It would appear that the government is playing its part in responding to what has been requested from the industry, but in the long term perhaps the most effective deterrent to cattle stealing will be the growing acceptance of the National Livestock Identification Scheme. This scheme owes its introduction not so much to its desire to prevent the stealing of stock but to enable accurate tracing of cattle slaughtered for the European Union market. Producers at abattoirs are required to choose from a list of accredited devices which include readers and on-farm software. Since late 2001, producers generally have been able to access the system by way of a unique identification number for each beast, a number which also has a common digit for the property of origin and the age of the animal. There is some disquiet in the industry because of the cost to the producer, and there is an argument that where contamination has occurred in relation to export meat it is possible to trace the offending beast back to the property in question in Queensland. However, when one considers that there are 24.4 million cattle in the country—or there are at least in the year 2002—one can readily be convinced of the need to adopt the technology of the 21st century in terms of control with respect to disease but also of course in respect of effecting a deterrent against stealing and providing a very effective aid in the prosecution of offences.

Debate, on motion of Mr Shine, adjourned.

SUGAR INDUSTRY

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (6.00 p.m.): I move—

That this house acknowledges the economic plight of the Queensland sugar industry as a result of the collapse in world sugar prices and previous adverse seasonal conditions and, recognising the failure of the State Sugar Industry Crop Re-Planting and Establishment Scheme, directs the Beattie Government to provide an immediate cash injection to assist the industry in the short-term as well as long-term measures to encourage industry diversification and improved productivity.

The sugar industry is one of the largest industries in this state and operates the entire length of the state from Beenleigh in the south to Mossman in the north. Australia produces approximately 3.5 per cent of the world's sugar supply and is one of the major international suppliers, with our exports accounting for about 15 per cent of all internationally traded sugar. Most of the industry is based in Queensland. In fact, Queensland produces 95 per cent of the nation's sugar—some 4.2 million tonnes—and virtually all the nation's exports.

Dozens of communities in this state have been built on the sugar industry and its service industries and dozens still rely on the industry as their largest generator of income and jobs. It is a truly family industry, a truly small business industry, in which 97 per cent of the cane land is family owned and family farmed by some 6,000 canegrowers. The sugar industry has served Queensland well for many decades and the state's continued dependence on the industry makes it so important that Queensland stands by the industry.

In recent years the sugar industry has suffered an unprecedented combination of poor fortunes. Since 1995 the industry has suffered a combination of low yields as a result of a succession of poor seasons, cyclones, excessive and unseasonal rainfall and flooding, pests and diseases such as orange rust in the industry's main variety, Q124. As a result, production was slashed from a high of 38 million tonnes of cane in 1998 to 29.9 million tonnes in 2001. After the devastation of orange rust, which in some mill areas comprised up to 80 per cent of the crop, the industry was forced to invest heavily in replanting some more resistant varieties. Canegrowers expect that this investment will reap dividends in future years, but for some in areas such as the Mackay district, the onset of drought conditions in the current season has set back that opportunity.

As if the natural disasters that befell the industry were not enough, more was to come in the economic arena. The world sugar price collapsed in 1999 and, after a brief and very modest recovery during 2000, it has now collapsed again to record lows of around US5.5c per pound. A driving contributor has been the massive overproduction in Brazil, our major competitor—an increase which was equivalent to the entire Australian sugar production. In the years from 1994 to 1997, the industry earned Queensland between $1.73 billion and $1.84 billion annually. In 1999 revenues fell to $1.3 billion. In 2000 revenues fell to $996 million before rising briefly to $1.3 billion in 2001. This year the outlook is again bleak, with forecasts putting the revenue earned by the industry as low as $1.1 billion—some 35 per cent below the average returns of the mid-1990s. The figures still sound big, but when we distil it down to the farm level, we get a full understanding of what the price slump means for Queensland canegrowers.

The Queensland sugar industry is among the most efficient in the world. It does not enjoy the huge subsidies that its competitors do. It operates in a highly competitive but highly corrupted international market. It relies on a favourable exchange rate, but with the value of the Australian dollar continuing to appreciate, even the cushion that the low dollar has provided in months past is now being pulled out from under the industry. The break-even price for Queensland growers is around US8.5c per pound. The current world price is approximately US5.5c per pound. That currently equates to forward prices for this year's sugar crop of $220 per tonne. I ask members to think about what that means for canegrowing families. The current prices that they are receiving are more than 35 per cent below break even. They are horrendously low levels and the situation is critical. It is not as if the current price crisis is a one-off blip that growers can absorb after a few years of good times. This is a price crash that has followed a price crash a few years earlier and a price crash that has come on the back of the most appalling combination of natural disasters. Farm debt has increased to historically high levels and growers are facing further losses this year. Hundreds of growers and their families simply have no means by which to ride this one out and no means by which to recover when the price eventually improves, whenever that may be.

There is no more fat in the system. That is why the Queensland Nationals have sought to bring the plight of the industry to this parliament's attention on so many occasions over the past 12 months. That is why, with this motion tonight, we are asking parliament to acknowledge the gravity of the situation and direct the Beattie government to step in and assist the industry before it is too late. When the industry first reached a critical stage in 1999-2000, in September 2000 the

federal government stepped in with the $83 million Sugar Industry Assistance Package. The package provided a mix of welfare support, income support and interest rate subsidies. In June 2001, in recognition that the situation had not improved, federal Agriculture Minister Warren Truss announced an extension of that scheme for another six months to 31 December 2001. In total, over 10,500 claims for assistance were approved, including over 4,200 for income support. The value of the support provided was more than $60 million.

The package was welcomed by the industry and has provided invaluable assistance. But the reality is that the situation remains bleak and more help is needed. The federal government has now commissioned an independent assessment of the industry to examine the key economic, social and environmental drivers of the industry.The results of this study, by former chairman of the Sugar R&D Corporation, Mr Clive Hildebrand, will assist all levels of government to develop a plan for the industry to remain profitable and sustainable in the long term. Mr Hildebrand's report is due in mid-June. In the meantime, though, the industry needs help.

In August 2000, just prior to the launch of the federal government's Sugar Industry Assistance Package, the Beattie government launched its own assistance scheme with much fanfare and publicity. This scheme, called the Sugar Industry Crop Replanting and Establishment Scheme, was allegedly to provide exactly that type of assistance through a promised $10 million in funding. But nearly two years on, only nine loans worth $60,308 have been granted. The scheme, like so much of what the Beattie government does, proved to be a massive flop—nothing more than another shonky publicity stunt to trick the industry and the community into thinking that the government was doing something when it was actually doing nothing at all.

Despite the Queensland Nationals' repeated calls on the Beattie government to overhaul that scheme and ensure that the promised $10 million is actually used to provide genuine and meaningful assistance to growers, the Primary Industries Minister has refused. In fact, he has finally now admitted that there never was $10 million set aside for the sugar industry at all. The money and the scheme were a beat-up. All that the Beattie government really announced when it launched its shonky scheme was a rebadged version of the existing loan schemes available through the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. All it has provided to assist one of Queensland's biggest industries in one of its worst crises, if not the worst crisis that it has ever faced, is a lousy $60,308—$60,308 when the Beattie Government can find $70 million to fund just one year of self-promotion and government advertising; $60,308 for the sugar industry when the Beattie government can find $29 million to build a footbridge over the Brisbane River. What a pathetic investment in one of this state's biggest export earners and job providers!

In the 12 months that I have been the leader of the National Party, I have toured the sugar communities of this state extensively—to the Burdekin; to the far north; to the Ingham, Tully and Innisfail districts; to Bundaberg and the Burnett; to Mackay; and to the Sunshine Coast. All of these districts depend on the sugar industry. If we took out the sugar industry, we would close down dozens of towns and villages. There is a very real risk now that the Nambour mill may close down because of the declining areas of cane land in the area as a result of urban expansion and the resultant government acquisitions of land for public infrastructure such as roadways. Queensland cannot afford to let the industry down and to let these towns close down.

The industry and the state need leadership from the Beattie government to assist this great industry to recover. The industry can have a bright future, but hard decisions will need to be made, and they will need to be made now. The industry needs to be assisted through the restructuring that is necessary. It will need short-term and long-term assistance measures. Tonight, the Queensland Nationals are calling on the parliament to unanimously put the interests of the industry first and direct the Beattie government to provide the help that is needed. Immediate relief could be provided through rate relief, relief from the onerous new water charges being introduced by SunWater, and relief from continually increasing production costs. But relief should not ever be in the form of loans. Sugarcane farmers cannot afford any more loans. They are up to their necks in debt now.

Long-term help will also be needed. In some cases, farms are simply too small to be run as a viable stand-alone unit. Some growers want to retire from the industry; others want to expand. But property sales have virtually dried up because of the lack of confidence in the industry and the high debt loads that so many of these family farms are carrying. The Beattie government should consider replicating the successful south-west strategy in the cane industry to allow affordable farm build-up and the graceful retirement of those who want to leave the industry and need to leave the industry. That would allow those young people who want to come through to take the reins of the industry. The Beattie Labor government also has a role to play in assisting the

industry to diversify the use of the sugar crop through the development of the ethanol industry and other products, or to diversify into other crops where that is agronomically and economically feasible. That is a practical approach and could provide enormous help to these people in their time of need.

The time for talk is running out. It is now time for action. The Beattie government's response of setting up another task force is only duplicating the work already being done through the Hildebrand review. The sugar industry needs more than just another Beattie government talkfest and more than smoke and mirror stunts such as the provision of a crop replanting loan. It needs a sympathetic and meaningful assistance package, which this government could provide if it had the will. It is the intention of the National Party to bring this to the attention of the parliament and to seek the urgent and practical support of every member of this House. I strongly commend this motion to all members of parliament.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): I rise to support and second the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition in respect of the dilemma that the sugar industry is facing at the present time. In the mid-eighties a similar situation of low price prevailed, without the bad seasonal conditions we have experienced over the last three years. The crops have been absolutely dreadful, mainly as a result of wet weather conditions, and a range of other factors. In that period there has been about a 25 per cent reduction on yield. There has been a decline, and in some areas that decline has been as much as 50 per cent.

Currently, the raw sugar price for the year 2002-03 will be in the order of $230 to $280 per tonne. The future looks bleak, because in the year 2003-04 a similar situation prevails. The industry needs to get something like $300 a tonne for sugar to make it worth while and to make ends meet. Currently, the prices are below the cost of production, and in many cases growers cannot afford to continue. The price is determined by the variations which occur between the exchange rate of the US dollar and the Australian dollar. Currently, it is about 54 cents Australian to the US dollar. The world price can also vary. Currently it is between about US5.5c and US5.7c per pound. Of course, that can vary on a day-to-day basis.

The sugar industry is in a terrible position. It has been through some very difficult times and it is entering another period of excessively low prices. As the Leader of the Opposition has said, Brazil has expanded the size of the industry over the last year. It has massive areas, cheap labour and large mill operations. It has a lot going for it. It is difficult to compete against the technology used in Brazil, which has come from Australia, and the factors in their favour for producing sugar at a cheap rate. They can probably continue to produce sugar at a level of about US6.5c a pound.

I note that the state government has an inter-agency working group. I am a little bit concerned about that. When the establishment of that group was announced, mention was made of what would happen between different departments and who would lead that inter-agency group, but no time was given within which a report had to be delivered. That is absolutely essential. We do not want another talkfest; we do not want people mouthing platitudes about the difficulties that the sugar industry is facing. We want some action and some initiatives to come from that group. There is a degree of urgency. Time is running out. In the past three years, growers and businesses have sold the family silver just to survive. In many cases, there are no off-farm assets left. It is imperative that there is now some level of support, some injection of finances, some short-term planning and some long-term planning. As has been indicated, this industry is currently worth about $1.3 billion. In the past, it has been worth over $2 billion.

Currently, drought and low world prices are threatening the industry. The crops in the north Burdekin region are in a reasonable condition. A large area of south Mackay is in drought, and that situation is worsening as each day goes by. Unfortunately, this is occurring at the wrong time of the year. We would normally anticipate fairly reasonable moisture levels at this time. Of course, we are yet to go through the drier part of the year, which does not auger well for the condition of many of the crops. The delivery price of cane is between $12 and $13 per tonne. That is about what it costs to harvest the crop and apply fertiliser. Some farmers are no longer in a position to plant, because the banks are saying that until they have some cash flow—from this very low delivery price—they will not be able to do any planning. There are some options. I do not believe loans are the solution, because many people within the industry—whether they are farmers, cane harvester operators or businesses in rural areas—do not have the capacity to borrow any more money. The additional water charges that those in the Burdekin have to pay because of SunWater's involvement—

Time expired.

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for State Development) (6.15 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

Omit all words after 'conditions' and insert the following:

This parliament notes the federal budget allocates no new funding and outlines no new strategy for the Australian sugar industry, and notes the positive initiatives of the Queensland government to increase availability of concessional loans for Queensland primary producers, including canegrowers, through the State Government's Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, and to form an inter-departmental committee to develop and coordinate a whole-of-government response to the challenges facing the sugar industry.

It is time for some sanity in this debate. The Opposition Leader said tonight that it is time for the government to show some leadership on this issue. That is precisely what this government is doing. We have formed this inter-departmental working group led by the deputy director-general of my department, Bob McCarthy, who led the Meat Industry Task Force which was so successful. We are already rounding up all of the relevant departments and consulting with the industry so that we can have a really good look at the fundamental, underlying problems of the sugar industry and address them.

Sadly, it is obvious from the opposition's contribution to this debate so far that the members opposite do not understand that there are fundamental, underlying problems. They simply say that we should throw some money at the industry to get it over the hump in the short term, just as they did for decades with this industry in this state. If we do not address the fundamental problems and if the industry does survive this particular crisis, then next time it will be in an even deeper trough and it will be even harder to resolve its problems.

I know a little bit about this industry because I was born in the Burdekin and I grew up there. I did an apprenticeship in a sugar mill from 15 years of age. I have had a direct association with the sugar industry all of my adult life and all of my working life, including having sugar growers and most of the workers at the Rocky Point sugar mill living in my electorate of Waterford. I have a direct interest from an electorate perspective, as well as being the minister whose department has the responsibility to look at just what is going down in this industry.

I must point out the absolute hypocrisy of the National Party opposition. The members opposite came in here today, bleating about this government not putting direct funding into the sugar industry. Yet this morning the Leader of the Opposition came into this House and described the federal budget as an 'excellent' budget. I table a press release from the Canegrowers organisation today that tells the world precisely what it thinks of Mr Horan's 'excellent' budget and what it fails to do for the sugar industry in this state.

This government is prepared to bite the bullet in relation to the sugar industry. At this point I am not prepared to say exactly what those solutions are, because we believe it is absolutely essential that the inter-departmental working group look at the fundamental problems, look at all of the options and come up with the reforms that have been needed in this industry for a long time. This crisis makes it more important than ever that we do that.

I have the privilege of leading the Department of State Development. Almost every day I deal personally with companies that are looking at diversification of the industry. I deal with mayors and councillors from the sugar growing regions and look at a range of issues, including co-generation projects in the sugar industry, ethanol production, plastics, biofibres and a whole raft of proposals that are coming through from major overseas companies. We are making sure that they are fully briefed and that they have access to the sugar industry to look at this level of diversification. I also deal with people such as the mayor of the Burdekin and the member for Burdekin on a regular basis to ensure that we obtain the very best outcomes for this industry.

Sadly, once again the opposition is simply prepared to go back to the old cash cow mentality. They say that there is a problem at this point in time, so we should just throw some money at it and ignore the fundamental problems. We will not do that. It may well be that this inter-departmental working group suggests that we need to do even more than we are already doing to support farmers to survive this current crisis. However, I assure this parliament that that inter-departmental working group will go much further.

Time expired.

Hon. P. T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Innovation and Information Economy) (6.20 p.m.): I rise to second the amendment moved by my ministerial colleague the Minister for State Development. As Minister for Innovation and Information Economy but also as the acting Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, I rise to support the amended motion. The sugar industry is facing a very difficult international trading environment. The Australian sugar industry accounts for a tenth of the 40 million tonnes of sugar that is traded on the world market

each year. There is a massive expansion in sugar production in Brazil. Cane production in Brazil this season is forecast to increase by more than 11 per cent to 325 million tonnes. That is 10 times the size of Australia's production. Not only is Brazil the world's biggest producer; I am advised that it is also the most efficient. Our industry has acknowledged the need to replicate Brazil's savings.

Australia is a key member of the Global Alliance for Sugar Trade Reform and Liberalisation that is working to ensure global trade in sugar flows freely. The major blockage to that free flow continues to be the United States. We have seen the US commitment to free trade—President George W. Bush has just signed off on the US Farm Bill worth more than $A330 billion over 10 years. Support for US sugarcane and sugar beet industries has restricted market access for the Australian sugar industry, but it has also forfeited market share to corn sweeteners from the US. Independent studies have shown trade liberalisation would see world sugar prices increase by almost 40 per cent and that US net imports of sugar would increase by five million tonnes within seven years.

The important message of the US Farm Bill and indeed the increased sugar production in Brazil for the Queensland industry is to focus on research and development. This is a message being taken on board by the member for Mirani. The member for Mirani said in a letter to the editor of Mackay's *Daily Mercury* on 11 May—

Alternate uses of sugar such as pharmaceuticals, plastics, ethanol, green power, etc.

The fact is there are a number of new innovations that the sugar industry can embrace and it is working on. There is work looking at sugarcane as a biofactory for functional foods, ethanol and other fuels, bagasse and improved fibres, but also biodegradable plastics and pharmaceuticals. These innovations will add value to Queensland's sugarcane production.

Department of Primary Industries Chief Scientist Dr Joe Baker has raised the development of plant based biofactories as a new production method with the potential to revolutionise the economic viability of farms and revitalise rural communities. Dr Baker points out that more than 60 per cent of pharmaceutical drugs marketed throughout the world today have their origin in natural substances isolated from plants or animals. Plant based biofactories are environmentally desirable.

Overseas reports indicate that growing plants to produce therapeutic drugs is cheaper, easier to scale up for mass production, and safer than producing them in factories. It is less capital intensive to build up a farm than scale up a factory. Given the proximity to international airports and the high-value, low-volume nature of biofactory products, there was no reason why the whole production cycle could not take place in areas such as north Queensland within a decade. There is the opportunity for the cultivation of bioproducts that could mean for Queensland primary producers the opportunity to enter global markets for higher-valued non-perishable products.

As the acting minister responsible for the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority, let me also take the opportunity to address some points raised by the National Party's motion. Late last year, the government announced changes to the Primary Industries Productivity Enhancement Scheme administered by the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority. The changes, which took effect on 1 January this year, reduce interest rates for the concessional loans of up to $300,000 by almost two per cent and give prospective and existing borrowers greater flexibility and choice. These amendments to PIPES were recommended by the QRAA board, which is chaired by well-respected sugar industry leader Graham Davies.

The government has also increased the funding allocated for FarmBis, which subsidises training undertaken by primary producers. Recommendations from the FarmBis State Planning Group have been accepted by the government and mean greater concessions for participating farmers, including canegrowers. In regards to PIPES and FarmBis, I would encourage interested canegrowers to contact QRAA on 1800 623946. The government has also allocated $41 million for its Rural Water Use Efficiency initiative to help primary producers get access to the latest and most efficient irrigation technology. Many canegrowers are taking advantage of this scheme.

The opposition has criticised the Sugar Industry Crop Replanting and Establishment Scheme that was available in 2000-01 because few growers applied for it. Now they support it. As I have already indicated, the Queensland government has made historic reforms to benefit the sugar industry as well as providing for greater access to assistance to enhance productivity. When one goes through South East Asia and speaks about some of the revolutions we have undertaken in biotechnology in Australia, there is no shortage of people talking about medical—

Time expired.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): As we all know, the Queensland sugar industry is facing a major crisis brought about by a number of factors but most predominantly and most recently by the collapse of international sugar prices. We are now experiencing first-hand through job losses from the closure of Pleystowe mill the grave implications four adverse and financially devastating years have had for the Mackay region. This year will see many growers, contractors and small business operators in crisis.

The sugar industry is responsible for the direct generation of up to $1.8 billion in revenue annually for Queensland and it is critical that the productive structure of the major rural export industry is preserved. Only a few months ago, the 2002-03 Queensland sugar season was touted as being the beginning of a long overdue period of recovery within the industry following four very difficult and trying years of low world sugar prices, crops that were devastated by adverse weather, pests and disease. It was envisaged that the output would be the best for some years and the world sugar prices, if not overly profitable, were at a minimum level reasonable for efficient producers. Since January the world sugar price has plummeted in anticipation of a huge increase in Brazil's sugar output, and this year's crop increase is expected to exceed the total size of Queensland's normal production. Given that there is little prospect of any significant improvement in that scenario and particularly with the US Farm Bill protection, the short-term outlook is very grim.

Along with the shadow minister for primary industries, I have met Clive Hildebrand and I have made a submission to his independent assessment on the sugar industry seeking meaningful assistance that will provide an industry loan to facilitate the increase in the price of sugar to an acceptable level, research and development funding to be utilised in the areas of carbon trading credits, seed funding for progression of cooperative farming and minimisation of losses through harvesters, integration of fallow or compatible crops into sugar production, improved organisational practices between millers and growers, alternative uses for sugar such as the minister for technology has indicated—in pharmaceuticals, plastics, ethanol, green power and so on—and accreditation through Environmental Management Systems, EMS, and recognition of the multifunctionality of the sugar industry.

Australia is one of the most efficient and resilient producers of sugar in the world. However, we cannot underestimate the major employment, economic, environmental and social implications to many of the communities throughout coastal Queensland if we do not take the necessary steps to sustain an industry that is viable enough to be attractive for the next generation of canefarmers. The industry has a history of overcoming adversity and will again. However, the key to the future will be the willingness of state and federal governments to show their commitment to the industry through research and development. Indeed, the key is a willingness for both state and federal governments to cooperate. The survival of the industry depends on it. Politics should not be part of it.

The Premier, his cabinet and the Labor Party must be aware of the dire consequences of the failure of this industry, not only for the sake of Queensland but if nothing else for the sake of his supporters throughout Queensland who rely on the sugar industry for their very existence—the jobs that support their families. As I mentioned earlier, the closure of the Pleystowe mill is of grave concern to employees in the industry, yet this could turn out to be a very minor consequence of the fallout from the downturn in the industry. The consequences for our local regional communities and the businesses that rely on the industry, such as fuel and fertiliser distributors, small businesses, machinery manufacturers and distributors and those who work for them, is that they will come under pressure, even to the extent of the checkout operators in the local supermarkets, as the industry winds back and people find their jobs in jeopardy. This is not even taking into consideration the direct employment of all those who work on our farms and in our sugar mills.

The Labor Party must accept a major role in ensuring this industry survives. It must start to get fair dinkum about real support and initiatives to sustain the industry, not step back, as it did last time when most of the support programs were federal government initiatives and the state government virtually washed its hands of any responsibility. It seems the Beattie government would rather spend hundreds of millions of dollars on pet projects. I mention the $29 million Brisbane footbridge—

Time expired.

Mr RODGERS (Burdekin—ALP) (6.30 p.m.): I rise to support the amended motion. The National Party purports to support the sugar industry. Believe me, it is not interested in the industry. The Leader of the National Party is not interested in the sugar industry. Last month the

Minister for Primary Industries arranged a meeting with industry representatives and members of parliament at Parliament House. The Leader of the Opposition was not present, and neither was the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. There were only two members of the National Party at that meeting. That is how interested the National Party is in what is happening with the sugar industry in Queensland.

Mr Seeney: We don't take part in your stunts.

Mr RODGERS: Great one! The only stunts I have seen in all the time I have been involved with the sugar industry have come from the National Party. It purports to support the industry. Farmers are struggling. What has it done for them? Nothing! The National Party supplies the industry nothing. The farmers asked the federal government to support them, but it neglects them. It supports other industries but not the sugar industry, which the National Party purports to support. The sugar industry in north Queensland needs support from the federal government. The state government supports the industry.

In all the years that I have been involved in the north Queensland sugar industry I have heard farmers say that they are having trouble, but the only government that has helped the industry has been the Labor government. The member can take me at my word on that. If the member doubts it, why isn't there a National Party member for Burdekin standing in this parliament today? These industries have been around for years. The industry in my region has been neglected. If the National Party was supporting the farmers, there would be a National Party member for my electorate. I am here because I am giving the industry the support that it needs and I will continue to do so.

I attended a meeting on the Hildebrand report in Townsville. People who attended that meeting from canegrowing areas were nothing but critical of the federal coalition and its level of support to the industry.

Mr Rowell interjected.

Mr RODGERS: I can tell the member that bugger all was said about the Labor Party. The state Labor government has assisted those growers. We could debate this issue across the floor all night. The facts of the matter are that the industry needs help. The proposal put forward by the Queensland Labor government will assist the industry. There will be none of this quick-fix stuff; the industry needs to survive in the long term. In order to survive, it has to diversify. To diversify, it needs assistance from government. That is what the state government is trying to do for the sugar industry. The federal government has neglected it for years. It is time that it put up its hand and offered help to the industry. Unless the industry is prepared to support the initiatives proposed by this government—

Mr Horan: What about the $83 million federal government package?

Mr RODGERS: What about the $125 million that the federal government gave to the car industry? If the Leader of the Opposition wants to talk figures all night, we can talk them. The federal government has given handouts to every other industry. Why doesn't it give a handout to the sugar industry? Where is its handout for the sugar industry? The canegrowers are getting their handouts from the state government, not the federal government. The federal government neglects the industry, as I have said, and canegrowers throughout the north are starting to realise that. The only way they will be able to survive is through working with the state government and supporting the packages that we have put forward. The federal government needs to assist the state government and work with us. None of this bloody kicking the industry and saying that it cannot support it. The federal government can support it. The issues that it comes up with are bloody rubbish.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Less of the profanities, please, and the member will keep to the subject.

Mr RODGERS: I withdraw those comments.

The amended motion basically states that the state government is prepared to look after the sugar industry, and so will I.

Time expired.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (6.35 p.m.): I have heard some bad speeches in the time that I have been in this parliament, but that would have to take the cake. That would have to be the worst contribution that I have heard in this House in my time as a member. I can only suggest to the member for Burdekin that he return to reading speeches that somebody else writes for him, because that effort did not do any good for the people whom he represents. But at least he stood

up to take part in this debate on behalf of the people whom he represents. When I look at the speaking list, I see that such members as the member for Burnett, the member for Bundaberg and all the other Labor members who represent sugar seats up and down the coast are not participating in this debate. They leave it to the member for Lytton and the member for Logan, who can hardly be said to represent sugar areas. That indicates just how serious this government is about the sugar industry.

It is also interesting to look at the *Hansard* record and see how often the sugar industry is mentioned by such members as the member for Burnett, the member for Bundaberg, the member for Cairns and the member for Whitsunday, who is not even in the chamber. Those are the members who should be on their feet in this House every day—

Ms JARRATT: I rise to a point of order. I am in the chamber.

Mr SEENEY: I apologise to the member for Whitsunday. She was not in her correct seat. Members should look at the *Hansard* record and see how many times the member for Whitsunday has been on her feet in this House talking about the sugar industry. One will never find such an example. Nor will one find an example of a speech on this subject by the member for Burnett or the member for Bundaberg. That is how serious this government is in its concern for the sugar industry. It indicates the falseness of the response that the government has put forward tonight to the genuine attempt that the National Party has made to draw attention to the crisis facing the sugar industry. We are genuine in our attempt to raise the profile in the public arena of the crisis facing farm families up and down the coast.

The Labor government has responded tonight exactly the same way that it has responded in the past—with another stunt, with an attempt to generate another media headline. The member for Burdekin mentioned the little morning tea that the Minister for Primary Industries held on the balcony of this place and criticised the Leader of the Opposition for not attending. That was simply a media opportunity. It was an opportunity for the Minister for Primary Industries to get his photo taken by the media. During this debate the Minister for State Development has made a big deal about the interdepartmental working group that the government has put together. Once again, it is a great headline that means nothing. The truth is that this government is doing absolutely nothing for the sugar industry—nothing meaningful at all. What we have put forward tonight is a suggestion that would be meaningful. It would do something to help the farm families who make up the sugar industry, an industry that is the economic backbone of so many communities. We are talking about people. We are talking about farm families who have done it hard for a long time. We are not interested in media stunts, in morning tea on the balcony of Parliament House or in a headline in the paper about the interdepartmental working group, which means absolutely nothing.

There is one thing that the government could do very quickly to assist the sugar industry, and the member for Burdekin should be promoting it. The one thing the government could do that would provide assistance in the quickest possible way is to rein in SunWater. This government owned corporation has preyed on family farmers up and down Queensland. Its impact has been especially bad on canefarmers. The government could rein in SunWater instead of trying to set up SunWater as some sort of cash cow to pay a dividend to the government, a dividend that will come out of the pockets of the farm families who are doing it tough in the sugar industry. The government will take food from the tables of canefarmers to ensure that SunWater will pay a dividend to boost its budget. That is how serious the government is. If it wanted to do something, it could start with SunWater and achieve some meaningful assistance to those people very quickly. But of course the government does not do so. It will not do so because it is not serious about providing any meaningful assistance. All it is interested in is stunts and media opportunities—

Time expired.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (6.40 p.m.): The waffle from the member for Callide has driven the member for Mirani out of the chamber. Oh, he is back. I apologise. The member for Mirani walked out, but he has returned to listen to what I have to say. The member for Mirani could not cop the waffle from the member for Callide. The waffle of the member for Callide about the National Party representing canegrowers begs the question: why are there only two National Party members in this parliament representing seats in canegrowing areas? It is because the National Party does not represent the perspective of the farmers, and they have voted accordingly.

It is interesting that the member for Toowoomba South would move a motion in this place about the sugar industry the day after the federal budget was handed down. I still have the comment of the Opposition Leader ringing in my ears. This morning he commented on what an excellent budget it was. The fact is that the federal budget offers no new funding for the sugar industry. The federal budget outlines no new strategy for the sugar industry. This fact is recognised by Canegrowers President Jim Pedersen—he is a constituent of the member for Mirani—in a media statement entitled 'Budget is essentially a non-event for canegrowers'. Mr Pedersen's statement refers to the fact that the federal budget 'contained nothing specific about sugar and its acknowledgment of agriculture's needs was sparse at best'.

We heard this morning about Commonwealth rural assistance funding in the budget. In the last financial year, 2000-01, the federal government spent $303 million on rural assistance. In this financial year, 2001-02, according to last night's budget papers rural assistance, which includes exceptional circumstances assistance for drought stricken farming families, will be $238 million. The forward estimates tell us where the federal coalition is coming from. The forward estimates show that spending will be reduced to $146 million next financial year, $115 million in 2003-04, $39 million in 2004-05 and $27 million in 2005-06. At a time when we have strong prospects of an El Nino climate pattern developing and large tracts of the state in drought, it is critical that the federal government ensures that the rural safety net is strong. We have seen in recent weeks the federal government trying to push more of the burden for exceptional circumstances assistance on to the states and territories. Queensland has rightfully rejected that push. We can now see just how many millions of dollars the federal government expects to save by shirking its funding responsibilities for exceptional circumstances.

Farming families can be assured that the money the federal government saves will never be seen by Australian agriculture, let alone Queensland canegrowers. The federal government's only new initiative for the sugar industry is the independent assessment of the industry being undertaken by the Sugar Research and Development Corporation Chair, Clive Hildebrand. Mr Hildebrand has indicated that his assessment, while being done over a relatively short period, would leave no stone unturned. I think Mr Hildebrand's commitment to a comprehensive assessment should be welcomed. Mr Hildebrand is due to report back to the federal government in June. The challenge for the industry is to address the structural issues and embrace necessary reforms to ensure the industry is competitive and prosperous in the long term. Mr Hildebrand has already highlighted a number of issues. These include price, industry organisation and products, industry productivity, industry, society and the environment. Industry expects Hildebrand's assessment to cover those issues because, unless these issues are addressed, the industry's future is not guaranteed.

During the 1990s raw sugar prices fluctuated between $300 and $350 per tonne. In this current decade, raw sugar prices could fluctuate between $250 and $300 per tonne. If the price dropped to $250 per tonne, that would mean a 15 per cent contraction in the industry on the 1990s price. Under these circumstances, issues such as productivity, farm size, mill size, season length, harvesting operations, value adding and cane payments will need to be addressed by the industry to secure its future. The industry historically has concentrated most of its efforts on raw sugar production. Raw sugar is a commodity and, like all commodities, the very nature of the trading environment means that its producers are price takers, and this has been borne out by the decline in world price. The decline in world price, compounded by low productivity on farm caused by drought and orange rust has put the industry on its knees in the Mackay region, with many farmers—

Time expired.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—NPA) (6.45 p.m.): The sugar industry is one of Queensland's major industries, employing thousands of Queenslanders. The industry is in crisis, and the 2002 sugar pool price is estimated to be $230 to $280 per tonne. As has been mentioned here tonight, the government has not pulled its weight on sugar issues. The amendment moved by the government tonight is an absolute disgrace. It talks about positive initiatives of the Queensland government in relation to the sugar industry, but nothing is happening and those opposite know it. Those opposite talk about committees. It is a case of when in doubt, form a committee. That is what this government is doing. What is it going to do for the sugar industry? Nothing! It will just talk in circles. The government should do something positive for a change. What about the Worldwide Fund for Nature? It is trying to crucify the sugar industry. How many people on the government side of the House have said anything against that organisation? They have not said

anything about the Worldwide Fund for Nature, which is trying to crucify the sugar industry. Those opposite know that.

The government should look at implementing a system of strategy regions. They have successfully reinvigorated devastated regions throughout Australia. Those strategy regions are in fact managed by the community. It would be far better to have one of those than this committee. As an example, the south-west strategy used in the Charleville area covered 323,000 square kilometres and represented a long-term strategy to reinvigorate the region, provide alternative industries, improve efficiency in existing industries, allow for farm build-up with improved productivity and provide re-establishment assistance for those who leave the land. The sugar industry needs a long-term strategy, as has been mentioned tonight, but the government has not put up one plan. This is one way it can be done.

The sugar industry needs a long-term, viable strategy—some sort of a millennium vision. Tomorrow's farmers need the opportunity to expand. They need clear choice for the future. Various schemes are available through QRAA, as we all know, and there are some federal schemes. However, there is a need for an official body that pulls these things together and develops strategic plans that suit the sugar regions in Queensland. These will vary according to various factors—high rainfall, low rainfall and other products that can be grown in those regions. Low interest loans can be better targeted, whether it be for build-up, improved water reticulation to drought-prone areas or opportunities to form cooperatives to reduce costs. This is part of the plan that can be implemented if we approach the problems in a strategic way, not by forming a Labor Party committee.

Assistance could also be provided for small business to renew the area and make it viable and therefore provide the necessary service for that community. The community must be viable. The community needs to have structures in place to be able to perform. A strategy region could help farmers in the community to go from a bleak situation to a viable position, enabling them to ride the international wave. Other areas around Australia have strategy regions, and there are a number of them. Even though the programs implemented by the federal government have changed—in the past it was the Rural Partnership Program and it is now the Agriculture Advancing Australia Program, or AAAP—these strategy regions are developed and driven by community people. It is not government that drives them, and that is the problem. If we try to work them from a government point of view, they just will not work in the long term, and they have not worked that way.

These strategies actually work. There are a number of them around Australia. The program is designed to encourage increased profitability and self-reliance in a competitive economic environment, responsiveness to changing market demands for goods, clever management of rural resources and more robust and equitable and prosperous rural communities. I mentioned the south-west strategy earlier. There is also the Sunraysia strategy in Victoria and New South Wales centred on Mildura. Irrigated vines and citrus are the main crops, with avocados, asparagus, olives and almonds reflecting a willingness to diversify. This funding supports business planning and interest rate subsidies to assist producers—

Time expired.

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): After listening to that contribution, the Leader of the Opposition should make the member for Warrego the racing caller rather than the racing spokesman. The motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition has been ducked entirely by the member for Warrego. Instead of talking about sugar, he talked about sheep. I suppose they both start with 'S'. The member for Callide was so embarrassed by the motion that he ended up introducing a brand-new topic with SunWater. It was so important to the Leader of the Opposition that it was completely ignored by the member for Callide! It was another 'S' word.

The point is that those opposite know, as we do, that the Leader of the Opposition is intellectually bereft when it comes to these sorts of matters. When it comes to economic matters, the Leader of the Opposition wanders in here in the morning bemoaning a deficit. But by question time he is up there urging us to spend a bit more money. He talks about the deficit one minute and then talks about spending more money the next. The only thing he is consistent about is his inconsistency. He has the Adam Lindsay Gordon *Magic Pudding* approach to finances.

No-one would deny the seriousness of the current financial plight of Queensland sugar growers, but it was the Goss government and the Hawke government which faced up to the regulated nature of the industry and did something about it. We dismantled the regulations that

were strangling the industry and made it better able to respond to international market signals. Under the current Minister for Primary Industries, we have again showed leadership and brought in another tranche of reforms to break down more of those excessive regulations. Mr Speaker, you remember in the last parliament how we sat here for two weeks. Why did we sit here for two weeks? Because the National Party was opposing every one of those reforms to bring about a stronger industry. The National Party wallowed in the problem and has never been part of the solution. The only encouragement out of tonight's debate is from the member for Mirani. The member for Mirani was the only one on that side who came up with any possible solution for the dire situation that the sugar industry finds itself in. Like Macawber out of a Charles Dickens novel, the National Party simply hoped that something would turn up. We saw the Howard government opt out of the hard decisions last year when it simply threw millions at the sugar industry in the hope that it would reform itself. Last night in the budget—the Leader of the Opposition described it as excellent—it threw nothing at it. Like Macawber, something has turned up all right. Years of drought as well as rust in some of the varieties have not helped. But what has turned up is a decision by Brazil—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr MICKEL: Oh, I know the member is uncomfortable about it. I would be embarrassed, too. I would be dreadfully embarrassed calling that budget excellent when it has ratted on the sugar industry the way it has. No wonder we on this side represent the majority of the sugar seats and will continue to do so in the next parliament, because they know that the Leader of the Opposition has no answers. It is easy enough to come in here bemoaning deficits and then suggest throwing money at the industry in a bit of a motion that not even the opposition spokesman supports. The point is that Brazilian production increased this year by 10 per cent.

Mr ROWELL: I rise to a point of order. I seconded the motion. I think the member has a problem.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! There is no point of order.

Mr MICKEL: I will say one thing about the member for Hinchinbrook: the member for Hinchinbrook is like one of those lizards that lies in the sun. He is alive, but he looks dead! The fact of the matter is that the 10 per cent increase in production in Brazil is the size of the Australian sugar industry, and that is why this is a crisis. In the face of this Brazilian threat, what have we done to position the industry? One of our key reforms has been the establishment of an industry owned marketing company, Queensland Sugar Ltd, and the establishment of Sugar Terminals Ltd to give the industry a tangible financial stake in the terminal assets, which are now valued at $390 million. The sugar industry did not have direct ownership of its own marketing and distribution. Listen to the National Party! We had to give the sugar industry ownership of its own marketing and distribution. It happened under Labor. It is always Labor who gives to the industry and protects it. We are in its corner fighting for it.

Time expired.

Question—That the amendment be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 60—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Bligh, Boyle, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Fouras, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Mackenroth, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reilly, Reynolds, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell

NOES, 19—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Springborg

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Any future divisions on this motion will be of two minutes duration.

Question—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 60—Attwood, Barry, Barton, Bligh, Boyle, Briskey, Choi, E. Clark, L. Clark, Croft, Cummins, J. Cunningham, Edmond, English, Fenlon, Foley, Fouras, Hayward, Jarratt, Keech, Lavarch, Lawlor, Lee, Livingstone, Lucas, Mackenroth, Male, McGrady, McNamara, Mickel, Miller, Molloy, Mulherin, Nelson-Carr, Nolan, Nuttall, Pearce, Phillips, Pitt, Poole, Reilly, Reynolds, N. Roberts, Robertson, Rodgers, Rose, Schwarten, D. Scott, Shine, Smith, Spence, Stone, Strong, Struthers, C. Sullivan, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: T. Sullivan, Purcell,

NOES, 19—Bell, Copeland, E. Cunningham, Flynn, Hobbs, Hopper, Horan, Lee Long, Lingard, Malone, Pratt, Quinn, E. Roberts, Rowell, Seeney, Watson, Wellington. Tellers: Lester, Springborg

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (7.05 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Anzac Day

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (7.05 p.m.): Anzac Day is a very important time of the year for my wife, Mary, and me. We have the opportunity to join with communities to participate in a number of commemoration ceremonies around the electorate. Throughout the electorate again this year, from the services we attended at Koumala, Sarina, Mirani and Finch Hatton, it was very heartening to see many cadets and other young people join with the diggers in commemorating those who fought to make our country what it is today. The level of participation of young people in our national day of remembrance is increasing each year, and it is particularly poignant when one considers that many of those who fought and some who died were little more than youths themselves.

Anzac Day this year started earlier in the week with ceremonies at Mirani and Sarina state high schools. I congratulate both school communities on very stirring and moving ceremonies. My Anzac Day schedule involved a 6.30 a.m. start at the township of Koumala, 10 a.m at Sarina, 4.30 p.m. at Mirani, 6.30 p.m. at Finch Hatton and I returned home at 12.30 a.m. The Koumala ceremony was conducted by MC Merv James, president of the Sarina RSL. Kevin Plumb, secretary of the Sarina RSL, was the guest speaker. At the Sarina ceremony Ron Gurnett was the parade marshal and Merv James was MC again. I was privileged to take the salute of the march along with the mayor of Sarina. The 121RCU Sarina cadets helped cook and serve meals to returned servicemen and women and guests at the RSL following the ceremony. I congratulate these young people and their peers, Lieutenant Pat Carroll and Major Paul Carroll. They did an excellent job in presenting the young people of our town.

At Mirani I was able to march with the mayor, Clive Rogers. The 122RCU Mackay cadets marched at both Mirani and Finch Hatton. Again, I congratulate the cadets and their leader, Major John Zimmerman. Ron and Greta McClure instigated the fabulous Mirani ceremony. At the 6 p.m. Finch Hatton march I marched and was guest speaker at the cenotaph. It was disappointing that I had to raise in parliament the week prior that the state government was charging RSL clubs for a second liquor licence to serve the traditional rum and milk to diggers before the Anzac Day march. That is an additional $27 licensing fee on top of the normal licensing fee paid. However, I was pleased that initially the minister took this issue on board and stopped the charge.

Federal Funding, Disability Services

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (7.08 p.m.): Last night Australia was plunged into darkness. Peter Costello delivered a khaki budget and, to fund it, turned off the lights for tens of thousands of Australians. Almost 80,000 Australians with a disability will lose up to $50 a fortnight in disability payments if forced into employment programs in a bid aimed at saving the federal government millions of dollars in welfare payouts. This cold-hearted, soulless and cynical federal government plans to pay for war off the backs of Australia's poor, sick and disabled. People like my brother, who has been on a disability pension for nearly 10 years, have had enough of being the scapegoats for every economic ill the government suffers. My brother Jim is 44 years old. He did not choose the degenerative, painful condition which afflicts him. He did not choose to give up his working life at the age of 34, forfeiting his independence, his right to earn and to accumulate wealth, his friends, his social circle and any hopes of finding a life partner and having a family of his own. No; ankylosing spondylitis chose him. This severe form of arthritis slowly fuses together the discs in his lower back, causing periods of chronic pain and debilitation. While he currently has more good days than bad days, eventually he will not be able to walk. But John Howard and Peter Costello want him to go back to work. Well, there is nothing my brother would love more than to go to work and to have a normal life. When his eligibility for the disability support pension came up for review recently, he asked for that permission, but the answer was no because his condition will only get worse, not better. But there is a question mark hanging over his head and there are many thousands of people like him who may not be considered by many to be severely disabled. After all, he can walk, talk, see, hear, read and drive. No doubt, the federal Treasurer, if he met my brother, would think, 'Here is a man who could work. Let us help him out.' But the question really is: what employer would employ him? What employer would be flexible and understanding enough to accept his inability to come to work for days or weeks at a time without warning? None, none, none! Not one! The reality is that it would take more than the willingness of

the individual person with a disability to make employment a reality. The job and the employer need to be there, too. In this highly competitive job market, incapacitated, unreliable and often unqualified applicants just cannot cut it.

This policy is nothing but a disgusting, despicable exercise in money grabbing. It is despicable because it will raise the hopes and expectations of thousands of people who would love to get a job and live independently, but in reality have little chance of attaining that goal. It is disgusting because the money saved will be used to further repress and demonise those who arrive on our shores seeking safety and asylum. I would like to see the federal members on the Gold Coast come and explain this policy to my brother.

Gympie Fire and Rescue Station

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (7.11 p.m.): The Gympie Fire and Rescue Station is essential to the region not only for the fighting of fires but also because of the fact that Gympie is a well-known black spot for motor vehicle accidents and the crew attached to this station is required on a regular basis to assist in many crash rescues. Therefore, it is vital that their equipment is up to date and of the highest possible standard.

A few weeks ago I was shown the station's urban fire vehicle, which is in dire need of replacement. This replacement is imperative for the following reasons: the age of the current vehicle, which was purpose-built for 10-year service, is now over 10 years of age; there are high maintenance costs due to the age of the vehicle; the water tank is severely corroded and leaks constantly when placed at a lean and may fail at any time; rust and corrosion is evident around both front doors, the pillars and the cabin frame; the locker space, whilst adequate when first designed, is now not capable of holding the extra equipment that is carried on fire trucks, such as rescue equipment, the oxy-viva rescue gear, the Hazchem gear and an extra BA set for additional crew; the lockers are leaking; when the brakes adjust themselves the whole vehicle pulls one way severely; there is no room for additional crew in the back cabin; the headlights are insufficient for country road conditions; the door seals and trims are of poor quality with some missing completely; the old firepac is not fitted with a transmission braking system; there is excessive noise, vibration and rattling inside the cab making it difficult to hear communications between fire crew and firecom; there is a lack of confidence in the appliance's capability due to various mechanical failures; hose reels are extremely slow to rewind; and branches are blocked and have failed due to corrosion caused by the deteriorating tank.

The Gympie station is unique as it is a stand-alone station that is unable to get support from another station in under an hour. Owing to its location, it is required to respond to north, south, east and west areas to support a number of auxiliary and permanently manned stations within the region. I really wish to emphasise to the Minister for Emergency Services just how important a new and updated vehicle is to the people of Gympie and the surrounding areas. I hope that the minister will give this station's needs serious consideration and make provision for them in the forthcoming budget as he stated that he would last week in this chamber.

Goodna Cultural and Arts Centre

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (7.13 p.m.): Tonight is a momentous occasion in the history of this parliament because all of the Ipswich city councillors have joined the members for Ipswich, Ipswich West and me for a dinner tonight with the Minister for Local Government. I would like to thank the councillors for joining us here tonight. It is for the good government of Ipswich that we all work together for the future of our people.

I would like to report to the parliament that yet another commitment of the Beattie Labor government in the electorate of Bundamba has come to fruition. The Goodna Cultural and Arts Centre, a multipurpose building, was officially opened by the Minister for Employment and Training and Minister for the Arts, the Hon. Matt Foley. As the member for Bundamba and parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Education, I was honoured to be in attendance, as was the Ipswich Mayor, John Nugent, and our local media tart, Councillor Paul Tully. This centre was funded by the Department of Sport and is located in Evan Marginson Park at Goodna. It was built on top of the change room and storage facilities that became known locally as the dungeon or the bunker and other names that really should not grace the records of our *Hansard*. It was an election promise of the former member, Bob Gibbs, and I know that he would be proud of the facility that has been built.

The centre was fitted out with funds from the Department of Housing's Community Renewal Program. I am delighted that the officers of this program are operating in my electorate from this particular centre. Community renewal meetings are held there, as are other important community meetings. The regional community forum meeting was held on the morning that the building was officially opened and the people of the area were pleased that the Minister for Emergency Services was also in attendance.

The official opening was a great occasion, with the Goodna State School choir singing three songs, one with a boy who has a key future in drama, I would think, accompanying the choir in *The Road to Gundagai*. All the students looked absolutely fantastic in their gold and purple choir coats. I know that the principal, Gary McCarthy, their music teacher and choir teacher were very proud of each and every student. The opening was attended by many members of the Goodna community, and particular community organisations and many local citizens. Everyone enjoyed the barbecue lunch after the official opening ceremony.

I understand that the Ipswich City Council will use the centre for art displays and exhibitions, sporting and cultural events, and I am hopeful that the Redbank Plains State High School art department will also use the centre for the displays of their most talented art. Today, I had the pleasure of hosting the vice-captains and captains of Redbank Plains State High School to a lunch at Parliament House. Over the past few months I have displayed in my electorate office works of art from the students of Redbank Plains State High School and I would like to place on record my sincere thanks to the students and the school for the loan of their great artworks. I assure them that every person who has viewed their artworks, both the charcoal portraits and the paintings, has greatly praised their artistic talents and the very surprising fact that so many of the students of that school are gifted in art. Finally, one cannot open an arts complex without some poetry, so there was a recital of Paul Adams' great poem, *Pictures of Ipswich*.

Pittsworth Sprints; Public Liability Insurance

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (7.16 p.m.): In communities right across the state it is becoming increasingly obvious that the state government's group insurance scheme will prove too little, too late to save many not-for-profit organisations and events from the endemic public liability crisis. The very popular Pittsworth Sprints in my electorate of Cunningham is one such event that finds itself in this critical situation and facing a very doubtful future.

The Pittsworth Sprints committee must secure public liability insurance now so that it can go ahead with the organisation and running of its yearly street sprints event on 7 and 8 September. However, it is unable to attain insurance for one of its main attractions, the annual burnout competition. CAMS covers the sprints section, but no insurance company will cover the burnout section because of its perceived risks, although it is a much safer competition. Additionally, the Pittsworth Sprints committee has been lumped with a rise in premiums for its remaining attractions to the tune of 250 per cent over the past four years.

Mr Lucas: Have you ever entered the burnout competition yourself?

Mr COPELAND: Not in Pittsworth, but I have at the Leyburn Sprints, which is also in my electorate, and it is a very good event.

This rise is for an event that has never witnessed an accident or had a claim filed against it. The Pittsworth Sprints have registered for the group insurance scheme in the hope that their burnout competition may be covered and premiums reduced. However, it appears that this scheme will be of little value to them because it does not kick in until 1 September, which would leave them with absolutely no time in which to reasonably organise and publicise the event. They are now left out on a limb with no state government assistance and faced with the imminent cancellation of the burnout competition. The cancellation of this very popular section of the weekend would decrease the event's success and could very well jeopardise the sprints' future beyond 2002.

The demise of the Pittsworth Sprints would be a terrible loss for the Pittsworth shire. Last year, the event raised enough funds to purchase 10 new ensembles and obtain two hospital beds for residents' rooms at the Beauaraba Lodge, a hostel for the aged and disabled. Another separate donation provided money to purchase a commercial freezer for the Pittsworth Hospital. These facilities represent significant tangible benefits for some of the most needy people in the community. However, they are just the tip of the iceberg. The Rotary Club, the Rugby League club, the swimming club, the basketball club and the scouts are all significant beneficiaries, and the list goes on. In addition to all of these specific recipients, the overall Pittsworth region benefits through this event with 150 competitors and approximately 7,000 spectators attracted to the

sprints each year. The benefit from these visitors ripples throughout the economy of the entire region.

The Pittsworth Sprints is just one example of a dilemma that is occurring across the state. I implore the state government to address this glaring hole in its group insurance scheme now and assist those not-for-profit organisations and events that stand to miss out on any assistance from the scheme. These community groups are fighting their battles right now during the public liability crisis. Any state government help that might become available in September could tragically be a case of too little, too late.

Langafonua Agricultural Life Exhibition

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (7.20 p.m.): Recently I attended an exhibition of photographs in my electorate by Charles Zuber in conjunction with Marcelina Cox and other Pacific Islanders who grow crops and bring their culture into the Redland shire. The exhibition was titled Langafonua Agricultural Life in the Redlands. Many honourable members know that between the Brisbane city boundaries and the shores of Moreton Bay lies the Redland shire, named after its red soil and well known for its fertile farmland. The images and text of the exhibition explore aspects of the cultural life of Polynesian families who came here from the South Pacific in the 1970s. Since their arrival they have brought new crops and contributed significantly to the longstanding traditions of farming in the district. As yet, this contribution is not widely appreciated or recognised. The exhibition was intended to be a small step towards a greater recognition in the community of these farmers and their contribution to the history of the Redland shire.

The title, Langafonua, represents the aspirations of a migrant community as they attempt to build a new life in Australia. As Ika Hola—one of the first to plant yams in the Redlands soil—points out, this is difficult when the land is leased and the farmhouses are too expensive to buy. The families pictured work in fields which are often on the verge of rezoning for residential development. Often the land is still owned by Italians who have ceased farming and rent the farms to the Tongans and Samoans, who then grow the yams and sweet potatoes so beloved by Polynesian communities throughout the Pacific.

Times change, and these migrant families have children who have been born here and who are now a part of their parents' traditions and the Australian way of life. They are forming new cultural identities, perhaps valuing the car as much as the tractor and a good education as much as a good crop. It is perhaps with this new generation of Islanders that we can see a new life building. The title, Langafonua, applies more to those who were born here, for it is now up to them to find ways to preserve their own cultural practices whilst building a new life. All of us need to respect the traditions of all cultures and to acknowledge the significance of farmers to the cultural life of Queensland.

I express my thanks to all those who participated in this project, including Charles Zuber of the Queensland College of Art at Griffith University, his wife, Pat, and Marcelina Cox. They have had to overcome quite a lot of hurdles to bring this exhibition to fruition. I also place on record my appreciation of their dedication and commitment to this project. This project has received assistance from Arts Queensland through a regional arts development grant, and I thank the minister for making this possible.

Anzac Day

Mr FLYNN (Lockyer—ONP) (7.23 p.m.): Time has gone by since Anzac Day this year, but time does not detract from the growing importance of the commemoration of Anzac Day. Over recent years, this day has taken a back seat in the public mind, particularly in the minds of our youth. I believe that events in 2001 have renewed appreciation of the sacrifices made not only by our warriors but also by their families and support troops who, whilst they did not pay the supreme sacrifice, were left behind to face life without their loved ones.

As with many members of this House, I was invited to a large number of Anzac Day services around the electorate and also to schools which held services the day before. To use the vernacular, I was gob-smacked at the number of children who enthusiastically took part. Yes, they were there because it was a school parade, but closer questioning revealed that they had a deep appreciation of the purpose of Anzac Day. I thought they were there because they had to be, but they were not. They were there because they knew exactly what Anzac Day is about. They understand that Anzac Day is not a celebration of war but a commemoration of what people did on our behalf and the fact that we are determined not to let it happen again.

Why the sacrifice? They know why. They know that we wanted to preserve our heritage and our country and that there were people who disagreed with that. They did not go into the politics of it, but they know that their country had called upon their fathers and their grandfathers to help, and they did so. I did not have to ask them why they have pride in their nation. We have a renewed pride in our flag and in our existence as an Australian nation. I am happy to say that our youth are now very much committed to our future as a single nation. Students and guests took part in these ceremonies. The students listened with much appreciation to old diggers from the Second World War and to Vietnam veterans. There is no doubt that we are moving ahead in our appreciation of the past.

Earlier today I noticed the presence of John Nugent from the Ipswich City Council. Even though only a small part of my electorate falls within his area, he has nevertheless taken time out to ensure that I am here and to ensure that immigrants have an appreciation of their new nationality. It has always been a pleasure for me to respond to these people by saying that I too am an immigrant and I appreciate what they are going through. Recently I had the pleasure of meeting the Chinese delegation from Shanghai and I made sure that the delegate knew that we appreciate Chinese input into our heritage.

Make-and-Do Shed, Kingston

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (7.25 p.m.): There is something about a man and his shed. Secret men's business? Maybe so. But in a bygone area, men all over this land retreated to their backyard shed to do car maintenance, maybe a bit of carpentry, work on a mower or pursue a hobby. The backyard shed is no longer an obligatory landmark down the back next to the chook pen, and I think many men have really lost something very valuable. In my electorate, a new facility is buzzing with activity. It is known as the make-and-do shed or the MAD project. The concept was born out of a discussion between two gentlemen, Jock Dingley and Mick Bird, at a meeting of the Kingston community renewal reference group early in 2001. They dreamt of having a community work shed where they could share not only tools and facilities but also yarns and stories. They had some questions, so they came to see my predecessor, Mike Kaiser, to ask: is it a good idea? Is it feasible? How would we go about it? Mike agreed that the answer to the first two questions was an emphatic yes and referred them on to Ms Kerry Holtz, head of the regional managers forum in Logan. They then brought Paul Ainsworth, community renewal facilitator, into the circle and a funding submission was developed and presented to both the Woodridge and Kingston community renewal reference groups.

Ms Stone interjected.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT: They did. The MAD group became incorporated in July 2001 and the combined funding of $57,000 became available in August. By this time an ideal shed had been located. They set about the fit-out, with all the benches and tables made by the members. Machinery was purchased along with saws, planers, lathes, sanders, drills and various other hand and power tools. Some electrical work was required to increase the capacity of the wiring.

In September 2001, the first group of woodworkers and lovers of wood crafts gathered excitedly to christen their new facility. They now have 45 members and are growing as more and more community members—men and women—hear of this wonderful hub of activity. Some of their members have left their home workshops for the extra ingredient offered by Jock and Mick's MAD shed. Here they offer mateship, a special place where they can find friendship and support and join what is a wonderful network in the communities of Woodridge and Kingston.

This project has received recognition in one of our state government publications. They are now mounting displays of their beautiful work at Woodridge Plaza, Logan Hyperdome and Grand Plaza at Browns Plains. At present, they open Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings and Tuesday evening. As news of this wonderful facility spreads, I can see more and more of our community becoming interested, and the hours will require extension. I commend Jock and Mick for such an innovative place, where friendships will be made and creativity fostered.

Meebunn-bia Outdoor Education and Recreation Centre

Hon. K. R. LINGARD (Beaudesert—NPA) (7.29 p.m.): Last Sunday I was invited to the launch of a replica of the ship Endeavour in the most unlikely setting of the mountains behind Rathdowney. The function was organised by a wonderful organisation in my electorate, the Meebunn-bia Outdoor Education and Recreation Centre. This centre was established in 1979 and provides quality outdoor education programs to educational, recreational, corporate, adult and

special needs groups of all ages and abilities. Programs include walking, climbing, abseiling and camping, with the emphasis being on problem-solving activities.

Approximately 4,500 young people throughout Queensland and New South Wales participate in these programs every year and more than 40,000 have participated in the 23 years it has been operating. The function I attended was the official opening of stage 1 of Meebunn-bia's Centenary of Federation project—the Endeavour High and Low Adventure Activity. The Endeavour High and Low Adventure Activity is a true replica of the ship Endeavour and will boast a labyrinth of problem-solving activities in the hull. Group initiatives will need to be solved before participants can move through the labyrinth and solve the many puzzles. It will also have electricity poles forming the masts and in these a high ropes course will be built for participants to challenge themselves.

Stage 1 of the project involved the construction of the base, hull and masts. This is a wonderful project for Meebunn-bia and a wonderful addition to their already sought after resources. This popularity is a result of the motivation and ability of the workers to stay abreast of current industry standards and maintain a reputation as a leading outdoor education organisation in terms of safety standards and innovative educational facilities and activities.

My wife and I thoroughly enjoyed the day at Meebunn-bia and I publicly congratulate them not only on this day but also on their work over the past 23 years. They have provided an excellent service to many Queenslanders and are a valuable asset to the Beaudesert electorate. I encourage corporate and school groups to pay a visit to this wonderful centre and experience the programs for themselves.

East Timorese Scholarship Winners; YMCA Youth Parliament

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (7.31 p.m.): The state government in partnership with Nudgee International College has welcomed four young East Timorese winners of Smart State scholarships to the Queensland electorate of Nudgee. I was pleased to personally welcome the four students when they attended parliament with the Premier and Minister for Education a few weeks ago. Esta da Costa Correia, Juliao dos Reis, Joao Baptista and Floriano Pinto were selected from a field of 28 students across East Timor to take advantage of the opportunity to pursue their education in Queensland. While in Queensland their program will consist of a 30-week English language training course at Nudgee International College followed by years 11 and 12 education at St Joseph's Nudgee College and Corpus Christi College commencing in the first term of 2003.

The scholarships cover the students' tuition fees, accommodation, textbooks, uniforms and return airfares to East Timor. We hope that these scholarships will make significant contributions to each student's future and role as a leader in the social, cultural and economic development of East Timor. I am delighted that these students will undertake their education within the Nudgee electorate. These scholarships, along with the relocation of the Australian Catholic University and the establishment of a P-12 campus at Banyo, are yet another example of the exciting educational prospects available within my electorate.

I wish also to advise the House of a local 15-year-old, Clinton Adams of Nundah, who has been selected as the youth member for Nudgee in this year's YMCA Youth Parliament. The Queensland Youth Parliament is a unique youth forum through which young people participate in personal development activities and a youth forum to equip them with the skills to return to their communities and take positive social action. The program culminates with a sitting of the Youth Parliament at Parliament House between 23 and 29 June later this year. Youth members of parliament serve as youth ministers, debate youth bills, consider motions, make private members' statements, ask questions without notice and speak about their electorates in an adjournment debate. Clinton is a year 10 student at St Patrick's Christian Brothers College at Shorncliffe.

Mr Lucas: A great school.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS: It is a good school. A number of constituents of mine travel to the neighbouring electorate of Sandgate to attend it.

Clinton's interests include scouting and miniature trains. He has advised me that he would like to be a flight attendant and also has a goal of acquiring a Duke of Edinburgh Award. We wish him well in those endeavours. We also wish him well in his deliberations as the youth member for Nudgee and look forward to hearing of his involvement in this program over the coming months.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.34 p.m.