



WEEKLY HANSARD

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51ST PARLIAMENT

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TUESDAY, 5 OCTOBER 2004

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

PETITION

The following honourable member has lodged a paper petition for presentation—

Townsville Port Access Road

Mr Reynolds from 87 petitioners requesting the House to compel the Townsville Port Authority to provide only one entry and exit point to the port, the Boundary Street/Benwell Road entry, as this would not only assist residential amenity but also assist in port security and that the road be built as a matter of urgency.

PAPERS

PAPERS TABLED DURING THE RECESS

The Clerk informed the House that the following papers, received during the recess, were tabled on the dates indicated—

1 October 2004—

- Report by the Minister for Emergency Services (Mr Cummins) pursuant to section 56A(4) of the Statutory Instruments Act 1992
- Report by the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (Ms Spence) pursuant to section 56A(4) of the Statutory Instruments Act 1992

Australian Crime Commission Annual Report 2002-03

4 October 2004—

- Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee—Report No. 65—Republication of the Code of Ethical Standards: Legislative Assembly of Queensland
- Code of Ethical Standards: Legislative Assembly of Queensland (2004 booklet)
- Information Notice No. 1A of 2004: Standing Order 262
- Interim Government response from the Premier and Minister for Trade (Mr Beattie) to Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee Report No. 64—Report on an examination of the appropriate scope of provisions on members transacting business with an entity of the state, and related matters

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments were tabled by the Clerk—

Government Owned Corporations Act 1993—

- Government Owned Corporations Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2004, No. 202

Building and Construction Industry Payments Act 2004—

- Building and Construction Industry Payments Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 203

Plant Protection Act 1989—

- Plant Protection Amendment Regulation (No. 4) 2004, No. 204

Mineral Resources Act 1989—

- Mineral Resources Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 205

Environmental Legislation Amendment Act 2003—

- Proclamation commencing certain provisions, No. 206

Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Act 2003—

- Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, No. 207

Environmental Protection Act 1994—

- Environmental Protection Policies Amendment Policy (No. 1) 2004, No. 208

Environmental Protection Act 1994, State Penalties Enforcement Act 1999—

- Environmental Protection Legislation Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004, No. 209

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Paedophilia; Child Pornography

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.33 a.m.): Queensland has some of Australia's harshest penalties for paedophilia and child pornography, and they are about to get tougher. Yesterday cabinet decided to ramp up the maximum penalties for procuring

children for pornography, and producing and possessing child pornography, and to include the offences in the Criminal Code. To enforce our tough laws, Queensland also has some of the best paedophilia-fighting forces in the world—the Queensland Police Service and the Crime and Misconduct Commission. The Police Service's specialist antipaedophilia unit, Task Force Argos, does a colossal job and played an integral role in the apprehension last week of almost 200 people involved in sickening Internet pornography. Officers from Task Force Argos charged more than a quarter of the alleged offenders.

I now advise the House that the government will immediately spend an extra \$1 million to boost Task Force Argos's success in fighting Internet child pornography. The extra funds—a 2004-05 capital injection from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet—will target people who trade in Internet child pornography by improving the equipment and skills of Task Force Argos. The funding will ensure police continue to have the forensic information technology, knowledge and skills to stay a few steps ahead of child sex offenders. From the \$1 million the Task Force Argos forensic computer examination unit will gain upgraded IT equipment, additional research into encryption of data and extra forensic computer experts.

Anyone who possesses child pornography is a sex offender and is contributing to child abuse. We clearly need to get that out on the record. These criminals cannot hide behind the fact that they may hold positions of authority or respect in our community. They must be caught, and this funding will assist in catching them. Cabinet's decision yesterday means that when they are apprehended by the police the courts will be able to impose tougher penalties. Currently, offences involving the production, sale and possession of child pornography come under three acts—the Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995, the Classification of Films Act 1991 and the Classification of Publications Act 1991. Yesterday cabinet decided to include them in the Criminal Code to make it clear that these are serious crimes. We will double the maximum penalties for procuring children for pornography and for producing pornography to 10 years jail, and more than double the maximum sentence for possessing child pornography from two to five years. The government will also encourage other Australian governments to formulate consistent national laws and penalties against Internet pornography. Internet criminals transcend borders, and we need to have consistent laws across the nation so that they do not shop around for a more lenient jurisdiction.

The government gave Task Force Argos and the CMC a potent new weapon last year when it introduced laws which made it an offence to use the Internet to procure a child for sex or expose a child to pornographic images. Since 2000 the CMC has used its dedicated Internet methodology to arrest 50 people on 241 charges. The CMC has developed computer software which enables it to identify predatory paedophiles on a geographic basis. This technology has been provided to the Queensland Police Service and the South Australia Police, and the methodologies have been brought to the attention of the Australian high-tech crime unit attached to the Australian Federal Police.

In approved controlled operations CMC officers pose as children on the Net in order to identify paedophiles seeking to sexually proposition children. The CMC's paedophile investigation unit, Egret team, continues the proactive attack on serial and networked child sex offenders and on Internet child sex offenders. This is an attack which the Queensland Crime Commission began. Under the CMC, the unit has received more resources for areas including surveillance, forensic computing and intelligence expertise for targeting child sex offending.

As I have said, our penalties are among the nation's toughest. A radical overhaul of the laws last year led not only to the new Internet powers but also to new benchmarks for the courts to punish predators who prey on young children as sexual targets. When judges sentence child rapists and paedophiles they no longer follow the general principle that prison is a last resort. We made the maximum penalties for indecent treatment the harshest in the nation—20 years for indecently treating a child under 12 years and 14 years for indecently treating a child under 16. We introduced a new Internet offence in the Criminal Code—the first of its kind in Australia. It carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment for using electronic means with the intent to procure a child under 12 to commit a sexual act (the maximum sentence is five years if the child is under 16) or using electronic means with the intent to expose a child under 12 to pornography (the maximum sentence is five years if the child is under 16).

Many offenders charged in Queensland last week through the operation against Net child pornography will be subject to these penalties, sending a message to would-be paedophiles and consumers of child pornography that their crimes warrant harsh punishment. In the allocation of this \$1 million I have consulted with the Police Minister, Judy Spence, and the Police Commissioner and they believe that is the most effective and appropriate way for that money to be spent.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ammonium Nitrate

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.39 a.m.): Members will recall that at the COAG meeting held on 25 June 2004, we agreed to limit access to security sensitive ammonium nitrate to only those people who could establish they had a legitimate need to use it. In addition, these people will need to establish that they are not of security concern and will store and handle the product safely and securely.

Ammonium nitrate has been used by terrorists in a number of incidents overseas and we must limit the scope for its abuse in Australia. Security sensitive ammonium nitrate includes ammonium nitrate, dry ammonium nitrate mixtures containing greater than 45 per cent ammonium nitrate and calcium ammonium nitrate.

Contrary to popular belief, ammonium nitrate is not commonly used as a fertiliser in Australia. Fertiliser grade ammonium nitrate is used by a small section of farmers—mainly horticulturists. However, ammonium nitrate is used extensively by the mining industry. In Queensland, 98 per cent of the ammonium nitrate used is used in mining. Because of this I opposed any proposal to totally ban ammonium nitrate in Australia at COAG and suggested that ammonium nitrate and ammonium nitrate products should continue to be available to legitimate users in both the mining and agricultural sectors.

At the COAG meeting this year we agreed that by 1 November 2004 the Commonwealth and state and territory governments would establish a nationally consistent licensing regime for each stage of the supply chain—that is the import, manufacture, export, storage, transport, supply and use of security sensitive ammonium nitrate.

Queensland is on target to achieve the commitment I made at COAG to introduce the required legislative arrangements by 1 November 2004, with administrative arrangements to be finalised as soon as possible thereafter. In Queensland, security sensitive ammonium nitrate will be declared as an explosive and regulated under the Explosives Act 1999. The Explosives Inspectorate in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines will be the regulating body.

A change to existing transport legislation is also necessary to ensure that Queensland transport inspectors have the powers to stop and inspect vehicles carrying security sensitive ammonium nitrate. The Minister for Transport, Paul Lucas, brought a submission to cabinet yesterday which has been approved and the legislation will be introduced in this House this week.

My government is now finalising the administrative arrangements that will support Queensland's licensing regime. To ensure there are no gaps between jurisdictions which could be exploited by those people wanting to misuse ammonium nitrate, we need to ensure that the licensing regime is nationally consistent. Some administrative matters will require national agreement, particularly transport and storage requirements and national processes for criminal history and ASIO checks.

Queensland government officials continue to work closely with the other states and territories and the Commonwealth government to finalise these matters. Queensland has wanted to ensure that momentum is maintained to address these matters and recently the director-general of my department, Dr Leo Keliher, wrote to the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet requesting that resolution of these aspects be achieved. The Commonwealth government has confirmed that it will maintain the momentum for national implementation. It acknowledged the need for a transition period in each jurisdiction, but agreed that national security will be best served by each jurisdiction commencing its licensing regime as soon as possible.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Temporary Protection Visa Holders

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.42 a.m.): There are a number of other matters I would like to report on briefly to the parliament. The first is temporary protection visa holders. On 13 July, federal Immigration Minister, Amanda Vanstone, announced new measures for temporary protection visa holders. This new package from the Howard government has been described by one refugee and immigration legal service as 'temporary election visas' and it is a cruel hoax.

It is time for a compassionate set of policies that better reflect our national character and reinvigorate our national consciousness and capacity to share opportunity and access to freedom from persecution. I seek leave to incorporate more details for the information of members.

Leave granted.

The Federal Government's measures include:

- Financial payments to individuals to return to their countries (previously introduced by Minister Ruddock in 2003 and repackaged);
- new return pending visas;
- allowing unsuccessful asylum seekers in detention to stay 18 months longer and live in the community while making arrangements to depart; and
- access to non-humanitarian onshore visas for TPV holders.

It's important to remember that TPV holders have been determined to be genuine refugees and that is their legal status. It is their Australian visa that is temporary.

At the time of Senator Vanstone's announcement, 9,500 TPV holders were told they would have the opportunity to apply for a range of mainstream migration visas, allowing them to remain in Australia permanently. These include skilled work, spouse visas and employer-sponsored visas.

Putting emphasis on the work skills of asylum seekers can however, lead to an unfortunate distinction between refugees. Is this an appropriate measure of their status? Many refugees experience difficulty finding work. They are traumatised, have language problems and have suffered years of oppression in their home countries, dislocation and detention. Are they any less worthy of support?

Senator Vanstone's regime initially raised hopes among refugees, but has been subsequently revealed as a package to convert refugees into migrants, effectively removing people's protection status and failing to provide guarantees for anyone.

In fact the only thing it guarantees is another level of stress-inducing paperwork for asylum seekers, compounding their anxiety and trauma.

The Howard Government has failed to accept their legal obligation to provide support and protection to genuine asylum seekers and refugees.

Eighty seven percent of claims for further protection by TPV holders that had been rejected by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) have had this rejection set aside by the Refugee Review Tribunal.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Association of Queensland Nurse Leaders

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.43 a.m.): Tonight I will be relaunching the former Directors of Nursing Association under its new name which accurately reflects the changes that they have adopted in their membership make-up and direction. The Association of Queensland Nurse Leaders is open to nursing officers 3 and nurses up to directors of nursing, whereas the association previously represented directors of nursing and nursing managers. The expansion of the membership means more nurses are represented across all areas of health throughout the state.

In line with the change, the first regional meeting has been held in Cairns and I understand there will be many more meetings in regional areas. The association's new direction will focus on issues including recruitment and retention, and maintaining standards in all areas of nursing.

Nurses make up 40 per cent of our health work force, so they are a very important part of the health system. I congratulate members of the Association of Queensland Nurse Leaders in recognising the need for change and proceeding with changes for the good of its members around the state.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Premier's Awards for Queensland Seniors

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.44 a.m.): On Friday the Minister for Seniors, Warren Pitt, and I honoured 15 Queenslanders who have made significant volunteer contributions to their local communities. This was the 19th annual Premier's Awards for Queensland Seniors and took place in a special ceremony here at Parliament House. The 15 winners have all undertaken tremendous unpaid work in their communities and the contributions—like that of so many—are all about making a better life for their fellow Queenslanders. I seek leave to incorporate those details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Most of this year's Premier's Award recipients have worked voluntarily for more than 40 years with community organisations and or individually to help others from all walks of life.

Mr Speaker, as noted sports commentator Tim Lane said in previewing last month's AFL Grand Final—"it is mateship that defines us"—he might have been referring to sport—but it so aptly applies in life.

It is these people's mateship that defines them as great Queenslanders and most deserving of rightful recognition. It has been estimated (Year 2000) that 1,073,600 Australians aged 55 years or over volunteered with an organisation or group, with this figure representing more than one-third of Australians aged 55-74 years and nearly one-fifth of Australians aged 75 or over.

Past and current Award recipients have indicated they gain enormous personal satisfaction from being able to help others, including access to social networks and improved physical and mental well-being.

These men and women are the backbone of our communities and an inspiration to us all—they're our great Queensland mates.

The Awards celebrate the diversity of achievements in which so many older people excelled and encourage others to develop innovative contributions of their own.

There 268 nominations received from throughout the state for this year.

The Awards also provide Queenslanders with an opportunity to recognise the vital support seniors provided to their local communities.

378 older people had received Premier's Awards since 1986 and Queenslanders of all ages were invited to nominate a senior volunteer.

This year, the youngest person nominated was aged 50 and the oldest was 97 years of age.

Recipients of 2004 Premier's Awards for Queensland Seniors are:

John Campbell, Barcaldine
 Bill Carney, Brisbane
 Ron Costabeber, Alice River
 John Patrick Geoghegan, Nerang
 Garth Harrigan, Aitkenvale
 Jean Harris Jensen, Monto
 Kathleen McNeilly, Victoria Point
 Joan Moore, Mareeba
 Margaret Nash, Ayr
 Betty Rees, Brisbane
 Bessie Schreck, Dalby
 Lorna Shaddock, Warwick
 Jill Sorensen, Innisfail
 Sue Stevens, Beerwah
 David Wilson, Maleny.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Japan-India Trade Mission Outcomes

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.44 a.m.): Less than three weeks after the conclusion of my trade and investment mission to Japan and India, I am delighted to inform the House of some preliminary results. This information is based on feedback from business delegates. Broadly, they say the high-level access that they gained through involvement in this mission would not otherwise have been possible. If we include the Teys beef promotion with Japanese supermarket chain Seiyu, and the \$20 million resort redevelopment agreement by Laguna Whitsundays, the value of this mission thus far totals almost \$30 million—\$29.65 million to be precise. I seek leave to incorporate more details in *Hansard* for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

New outcomes from the trade mission include:

- Gold Coast-based Superior Jetties expects to do approximately \$500,000 worth of business in the next two years with Sahara India;
- Jimbour Wines expects future sales worth \$100,000 in Japan. I promoted Queensland's wine industry vigorously during the mission, and Jimbour supplied wines for the Queensland Government Reception in Tokyo;
- Brisbane nanotechnology company Nanochem expects to sell silver catalyst worth \$250,000 to Mitsui Chemicals. Delegates from Nanochem and I met with Mitsui representatives in Osaka.
- An agreement I witnessed between Southbank TAFE and the Institute of Hotel Management Bangalore will be worth approximately \$100,000 over the next 2 years; and
- The University of Queensland's School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering will pursue an agreement with the Institute of Information Technology Mumbai, and a training course with the Manipal Institute of Technology. These will be worth approximately \$400,000 and will involve employing an extra 10 staff.

The Australian Industry Group has positive feedback from meetings with Sahara India and TATA—both giant Indian corporate empires.

These conglomerates have asked Australian Industry Group to help them identify business opportunities in Queensland.

Australian Industry Group believes the challenge will be keeping the inquiries to a manageable level!

Other outcomes which do not yet have a specific dollar value, but will almost certainly lead to job creation and export income, include:

- A decision by the Vice President of Tata Steel, Mr A.D. Bajjal, to lead a business delegation to Queensland this month to investigate mining investment, equipment services and technologies for the mining sector. This came out of discussions I held in Mumbai with Mr Bajjal and other Tata executives;
- Progress by Queensland company Con-Serv towards an agreement to supply Taj Hotels in India with smart water and energy conservation technology;
- A decision by the Governor of Osaka, Ms Fusae Ohta, to lead a business delegation to AusBiotech in Queensland next month. Osaka is the biotech capital of Japan;
- The desire of Osaka University of Pharmaceutical Sciences to open academic exchanges with universities in Queensland;

- The potential of the Wollemi Pine to be a Smart State export earner. Birkdale Nursery is currently in negotiations to select a major distributor for the Japanese market; and
- Negotiations between the Pacific Film and Television Commission and India's only academy of motion pictures, the Kerala State Calachitra Academy, to bring a variety of Bollywood films to Brisbane for the Brisbane International Film Festival in July-August of 2005.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fine Food Australia

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 a.m.): While we are talking about promoting Queensland, we have sought to promote Queensland as a fine food destination. This year, for the first time, the government hosted a display stand at the prestigious annual Fine Food Australia in Melbourne from 6 to 9 September. Fine Food Australia is the largest food industry event in the country and attracts approximately 25,000 international and domestic buyers. It is a new initiative and I would encourage members to read it. I seek leave to incorporate more details in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

Our display stand, themed "Queensland Food...the smart choice" was nominated as a finalist in the best Group Stand category of awards—we were the only State Government to attain this recognition.

Ten Queensland food manufacturers joined us in the stand, which featured popular cooking demonstrations.

The Logan Office of Economic Development and the Gold Coast City Council were also valued partners.

The feedback is that results for these participants include:

- over 300 new contacts and leads;
- increased sales from existing clients;
- opportunities to further develop relationships with major departmental clients including Masterfoods, Primo and Food Spectrum;
- identification of new product development, packaging and marketing opportunities; and
- increased media profile for companies and the industry as a whole in Queensland.

Other exciting opportunities for Queensland include:

- Promotion of Queensland food products through Australian television cooking programs;
- Hosting the stand again at next year's Fine Food Australia 2005 in Sydney;
- Enhanced opportunities for Queensland food companies at the G'day L.A. promotion in Los Angeles next year; and
- Greater national and international awareness of Queensland's Les Toques Blanches Quality Endorsement initiative which is assisting in the sales and promotion of Queensland's fine food products.

As well as the display stand, officers from the Department of State Development and Innovation worked on the Queensland Food-Buyer's Brunch and an Investment Breakfast Seminar.

The Buyer's Brunch drew 150 international and domestic buyers as well as members of the media, and led to sales and promotion opportunities.

At least 30 companies interested in investment in Queensland attended the breakfast.

I thank Peter Lancaster, CEO of Food Spectrum, and Rodney Wiley, Managing Director of Wiley and Co, who both provided excellent presentations on the advantages of a Queensland location and the benefits and business advantages that Queensland offers.

Congratulations to everyone associated with Queensland's success at this event and offer my Government's continued efforts to grow the Queensland food industry.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

CMC Report, Organised Crime in Queensland

Hon. P.D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier and Minister for Trade) (9.45 a.m.): The Crime and Misconduct Commission yesterday released *Crime Bulletin No. 6: Organised crime markets in Queensland: A strategic assessment*. It is an important resource in the fight against organised crime in Queensland.

I want to highlight two aspects of the report. As at 30 June 2004 the CMC has restrained property worth \$17.67 million under the new civil confiscation legislation. To date some \$1.16 million has been forfeited to the state through deeds of agreement—that is private settlements between the state and the person who has possession or effective control of the criminal proceeds. That is what the bulletin said. Last week police seized more than \$8.6 million worth of suspected proceeds of crime from an alleged gang trafficking heroin and cocaine in two states.

This fight against organised crime which my government has been pursuing vigorously with support from the CMC and police is working. I table for the information of the House the *Organised*

crime markets in Queensland report and I seek leave to incorporate further details in *Hansard* for the information of all members.

Leave granted.

As the report notes, the government has responded to a forerunner to this bulletin, the 1999 Krystal Report, which also dealt with organised crime.

We have implemented all but one recommendation of Krystal.

The bulletin is complimentary of some of the government's organised crime-fighting initiatives.

For example it states (p30): "Arguably the most significant innovation in the battle against money laundering in Queensland was the enactment of the Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002 (CPC Act)."

It says this legislation "overcomes the inherent difficulties of linking assets to particular crimes, which was a requirement of conviction-based confiscation".

"As at 30 June 2004, the CMC has restrained property worth \$17.67 million under the new civil confiscation legislation; and to date some \$1.16 million has been forfeited to the state through deeds of agreement (private settlements between the state and the person who has possession or effective control of the criminal proceeds)," the bulletin says.

The government is now closely studying the new bulletin.

However it's important to keep it in perspective.

Queensland's crime rates, in general, are continuing to fall.

The CMC assesses that motor vehicle rebirthing, illicit firearms and prostitution pose only low risks in Queensland.

In 2003 we increased penalties associated with illicit firearms supply and ownership, and the Prostitution Act 1999 strictly regulates prostitution.

Also, the Queensland Police Service and the CMC have had many successes in fighting organised crime.

For example:

- Last week, police seized more than \$8.6 million worth of suspected proceeds of crime from an alleged gang trafficking in heroin and cocaine in two states;
- Over the past 10 years the police have had increasing success in detecting clandestine amphetamine laboratories. In 1994, police located 12 labs, most of which were professional operations that could produce large amounts of drugs. By comparison last year, 166 labs were found and the majority of labs detected were smaller, more portable and located in a variety of locations including the boots of cars, hotel rooms and self-storage units;
- The Department of Transport and Main Roads proposes to introduce a digital smartcard driver's licence. This will deter identity crime—the most rapidly growing fraud offence in Australia and internationally;
- Queensland works with other jurisdictions through the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre Steering Committee on Proof of Identity, which since 1999 has run projects to strengthen proof of identity processes.

Mr Speaker, Queensland has dedicated units to fight organised crime:

- The Organised Crime Investigation Group (based in Brisbane) undertakes intelligence driven operations to target criminal networks,
- The Illicit Laboratory Investigation Team detects and dismantles clandestine drug laboratories and works with industry to identify people acquiring chemicals to potentially use in the manufacture of drugs.
- The State Drug Investigation Group investigates major and organised drug-related offences that occur across regional, interstate and international boundaries and participates in operations with the CMC, the Australian Federal Police and the Australian Crime Commission.

The Government supports the CMC's strategies in response to the risk assessment in the new bulletin.

These strategies are:

- detailed future assessments of the cocaine market, and the links between official misconduct and organised crime;
- continued monitoring and investigation of people with links to criminal networks;
- cooperation and intelligence exchange with other agencies; and
- implementing proactive intelligence-led strategies.

As I have said, the government implemented all but one recommendation of the 1999 Krystal Report.

In response to the report:

- Law enforcement agencies adopted a market-based approach to the analysis of organised crime using risk assessment methodology; and
- We introduced laws for the civil-based recovery of proceeds of crime, covert investigations, and witness protection.

Regarding a recommendation about telecommunications interception: the government has consistently stated we will not grant additional phone tapping powers unless and until they are covered by appropriate safeguards such as the Public Interest Monitor.

Queensland police already have extensive surveillance powers and can access information about Queensland offences obtained by another State or a Federal agency.

In August, Cabinet directed that a high level inter-departmental committee be formed to examine all issues relevant to telephone intercepts.

The CMC is one of four agencies represented on this high level interdepartmental committee.

The CMC will be welcome to put the information from this report to the Committee.

The Committee will examine the adequacy of the current surveillance procedures in regard to crime detection, including fighting organised crime, and whether changes need to be made.

This Committee will report back to Cabinet in the New Year.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Skills Recognition

Hon. T.A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations) (9.47 a.m.): I am pleased to announce that TAFE Queensland is achieving real results with its Recognition of Prior Learning program which helps Queenslanders achieve their career and employment goals while addressing the problem of skill shortages.

The program allows people to have their existing skills and knowledge assessed and credited towards their chosen course. Australia's future rests on its ability to meet the challenge of a highly competitive international economic environment.

Currently only 25 per cent of the Australian population has vocational education and training qualifications, while around 48 per cent of jobs require these skills. The Queensland government's Recognition of Prior Learning strategy addresses this issue. We are currently leading a national push to simplify and streamline the recognition of prior learning system so that students find the process easier to use and are more likely to take up the option.

One example of how the process overcomes barriers and leads to better opportunities is Toogoolawah's Erik Bonta, who used the program after discovering his Belgian carpentry qualifications were not recognised in Australia. Erik undertook training in scaffolding, elevated work platform and explosive power tools at Southern Queensland TAFE to meet Australian standards, before gaining accreditation. He did not need to undergo all the training because he had documented proof of his experience and passed theory assessments, enabling this experience to be counted towards his formal carpentry qualification.

Another success story involves Surat property owner, Gai White, who recently completed a Diploma in Rural Business Management, using recognition of prior learning to gain credits towards her Certificate II in Agriculture. Gai demonstrated to Roma TAFE's workplace assessor and trainer that she could develop farm plans, carry out marketing and budgeting, financial reporting, climatic risk management strategies and production plans for livestock.

Recognition of prior learning is an effective way of having experienced workers recognised for their skills and knowledge. If skills gaps are noted during the assessment, quality training can be provided to help students meet criteria. Recognition of prior learning is a key component of the Beattie government's three-year, \$1 billion SmartVET strategy. Through it we want to give 1,000 Queenslanders in key industries the opportunity to take the fast lane to new qualifications, and allow industries in urgent need of more highly qualified staff to upgrade their existing work force more quickly.

Our goal is to have the first 500 people qualified by June 2005 and the remainder by June 2006. Once again, the Queensland government—and TAFE, in particular—are leaders in the goal to address skill shortages and make Queensland the Smart State.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Retail Shop Leases Act

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for State Development and Innovation) (9.50 a.m.): Mr Speaker, I would like to draw your attention and the attention of members of the House to the proposed changes to the Retail Shop Leases Act 1994. The retail industry is our largest employer, with over 300,000 employees, and it contributes almost \$8 billion to the Queensland economy annually. For this reason it is vital to have the best possible legislation in place to protect the rights of Queensland's retailers.

For some time now, the government has been consulting with industry groups to address the concerns of the sector. The government's motives are very clear. We want to increase the equality between lessors and lessees and decrease disputes. We will also be putting in place a low-cost dispute resolution process. I am sure most retail store owners and operators would agree that settling disputes in faster, more cost-effective ways makes good business sense.

I recently released a policy review paper which examined proposed changes to the current legislation. I now table a copy for the benefit of the House. Copies have also been sent to the electorate offices of all members. The paper looks at mandatory minimum retail standards, the retail lease dispute resolution processes as well as obligations and responsibilities. But importantly, before these changes are made we are asking the industry itself to get involved. We want to know their concerns, their issues; we want to hear what is affecting them on the shop floor.

I would ask members of this House to get behind this process and encourage local retailers to submit their responses by 15 October. At the end of the day, this legislation review is being performed to

provide real, long-term benefits for the retail sector. Once again, the Beattie government is working with industry to ensure our legislation is effective, fair and, above all else, just.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Seniors Safety Handbook

Hon. J.C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.52 a.m.): I am pleased to inform the House that later today I will officially launch *Confident safe and secure living in Queensland—A handbook on safety for seniors*. I now table a copy of the handbook. When the Premier and I established the seniors task force in February, we were determined that it not be a talkfest, and today proves that.

Since the task force was formed, it has set about investigating options and strategies to reduce crime against seniors and reduce their fear of crime. While statistics show that seniors actually have a low risk of becoming victims of crime, the impact of crime can have a devastating effect on seniors and their friends and families. Some seniors are also debilitated by a fear of crime and this lack of confidence impedes their ability to actively participate in the community.

The handbook encourages seniors to live their lives to the full by providing simple, proactive strategies they can adopt to improve their own confidence and security within the community. It also includes practical advice and contact numbers for a broad range of relevant organisations including Home Secure Assist, Legal Aid Queensland, Seniors Enquiry Line and Relationships Australia.

Checklists feature throughout the handbook covering such things as a home security assessment, a property inventory, a personal safety strategy and a checklist to ensure your property is secure while you are on holidays. The handbook also includes some very practical tips from seniors themselves. Gladys, who is 84, suggests older women who live alone hang out some men's clothes when they do the washing or leave a pair of men's shoes outside the front door. Elder abuse is also addressed in the handbook, as is fraud awareness and some strategies to avoid becoming a victim of scams or shonky traders.

The handbook will be distributed through government departments and community groups in conjunction with talks to seniors. The launch of this 48-page handbook today coincides with Crime Prevention Week. It was my great pleasure on Sunday, along with the Police Commissioner and the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Paul Lucas, to officially launch Crime Prevention Week. The theme this year—'Crime prevention—it starts with you'—is a timely reminder that crime prevention is the responsibility of each and every one of us, not just the police.

Throughout Crime Prevention Week police will focus on promoting specific crime prevention strategies, including marine and motor vehicle security, personal safety and property and business security. I urge all members of the community to learn more about the crime prevention programs operating in their neighbourhood and to become involved in their local Crime Prevention Week activities.

For me, one the highlights of Crime Prevention Week will be the launch this afternoon of the seniors handbook. I would like to take this opportunity to thank members of the seniors task force for their hard work on this project and the Department of Communities and the Office of Fair Trading for their input. We all know that Queensland's population is ageing, so it is important that we as a community develop strategies to better support our seniors. I believe this handbook will be a valuable resource for seniors and will empower them to lead active and fulfilled lives.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Townsville Port Access Road

Hon. P.T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (9.55 a.m.): On 21 September, the federal MP for Herbert, Peter Lindsay, withdrew federal coalition support from the Townsville port access road—a vital project for both Townsville and the nation. Mr Lindsay said there was no federal money left for the port access road after the federal Transport Minister, John Anderson, said the coalition would fund the ring-road instead.

Both the Townsville ring-road and port access road are important priorities for the Queensland government. Townsville is one of Queensland's fastest growing ports. It also is a major Australian port with strong exports in cattle, minerals and sugar. Currently, there is no direct heavy vehicle connection between the Townsville port and the Townsville state development area—or to southern and western Queensland—except through the residential area of Stuart, Oonoonba and South Townsville. The port access road addresses this shortcoming.

In December 2003, subject to matching federal funding, the Queensland government committed \$8 million to construct stage 1 of the port access road, linking the Flinders Highway and Bruce Highway via the Stuart bypass. It also committed to planning, corridor acquisition and detailed design of stage 2, a new eastern access extension from the Bruce Highway to the Townsville port.

Peter Lindsay said federal funding for the port access road would be favourably considered if the Queensland government committed 50 per cent of the costs for the entire project—stages 1 and 2. In the *Townsville Bulletin* on 21 January, Mr Lindsay said federal money would be 'on the table tomorrow'. On 26 August 2004, Queensland sent a funding application to the federal government for 50 per cent for stages 1 and 2—that is, 50 per cent of \$115.2 million, or \$57.6 million.

If it wins government, the federal opposition has committed to match the \$8 million state government funds for the Stuart bypass. There has been other bad news for the port access road. The federal government recently said it does not consider the road to be part of the AusLink network, despite the road being an extension of the Flinders Highway to the Townsville port.

The Beattie government and Main Roads have always considered the port access road to be part of AusLink, and I am amazed the coalition is now trying to change the ground rules. We are not giving up on the port access road and we are not letting the federal government off the hook when it comes to funding it. This is not only an important industry development issue but also an important quality of life issue for the people of Townsville. Immediately after the federal election I will be contacting the new federal government to push for support for this project.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Wheat Varieties; Citrus Canker, Inspection Services

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (9.58 a.m.): The drought of recent years has severely reduced Australia's wheat harvest. Today, I am officially naming three new Queensland-bred wheat varieties that offer seeds of hope for the wheat industry in our state and across the country. These varieties combine good yield potential with disease and nematode resistance, as well as providing high quality wheat for consumer products. The varieties either have Australian hard or prime hard classification. The varieties will be available commercially in 2006. As with the tradition of naming Queensland-bred wheat varieties after Australian explorers, the new varieties are called EGA Gregory, EGA Wylie and EGA Wentworth.

EGA stands for Enterprise Grains Australia, which is a joint venture that the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries is a member of along with the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries, Agriculture Western Australia and of course GRDC. Toowoomba based Pacific Seeds successfully tendered for the licence to market these varieties both nationally and internationally. These new varieties represent a boon for the Queensland wheat industry, which was worth a gross \$260 million last season. However, there are benefits for growers further afield. More than 40 per cent of the area sown to Queensland-bred lines was outside the state and almost half this production was in South Australia. This extensive interstate production opens the potential for returns to the Queensland breeding program and Queensland wheat growers through royalties.

On a separate matter, I can advise all honourable members that the fee-free period for the department's inspection and accreditation services required by citrus growers and nurseries as a result of the detection of exotic citrus canker disease will be extended until the end of November. This fee-free period was due to end on 20 October. By the end of November, it is likely that continued inspection and certification services will no longer be required by the majority of Queensland's citrus fruit producers and citrus nurseries, with surveillance completed to demonstrate and regain pest-free area status.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mining Ban, Shelburne Bay

Hon. S. ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources and Mines) (10.00 a.m.): The Beattie government went to the last state election with a very clear policy to protect and enhance the cultural, environmental and natural heritage of Cape York. Furthermore, the Premier and I have also made it clear on numerous occasions that this government has no intention of allowing any mining in the Shelburne Bay area. That is why we did not allow the Shelburne pastoral lease to be renewed and why we passed special legislation through the parliament last year to cancel the two remaining mining leases over the area. Today I am delighted to inform honourable members of further action the government has taken to honour its commitment to protect the pristine sand dunes of Shelburne Bay.

Her Excellency the Governor has approved the Mineral Resources Amendment Regulation (No.1) 2004 which creates restricted area 320 over approximately 33,000 hectares of the Shelburne

Bay district. This regulation prohibits the further grant, and application for the grant, of a prospecting permit, mining claim, exploration permit, mineral development licence or mining lease over the area. Restricted area 320 adjoins the existing restricted area 168 which, on 30 August 1990, was placed over an area of approximately 59,000 hectares covering the rest of the Shelburne Bay dune fields. Together these two instruments protect the unique environmental and cultural significance of Shelburne Bay against all future mining activities. Further, a company which recently lodged an application to explore for mineral sands in the Shelburne Bay area has now withdrawn that application. This means that the largest and least-disturbed areas of active parabolic sand dunes in the world are now protected for future generations.

Shelburne Bay has long been identified by the government and independent scientists as an area of extraordinary environmental significance. It is also an area of Aboriginal cultural significance for the Wuthathi people. In studies spanning 25 years, the fundamental importance of protecting the area's unique natural environment has been highlighted. This is a case where environmental, conservation and cultural heritage values far outweigh any benefit to Queensland from mining, and that is why the Beattie government has taken all necessary steps to ensure that there will be no mining in this internationally significant area of Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Grandparents; Federal Election

Hon. M.F. REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.03 a.m.): Mark Latham was right on the ball when he announced an extra \$144 million for grandparents caring for their grandchildren at last week's campaign launch in Brisbane. This is an issue that affects 27,000 grandparents around the country and an issue on which the federal government has ducked for cover and wiped its hands. It is not a new phenomenon that grandparents often become the full-time carers of their grandchildren, yet they often struggle to make ends meet on very limited incomes. I would like to ask those members on the opposite side of the House why they have not been lobbying their colleagues in Canberra to give grandparents a fair go.

The Queensland government has urged Prime Minister Howard to address this issue, and it was our Premier who placed this on the COAG agenda earlier this year. It is essential that the federal government recognises not only its responsibility when it comes to this very important issue but also the vital role that grandparents play in the lives of many children across Queensland. Mark Latham's announcement means that grandparents would be entitled, under a federal Labor government, to access financial assistance under current Commonwealth government arrangements. Labor's policy would see the introduction of a new grandparenting allowance which would provide eligible grandparents with an additional \$20 a week for each child in their care to assist with the additional costs of child rearing. This is on top of benefits they will receive as part of Labor's tax and better family payment plan and Labor's promise of one day of free child care per week for three- and four-year-olds.

Many grandparents struggle to survive while caring for their grandchildren on very limited incomes. There are grandparents in our community who go without meals so that their grandchildren can eat. They put off seeking medical advice for themselves because there is no money to pay for medicines. There is no money for the extras that growing children need, and many receive no support at all from the parents of their grandchildren. In fact in some cases, they are abandoned by their biological or natural parents. These grandparents have raised their own children and now they are being called on to raise their grandchildren. They need our support, and they deserve our support.

Despite Queensland's efforts to have the federal government face up to its responsibilities to our grandparents, the Howard government has only paid lip-service to the needs of grandparents and the children in their care. Mr Latham is clearly prepared to lead on the issues that are important to not only Queensland grandparents but also all grandparents who care for their grandchildren. This additional payment for grandparents, combined with Mark Latham's other announcements, will help ensure that the grandparents and the children they care for will finally get support from the federal government after eight and a half years of absolute Howard government neglect. This recognition of the dedication of grandparents around the country is well overdue and well deserved. I would ask the opposition to get on the phone to Prime Minister Howard. Let us make this a deal for grandparents overall.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electricity Supply; Ergon Energy

Hon. R.J. MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (Minister for Energy) (10.06 a.m.): The approach of the storm and cyclone season highlights the need to ensure our essential services are ready to respond to emergencies, particularly in regional areas. That is why I am pleased to advise the House that regional

electricity supplier Ergon Energy is taking steps to improve its on-the-ground response to power outages and natural disasters in north Queensland. Ergon Energy's board has approved a pilot project which will see a branch of its customer contact centre established in Townsville. The Townsville centre will employ 15 people and is expected to be operating by Christmas. If the trial proves to be successful, the centre will be expanded. The centre will be linked to Ergon's new fibre optic cable network and will take northern region overflow calls from the existing Rockhampton centre. It will also have the capacity to take calls from anywhere in Queensland. This will provide greater backup capacity and flexibility for managing major interruptions to power supply as well as natural disasters such as severe storms and cyclones.

Under the new arrangements, Ergon Energy's National Contact Centre in Rockhampton will continue to be the main hub for receiving customer general inquiries and emergency calls. This is about improving services to customers, particularly those living in rural and remote areas. Ergon's decision to establish the centre is part of its response to the review of the electricity industry which was initiated by this government. It is also a Smart State response to tackling the challenges posed by servicing customers in rural and remote areas. Ergon Energy is investing \$19 million in the fibre optic network which will allow it to improve service delivery in a cost-effective way. About 300 kilometres of fibre optic cable is being rolled out in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Maryborough, Gladstone, Dalby and Bundaberg where Ergon Energy has major substations, offices, depots and major customer facilities. The network will improve communications and help Ergon get people on the ground where they are needed in the event of a major interruption to power supply, a disaster or cyclone. Townsville was chosen as the location for the communications centre because the regional network control centre and senior management support for north Queensland is located there. This decision by Ergon is a plus for regional Queensland. It also reinforces this government's commitment to ensure that services are delivered to Queenslanders, particularly people living in our regions.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Financial Planning Workshops for Women

Hon. D. BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women) (10.09 a.m.): Women, particularly those with children, are consistently among the lowest income earners in Queensland. Queensland women earn on average \$290.90 less a week than men earn; women working full time earn \$120.40 less a week than men working full time; and 91.5 per cent of people who receive the sole parent pension are women. But while women are earning less than men, we are also living longer. In 2003, there were 120 women aged over 65 for every 100 men in that age group. For every 100 men aged over 90, there were 250 women.

As wonderful as this news is in some ways for women who embrace life, nonetheless it makes financial security for women in their senior years a very big issue indeed. Many of the women approaching retirement age in the coming years have little or no access to superannuation. Addressing inequity for future generations of women is essential. In the meantime, it is absolutely vital that women know how to make their money work for them and that they plan for their retirement.

That is why the Office for Women will be running Economy Wise and Budget Smart workshops for women—to help them become savvier with their money. The pilot workshops will be run in six regional centres: Dysart, Hervey Bay, Kingaroy, Warwick, Yeppoon and in my own electorate of Cairns. The response to the workshops has been strong, particularly in Cairns. Before we had even advertised them, word had spread on the grapevine and more than 100 women in Cairns tried to enrol. Most of the other workshops already are full. If the pilot goes well—and all indications are that it will—we will be rolling out the workshops to 19 centres next year.

The workshops have been designed under the leadership of the Office for Women with the Australian Pensioners and Superannuants League Queensland and they will be delivered by Learning Network Queensland. These workshops will not be just information sessions but real, practical workshops. Women will learn and, therefore, in order to learn well they must be in small groups, and the numbers in these pilot workshops are restricted. Nonetheless, the important issues will be taught: budgeting, saving, debt management, investments and superannuation. Once participants have finished the course, these women should know how to make their money stretch further, how to make some of it, at least, work harder for them and have at least some put by for their senior years. When these six pilot workshops are completed, I look forward to reporting to the House on the outcomes of what I am sure is a well-targeted and practical initiative by the Office of Women.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Ambulance Week; Bundaberg Communications Centres

Hon. C.P. CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.12 a.m.): The Queensland Ambulance Service celebrated Ambulance Week late last month and it was a resounding success. With more than 100 events staged around Queensland, it was the biggest and best Ambulance Week on record. May I thank all members who took time to be involved and showed their support. The events included station open days, displays and demonstrations where people could learn about first-aid courses, information sessions on how and when to use 000, CPR for Life, the QAS baby capsule service and other QAS community focused programs. Ambulance Week also provided the opportunity to recognise and acknowledge the outstanding achievements of our much-loved paramedics, communications officers, QAS staff and, of course, our valuable volunteers.

One person in particular I would like to mention is 12-year-old Sean Gageler, who won the Queensland Ambulance Service's prestigious Young Hero of the Year Award for saving the life of his 39-year-old father who suffered a cardiac arrest. When his father collapsed, Sean immediately took control of the situation by phoning 000 and commencing CPR, which paramedics say is the only reason he is here today.

The Queensland Ambulance Service is the fourth largest ambulance service in the world and is recognised as a world leader. The QAS intends to keep progressing and part of this development depends on making the right decisions when it comes to our communications centres. Currently, the QAS north coast region currently operates communications centres in Bundaberg and North Buderim. To maximise the use of all available resources and technology, the QAS is developing plans to integrate regional communications to North Buderim. We have been through the same process before, when both the previous Ipswich and Mount Isa ambulance communications centres were moved successfully. It is anticipated that the initiative will link into the introduction of the interim CAD, or computer aided dispatch, system by December 2005. The Sunshine Coast communications centre was initially designed and built to accommodate all regional communications. Calls to incidents in Bundaberg for Queensland Fire and Rescue are already initiated from the Sunshine Coast call centre.

It was no surprise to see that the member for Burnett was his usual helpful self when he recently said in the *Bundaberg News-Mail* that his main concern was service delivery. I can assure the House that, with the advances in communications, services for the region will be even better. In fact this is the latest in a long line of improvements for service delivery in the area. Earlier this year I joined the member for Bundaberg in opening the new Burnett Coast Ambulance Station and commissioning a state-of-the-art vehicle, collectively worth over a million dollars. With the member for Hervey Bay, I also opened the new Howard Ambulance Station, and the new Hervey Bay Ambulance Station. Two weeks ago several new paramedics started at Hervey Bay, and there will be more on the way soon in the next wave of the 240 extra paramedics to be trained over the next three years on top of the 110 whom we employed and trained last year.

Our recent boosts in stations and other resources to the Bundaberg region clearly demonstrates that the QAS is committed to the ongoing improvement of service delivery. The integration of the communications centre is simply the next step in that process.

TRAVELSAFE COMMITTEE

Annual Report

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy—ALP) (10.16 a.m.): I lay upon the table the Travelsafe Committee's annual report for 2003-04. This report notes the work of the current and former committee on three significant inquiries over the past year. The first two inquiries examined ways to help young drivers avoid crashes and survive their first and most dangerous years of solo driving. Our current inquiry is looking at the role of driver fatigue in crashes.

I thank the ministers and departments, committee members and staff for their assistance and support. I also thank the many community groups and individuals who participated in our inquiries. I also take this opportunity to invite honourable members to the committee's fatigue symposium to be held in the Annexe on Friday, 22 October. Fatigue driving is an issue of particular relevance to each of us who work and spend long hours on the road. I commend the committee's report to the House.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Valuers Registration Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2004

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.17 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

That the Valuers Registration Amendment Regulation (No.1) 2004, (subordinate legislation No. 189 of 2004) tabled in parliament on 28 September 2004 be disallowed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Energex; Treasurer

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.17 a.m.): The common denominator in this whole Energex saga has been the Treasurer. The Treasurer has been there since day one. The Treasurer ignored the warnings. He raided the dividends. He says that he did not know that the electricity system was crumbling in Queensland. He says that he did not know that the blackouts were coming. He took no action against his Labor mate Scott Flavell, the head of the Office of Energy, who he says lost the Energex memo warning that the electricity system was about to crumble in Queensland. The Treasurer appointed the investigators to interview Greg Maddock. He appointed his Labor cronies to government boards.

Mr MACKENROTH: I rise to a point of order. I did not appoint the investigator. That is untrue and I ask it to be withdrawn.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I withdraw. The Treasurer appointed his Labor cronies to the boards. He appointed numerous Labor cronies to the boards.

Mr MACKENROTH: I rise to a point of order. In relation to Energex, I have appointed no new people to Energex. All of the people who were appointed to Energex prior to my becoming the minister were reappointed. I have appointed no new people.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Let the record of the state speak for itself on who the Treasurer has appointed to the government owned corporations throughout this state. Yet intriguingly, this man bears no responsibility.

Mr MACKENROTH: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I draw to the member's attention that most of the people appointed to the Energex board were appointed by the Borbidge government.

Mr SPRINGBORG: This man says that he bears—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! 'The honourable member', not 'this man'.

Mr SPRINGBORG: The Treasurer bears no responsibility. Let us cast our minds back 10 years. When the Treasurer failed Wayne Goss's very high standards of accountability and integrity, he was sacked.

Time expired.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Resume your seat!

Mr MACKENROTH: I was never sacked. I ask for that to be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will withdraw that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I withdraw. He resigned because he did not live up to the high standards of accountability and integrity set by Wayne Goss.

Mr MACKENROTH: He has not withdrawn the fact that he said I was sacked. I was never sacked. He should withdraw it. He didn't withdraw.

Mr Springborg: I did so. Check the record.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I think he did.

Mr Schwarten: He can't stand up. He hasn't got any backbone.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I find the words uttered by the minister to be offensive and I ask for them to be withdrawn.

Mr SCHWARTEN: They were intended to be. I withdraw, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will just withdraw, thank you.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I withdraw.

Cardinal G. Pell; Archbishop D. Hart

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN (Stafford—ALP) (10.21 a.m.): Church leaders have the right and responsibility to comment on all political and social issues, but to have credibility they must speak in accordance with the principles of their church, mindful of the aspirations of the community to which they have been appointed leaders.

As a person with direct personal contact with Catholic schools for almost 50 years and as a long-time active member of my local parishes, I am appalled at the disgraceful and hypocritical way that Cardinal George Pell and Archbishop Denis Hart attacked Labor's funding policy. The recent statement from Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart has simply endorsed a base earthly value—the grab for money by those who are already the best resourced. The two archbishops set aside gospel values and chose to involve themselves in party politics to help John Howard.

Measured against the teachings of the New Testament and the Australian notion of a fair go, Labor's education funding plan would be judged as just and fair. Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart have turned their backs on the teachings of the Vatican Council to deliver a political advantage to Australia's less-than-honest Prime Minister, John Howard. These two bishops must realise that in the post-Vatican era parishioners will not stomach partisan incursions into politics by the hierarchy.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Gregory will cease interjecting. Final warning.

Mr TERRY SULLIVAN: Many of the faithful are experiencing a loss of hope because they see the church focusing on many issues that are irrelevant in their lives. If Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart continue their one-sided forays into party politics, they will alienate the parishioners at an even faster rate. I table an open letter to the Australian Catholic archbishops—to those wise and compassionate men who know that the faithful are already voting with their feet. The laity will not support church leaders who are obsessed with pretentious regulation, much like the Pharisees of old. Rather, the faithful want an inclusive church that promotes gospel values in a manner that helps them in their everyday lives. Cardinal Pell and Archbishop Hart are failing to provide the leadership my church needs.

Labor Members, Gold Coast

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (10.23 a.m.): Last week in this House there was a debate on the state of the Queensland Health system. It is a matter of record that the six Labor members representing the Gold Coast never spoke and voted against the motion in the House. I have to tell the House that they have finally overcome their silence. But they did not find their voice; they found a pen. But they did not find six separate pens; they found one corporate pen. They wrote a letter to the editor of the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. These six members of parliament did not have the wit or the energy to write separately pointing out what they have done to represent the Gold Coast over the past couple of years. They had to rely upon someone in the minister's office to write a corporate letter to which they all put their signatures. The best thing they could come up with was the fact that they would take seriously—

Mrs REILLY: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I wrote the letter to the editor with some assistance from the ministerial office in relation to figures only.

Mr QUINN: That just confirms how lazy the other five members are! They had one person to write the letter, then the other five signed on the bottom. What they said in their letter is, 'We take seriously the concerns and issues raised by all constituents and lobby on their behalf.' That is all they have done in the time they have been in parliament. They have taken concerns and lobbied on constituents' behalf. Then they have the audacity to say that they are committed to a world-class health system! Anyone who knows of the appalling stories coming out of the Gold Coast with regard to health issues understands how little these six members have done in their time as members of parliament. Is it any wonder that they are labelled as the 'silent six'? All they can do is find one member of parliament with one pen to write a letter that they all signed.

Time expired.

Queensland Multicultural Festival

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (10.25 a.m.): This Sunday the Premier, Peter Beattie, will host a significant new multicultural festival at Roma Street Parkland, a festival that will showcase diversity in the Smart State and celebrate the world of difference that makes our communities more socially and economically vibrant. Performances across four stages will occur throughout the day, with the Premier introducing Christine Anu on the Channel 7 concert stage at 1 p.m. and Paul Kelly at 7.30 p.m. The festival will include an Australian citizenship ceremony on the celebration lawn at 10 a.m. I look forward to welcoming 200 new Australians to the festival following that ceremony.

The Chifley Labor government introduced the nation's citizenship system in 1949 and it was made non-discriminatory by the Whitlam government in 1973. This is in stark contrast to the politicised

efforts of federal Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Gary Hardgrave, whose efforts earlier this year cost taxpayers \$200,000. Mr Hardgrave presided over a citizenship ceremony at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne, which can only be described as an act of flagrant self-promotion. This follows the minister's well-publicised earlier stunts, including a ceremony in a Bunnings hardware store on the south side of Brisbane and another in a Qantas jet.

Citizenship is about people, it is about dignity and it is about pride. Sunday's ceremony will be conducted in a non-partisan manner and will celebrate the desire of migrants to fully access the rights and responsibilities involved in being an Australian. I invite all members to attend this great multicultural festival, let their hair down, have a post-election party and particularly join us on the Bollywood dance stage at 6 p.m.

Energex; Treasurer

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.27 a.m.): Last week in this parliament and again this morning we saw the absolute arrogance of the Deputy Premier in his idea of what it is to be accountable to the people of Queensland. This is the man they call 'Top Level' Terry—the man who has made all of the decisions about Queensland's electricity industry for the last four years. But he was not able to come back into this parliament last week, answer questions and be accountable to the people of Queensland for the disaster that has beset Queensland's power industry. 'Top Level' Terry did not have the courage to come into this parliament and face the questions. He had to leave it to the Premier, Queensland's greatest actor, who put on his sorry face, his sad face and his angry face. He came in here and tried to say that the issue is over. Queenslanders know that the issue is not over. Queenslanders know that they will be paying for this government's incompetence for many years to come. That incompetence will be visited on Queensland's electricity consumers this summer and for many years to come because of the failings of the Treasurer, who has been the common denominator in the Queensland power industry debacle for the last four years as he stripped Queensland's electricity corporations of the money they desperately needed in order to maintain their infrastructure in a bid to fix up his budget deficit.

The Treasurer is the man who should be taking responsibility, along with the other failed electricity ministers. Most of all, the Treasurer is the man who should be taking responsibility. He should be doing what he did when he was a failure in the Goss cabinet and resign—taking responsibility for the debacle rather than trying to shift blame on to people who were powerless to do anything about the government's deliberate policy to put in place a culture of producing dividends from Energex and a culture of turning those corporations into cash cows to boost the government's failing financial situation. The Treasurer is the man who should take responsibility. He should resign.

Time expired.

Breastfeeding, Discrimination

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (10.29 p.m.): What is it about some old men and women's breasts? Women breastfeeding in shopping centres, in cinemas and in other public places should be able to do so freely without objection and harassment from intolerant and disapproving members of the public. Despite discrimination against breastfeeding being unlawful, a Mitchelton mother of three was recently verbally assailed by an elderly man for feeding her newborn in Brookside Shopping Centre. I fear the low reporting of these incidents to shopping centre owners, and the Anti-Discrimination Commission understates the real level of this form of discrimination. Thankfully, society has come a long way since 1961, when the federal postmaster-general's department refused to list the Breastfeeding Association name in a telephone book because of the use of the word 'breast'. Since then, this excellent association has used the name 'Nursing Mothers' until a change to the 'Breastfeeding' name was successful three years ago.

In 1991 Queensland was the first Australian state to provide for the offence of discrimination against women for breastfeeding. At that time, the offence was limited to the area of the supply of goods and services. In 2002 the Beattie Labor government further strengthened the law to make discrimination on the grounds of breastfeeding unlawful in all circumstances. This protects thousands of women. In 2002 there were 48,000 births in Queensland. Approximately half of these women continue to breastfeed for about six months. How strange it is that we need a law to protect a woman from harassment for doing something as normal as breastfeeding. My Mitchelton mother boldly told her harasser to 'rack off' and a few other things. It is time for the intolerant to get over it and for women still experiencing the problem to report it to shop owners and to the Anti-Discrimination Commission.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for private members' statements has expired.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Energex; Mr D. Nissen

Mr SPRINGBORG (10.31 a.m.): My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. In recent days the Premier has claimed that Mr Nissen has lied. Mr Nissen has claimed that the Premier has lied. As the Treasurer knows the character of both of these men, will he tell the parliament who is telling the truth?

Mr MACKENROTH: I have had the opportunity to speak at length with the Premier in relation to this matter. There is one thing that I do know, and that is that the Premier prides himself on telling the truth. He prides himself on that. I have had the opportunity to work with the Premier over the last six and a half years in his ministry and there is one thing that I know: in that time I have never found that the Premier has ever said anything that was not the truth—never ever once. In relation to Mr Nissen, I have not spoken to him since I have returned from overseas. All I have is what was written in the paper. I do not particularly believe everything I read in the paper.

Energex; Mr G. Maddock

Mr SPRINGBORG: My second question without notice is directed to the Treasurer. When the Treasurer appointed the Treasury investigation team into Greg Maddock, did he personally give them any instructions and did he ask them to go in hard?

Mr MACKENROTH: I took a point of order earlier and the member was made to withdraw the fact that I did not appoint the Treasury investigation team.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr MACKENROTH: Well, I didn't. You cannot say that I did it when I did not do it.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader will come to order.

Mr MACKENROTH: What I did is this: I received a letter from the Auditor-General, who said in relation to these expenses that it was his view that they were personal in nature and they were not of the type envisaged by the terms of the contract of employment. He asked me for any comments that I may have. It has already been well documented by the Premier what happened after that, but in relation to the matters that transpired I did seek Crown Law advice. Crown Law advice was that, in relation to that, it appeared to me there might be grounds for the shareholding ministers to request the Under Treasurer to investigate under section 185 of the GOC Act issues arising, including whether the payment to the CEO was authorised at the time it was made. That is the action that I took and the other shareholding minister took.

Can I say two things: one, I think it is very hypocritical of the Leader of the Opposition to criticise me for taking the actions I did. I do not mind the political hoo-ha that comes with it, but there is one thing that I do object to: I object to the personal criticisms and attacks that he has made on the credibility of very good public servants who were asked to do a job. I do not believe any public servant should be attacked by members of parliament for simply doing their job, and that is what he has done. I support those people in the job that they did, and I think the attack that he made was totally unwarranted. In relation to the hypocritical nature of the review, if in fact we were not in the position where Greg Maddock had taken his own life, the Opposition Leader would be standing up here today demanding that I sack him.

St Mary's Catholic Church, Ipswich; Energex

Ms NOLAN: My question is directed to the Premier. St Mary's Catholic Church in Ipswich is an iconic building that is central to the life of many Ipswich people. Can the Premier detail if the state government has extended any support to this fine church's restoration?

Mr BEATTIE: I am delighted to answer the question because this year marks the centenary of one of Ipswich's—if not Queensland's—finest buildings. St Mary's Catholic Church of Ipswich in Elizabeth Street is in the midst of its centenary celebrations. So, too, is the city of Ipswich itself. The church is as old as the city. St Mary's, apart from being a gathering place for worship for 100 years, is very much in keeping with the centenary celebrations theme—the spirit at the heart of Ipswich. It truly is a magnificent sandstone building. It is distinctive and often appears in publicity material linked to the proud city of Ipswich.

Following a deputation from the member for Ipswich, Rachel Nolan, and also having been approached by the National Trust of Queensland and the St Mary's parish, I can say today that I have approved \$50,000 towards the restoration. This is matched by the Ipswich City Council. I want to thank the honourable member for pursuing this matter. A conservation fund—a combined working body of the

National Trust and the parish—was launched by Sir Llew Edwards in October 2003. The fund is co-chaired by Mary-Lou Gilroy and John Bowen. So far they, with the assistance of parish priest Father Peter Casey, have raised \$575,000.

This is from my own department's budget and is in keeping with previous support for other projects like the St John's Anglican Cathedral project in Brisbane, Nazareth Lutheran Church at Woolloongabba, St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Spring Hill and St Andrew's Uniting Church on Creek Street. St Mary's was opened and dedicated in October 1904. Virtually 100 years to that day the Archbishop of Brisbane, John Bathersby, celebrated the centenary mass last Friday night at St Mary's. I simply say well done to all those involved and extend my good wishes to the fund as it seeks more community support.

Before I sit down, I notice the Leader of the Opposition in his first question to my deputy made reference to comments that I have made. In light of his question, I table for the information of the House a letter I wrote to you, Mr Speaker, in relation to this matter. Bearing in mind that this is being pursued in the parliament, I believe it is imperative that I inform the House of my correspondence to you, and with your permission I table it for the information of the House.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers of Patricks Road State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove.

Energex; Treasurer

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is directed to the Treasurer and is one of a number of questions I would have liked to have asked the Treasurer last week.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! You will ask the question!

Mr SEENEY: When the special investigation unit was set up to investigate the expenses of the former Energex CEO, what powers was it given and why did those powers extend to the compulsory tape recording of interviews?

Mr MACKENROTH: The powers that they were given are quite clearly set out in the GOC Act.

Indigenous Communities, Development Opportunities

Mr O'BRIEN: My question is to the Premier and Minister for Trade. Can he please update the House about the recent work by the government to give remote indigenous communities new employment and economic development opportunities, especially in the mining and construction industries and in the arts?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for Cook for his question, and I thank him for his keen support for advancing indigenous people in this state and in this nation. Just as the government is working with indigenous communities to break the cycle of grog, violence and sickness, we are also striving with the communities to end welfare dependence.

In the vast Cook electorate we have recently invested a total of \$520,000 in two projects that are creating meaningful work for indigenous communities and establishing an economic base for future generations of indigenous people. A \$400,000 grant recently made by the Department of State Development and Innovation to the Skardon River Kaolin Mine will help establish a new export industry to employ up to 20 indigenous people. Down the track the mine could create more opportunities to employ up to 80 indigenous people.

Skardon River kaolin mine is a high-quality mineral resource that is expected to have a life of 12 years. Skardon River mining company, a subsidiary of Minerals Corporation Ltd, predicts the operation to earn approximately \$68 million a year. It has the potential to stimulate growth and economic activity and to be an important project for all people of the region. Other economic and social benefits that will flow from the government's assistance package include establishment of indigenous employment and training programs linked to the western cape training hub at the Weipa multipurpose facility, potential to develop a cluster of new industries around local indigenous businesses including aquaculture ecotourism and agricultural projects, and identification and establishment of stand-alone indigenous business opportunities in the Mapoon-Skardon River area. The mine's operators have entered an indigenous land use agreement with the local people to identify and establish businesses and training opportunities, and also to provide mine site employment.

A separate grant of \$120,000 from the Department of State Development will help establish a masonry block production plant at Injinoo near the tip of Cape York. This has the potential to create six jobs for indigenous people and to supply building projects in the five northern peninsula area communities. I thank the Minister for State Development for supporting these projects.

Arts and cultural projects are also producing excellent outcomes in terms of indigenous business development. For example, the Lockhart River Aboriginal Community Arts and Cultural Centre has become something of a phenomenon in the indigenous art world. The government is now assisting the

construction of a fine art print studio and expansion of the existing production space at Lockhart River. We have provided funds totalling \$400,000 for the centre. It is a hugely worthwhile project. I visited the centre in Lockhart River in March when it was little more than a glorified shed. Some people may argue that working in a garret stirs the creative juices and makes artists hunger for success, but I think the brilliant young artists of the Lockhart River Art Gang deserve better. Demand for exhibition-quality works from these rising stars is outstripping supply and some of them are gaining international note. Tenders are to be called in coming days for this project.

Energex; Mr G. Maddock

Mr HOBBS: I have a question for the Treasurer. Did the Treasurer or any of his staff inform the media about the investigation into Mr Maddock's expenses? If not, how did they get details of his investigation?

Mr MACKENROTH: What a question! It was on crikey.com this morning: 'The opposition should ask this question.'

Mr HOBBS: I rise to a point of order. Maybe the Treasurer would like to answer the question.

Mr SPEAKER: That is not a point of order.

Mr MACKENROTH: I told no media about the investigation. My staff told no media about the investigation. There were enough people in Energex who knew about the investigation who could have told people, so that information could have come from any other source. At one stage the information was provided to the police. The Auditor-General was aware of it. There were a whole range of areas where this information was available. But I can tell the member for Warrego—and I ask the member to please email it back to crikey.com—no, I did not. Perhaps the opposition should try to find a new line of questioning for tomorrow. I will have a look early to see what sort of answers I need.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Premier and Treasurer

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.43 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising. Earlier I indicated in my private member's statement that Mr Mackenroth had been sacked over previous indiscretions in the Goss government era. It is true, as the Treasurer indicated, that he resigned from his position. In answer to a question that I asked, the Treasurer went on further to say that, from his knowledge of the Premier's character, the Premier prides himself on telling the truth, that he had never found that the Premier had said anything that was not the truth. In the same article in 1991 that commented on Mr Mackenroth's—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have a point of order.

Mr MACKENROTH: I rise to a point of order. Before the member starts, I do not want the Leader of the Opposition to deliberately try to make out that I said something which I did not say. What I said is 'in the time that I have been in the ministry in the past six and a half years'. That is clearly what I said. It is not about what I said in 1991. That is not what is referred to today. There is no point of privilege in relation to what I said some 13 years ago. What I said is in relation to my term in the ministry over six and a half years, and I do not want this person to stand up in here and try to say that I said something which I did not.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Mr Speaker, I thought you made the rulings in this House. Mr Beattie said—
... he had to speak out because his position had been grossly misrepresented and he had come in for a vicious slur from Mr Mackenroth.

Mr SPEAKER: That is not a point of privilege.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Resumed.

Firearm Amnesty

Mr LIVINGSTONE: My question is to the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. On 1 July the minister announced the start of a six-month firearm amnesty. It is now halfway through the amnesty. Can the minister update the House on how successful this amnesty has been?

Ms SPENCE: I thank the member for Ipswich West for the question. I know that he supports the removal of unwanted and illegal firearms from our community. As part of Queensland's commitment to

the national agreement to reduce the number of firearms, we began a firearm amnesty in July. Halfway through that amnesty, I am pleased to announce some very pleasing results. After three months of the amnesty we have seen 824 firearms surrendered and a further 1,513 unlicensed guns have been registered. This means that a lot more guns have been removed from Queensland homes and, furthermore, are now subject to the strict licensing conditions on a weapon's licence.

The highest number of surrendered guns has occurred in the north coast region, where 179 weapons have been surrendered in three months. In the southern region we have seen 123 weapons surrendered, in the central Queensland region 109 guns have been surrendered, the Brisbane north and south police regions each received 96 firearms, 88 have been handed over in the far north, 68 in the north and 65 in the south east region.

We have three months to go in this general amnesty, which ends on 31 December. During this amnesty people are no longer being compensated for surrendering their firearms, but we are urging people—and I would encourage all members of parliament to do this in their own electorates—who may have unlicensed firearms to use this opportunity to call in at their police station where they can surrender their firearms anonymously.

The police are asking people to leave their guns in the car while they go inside and alert the officers at the station that they would like to come in and surrender a weapon. People are asked to ensure that the weapon is not loaded. People are asked, if possible, to remove the bolt or the firing mechanism and, if possible, to break the firearm into pieces.

At the end of this amnesty Queenslanders will be prosecuted for possessing unregistered firearms, and we do have stiff penalties in this state for possession of unregistered firearms. In fact, we have penalties of \$37,500 or 13 years in jail for the possession of illegal firearms. I would encourage all Queenslanders to use the final three months of this amnesty to take this opportunity to anonymously surrender their firearms. At the end of this period I am confident that there will be fewer firearms in Queensland homes, which means that there will be fewer firearms that are likely to get into the hands of criminals and fewer firearms that are likely to be used in domestic violence.

Energex

Mr QUINN: My question is directed to the Premier. Will the Premier take this opportunity to rebuild the Energex board by overruling the Treasurer and appointing two people with energy industry experience or will he simply allow the Treasurer to appoint two more of his mates to do his bidding and add to the scores already appointed to government boards?

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to take the Leader of the Liberal Party's question. Can I explain to the House the process of appointments so that everybody understands how it works. What happens is this: ministers write to me with recommendations of whom they want appointed to various boards, including all the GOCs. I discuss it with the ministers concerned and then they go to cabinet. No-one is appointed to any government board or organisation that I do not approve. It is very simple.

In my time in the ministry with the Deputy Premier and Treasurer he has always recommended people of a high standard whom I have supported. I have no qualms about that at all; let us get it on the record and upfront so that there are no illusions. Because my government has been about balance, I have also supported the appointment of these people: I supported the continuation of the Liberal Party former leader Terry White as deputy chair of the board of WorkCover; I have supported the former Liberal Leader and Deputy Premier, Sir Llew Edwards, as the chair of the Pacific Film and Television Commission; I have supported the former Liberal Leader David Watson, who was a member of the Racing Minister's recent racing industry integrity review of the industry; I have appointed, with the support of my colleagues, the former National Party Premier, Mike Ahern, as a special trade representative; I have supported the former Liberal lord mayor Sallyanne Atkinson as our special trade representative; I have supported the former Liberal Party Attorney-General, Sam Doumany, as the chair of the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority; I support the employment of former National Party Minister Craig Sherrin, who is now a senior executive in TAFE; I have supported former Liberal MP for Salisbury, Rosemary Kyburz, who is a member of the Children's Services Tribunal; I have supported Doug McTaggart—this was actually a decision made by QIC—former Liberal Treasurer Joan Sheldon's Under Treasurer of the department.

The list goes on. I have also supported the former Leader of One Nation in this House, Bill Feldman, who has come back as a police officer. I support people of merit regardless of their political affiliation. When I see a long list of so-called Labor mates, I have to say I regard all of those as my Liberal and National Party mates and I support them. I will support any Labor, Liberal or National Party mate who has ability and who can do a job for Queensland.

All we have seen this morning from the opposition is an attempt to suggest that there should not have been a proper and full investigation by the Auditor-General. Let me make it clear that while I am Premier of this state not only are we going to have honesty and integrity; we are going to do the right thing. If it causes us some pain along the way, so be it. I will not allow improper behaviour to exist

anywhere. I fully support what the Auditor-General did in this situation and I fully support the Treasury investigation. That is the end of it.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Government Owned Corporations Act

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10.53 a.m.): I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising. I believe in an answer to a question a moment ago the Treasurer deliberately misled the House. I table for the benefit of the House the relevant pages of the act that the minister referred to, the Government Owned Corporations Act, which does not outline the powers that I asked the Treasurer about.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of privilege.

Mr SEENEY: I will quote the relevant section.

Mr SPEAKER: But that is not a point of privilege.

Mr SEENEY: It says that the shareholding ministers of the GOC may request the chief executive of the department to investigate. It says the chief executive may delegate to an officer of the department to investigate. It does not outline the powers that the Treasurer and his investigative team—

Mr SPEAKER: That is not a point of privilege.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: We do not need to debate it.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Resume your seat!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Resumed.

Residential Tenancy Database Regulations

Mr FRASER: My question without notice is to the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing. Minister, almost half the residents who live in my electorate of Mount Coot-tha live in rental accommodation. Now that the residential tenancy database regulations have been in operation for over 12 months can the minister update the House on their success?

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is great to see that this side of the House is dealing with issues that really do matter out there in the community and that this side of the House actually does—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Toowoomba South will cease interjecting.

Mr SCHWARTEN:—concern itself with matters for battlers and not for people who tick off on several tens of thousands of dollars worth of expenditure for their mates. I congratulate the honourable member for standing up for the four out of every 10 people in his electorate who rent. I know the opposition is not interested in standing up for them. It is great to have people like the honourable member for Mount Coot-tha, who indeed fits into the 19 to 39 group—which is half of the electorate—who rent. This is a serious issue.

While I am on my feet, I want to thank the member for Kurwongbah; it was the member's research that backed this up. On 1 August last year I asked for a committee to be put together and as a result of that legislation was brought in for the first time in Australia and possibly the world where people had a right to a fair go on a database.

The results have been startling. Over the last 12 months there have been something like 2,500 calls to the RTA about this matter. There have been 208 appearances in the Small Claims Tribunal and of those 180 have been finalised. Eight out of 10 of those have resulted in people having their name withdrawn from the database. Eight out of 10 of those people who have made a complaint under the previous rules would have still been unfairly on a data base. This is indeed, as far as I am concerned, very progressive legislation that is being followed by other states in Australia. The fact of the matter is that the government was told that nothing could be done about this, but in true form this government did not shy away from it. The government faced up to this big issue and the tenants of Queensland are better off as a result.

I want to bring to the House's attention a document entitled *Handling Tenancy Disputes in the Small Claims Tribunal*. It is a very handy document for the people whom we represent—the battlers, not the people whom this lot over here have been harping on about for the last week or so. We support people who cannot look after themselves. I am delighted to be part of a government that really has its hat on its head and its feet on the ground.

Telephone Tapping Powers

Mr WELLINGTON: My question is to the Premier. With the increasing availability of new technologies now assisting people in the pursuit of illegal activities in Queensland, I ask: why will the government not support an extension of Queensland Police powers to enable Queensland Police to undertake more extensive phone tapping of people suspected in involvement in illegal activities?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I indicated yesterday when I was asked this question by the media, there is an interdepartmental committee that is currently considering this. The Police Minister, Judy Spence, has made a submission to cabinet and basically what is happening is this: the Queensland government has an interdepartmental committee having a look at it, it will consider what arguments are put forward by the police and the CMC—both of them support phone tapping powers in this state—that committee will make a recommendation and the government will make a decision early next year.

Brendan Butler, the head of the CMC, made reference to this yesterday when he tabled the crime report that I made reference to this morning. I have a lot of respect for Brendan Butler. I think he is a person above politics who has done a brilliant job. I put on record today my thanks to Brendan Butler for the magnificent job he has done, notwithstanding the difficult circumstances, as head of the CMC.

Nevertheless, in my view this problem is a little bit overstated. The world has actually moved on. If we look at what is happening internationally with paedophilia, for example, we see that it is international. That is why we gave the CMC bugging power for computers last year, I think it was.

If we look at paedophilia we find that it is all done internationally. Look at all those scumbags who were arrested in the last week for possession of dreadful child pornography. There is no excuse for this behaviour. There is no excuse for having this material or for going out and encouraging young children to be exploited in this way. I make no excuse for using the term I just did in relation to them. It is across borders: it is national; it is international.

The same goes for organised crime. Organised crime does not stop at borders any more—it is largely national—although with the Triads and various other organisations it is certainly international. What is the point I am making here? The point I am making is that nationally our police can access, across borders, bugging powers. The CMC and the police can access these powers not only for computers—which we have given it the power to do—but also for organised crime. Let us now look at drug operations. I gave some figures on this issue this morning. I think it was \$8.6 million worth of drugs for the operation last week and about \$17 million confiscated—whatever the figure was I gave before.

We can see they are very successful. The model we have now is joint operations. It is joint operations involving the Federal Police who have these powers with the state police and the CMC. So, to some extent, this argument has moved on. Therefore, when we come to the Mr Bigs, the major players, police can access those bugging powers through the national organisations, which we allow. Therefore, I believe that we are dealing with this problem head on. The figures that I referred to in the House this morning prove it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the member for Greenslopes, I welcome a second group of students and teachers from the Patricks Road State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove.

Clinical Waste Management Audit

Mr FENLON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister advise on the audit of clinical waste management and how Queensland Health will respond to the recommendations made in the audit?

Mr NUTTALL: I thank the honourable member for his question. At estimates on 21 July this year I gave an undertaking to have my department conduct an audit of clinical waste management in response to questions about waste management practices in Queensland Health hospitals. Today I table the report, the list of recommendations of the audit and a letter from the chief health officer.

I am pleased to advise that the audit shows a high level of compliance—90 per cent or above—by Queensland Health with legislative requirements for waste management. Areas of non-compliance detailed in the audit were primarily related to waste storage, signage on waste storage areas and recording waste volumes which have little direct impact on public health or environmental risk.

Some of our more remote facilities are experiencing difficulties in relation to access to licensed waste transporters. My department is in the process of fixing this with the aid of the Environmental Protection Authority, which has legislative control over waste management. The audit highlights a small

number of issues of process within our internal waste management system where improvements can be achieved. The audit made a number of recommendations which my department will implement.

My department has been active in segregating general waste from clinical waste in accordance with EPA legislative requirements as required by the Environmental Protection Waste Management Policy 2000 and the Environmental Protection Waste Management Regulation 2000. Clinical waste is defined by the Environmental Protection Waste Management Regulation 2000 as waste that has the potential to cause disease including, for example, the following: animal waste, discarded sharps, human tissue waste and laboratory waste. This definition of clinical waste is consistent with the definition within the national guidelines of the National Health and Medical Research Council for the waste management in the health industry.

The definition was arrived at following extensive consultation with the leading national experts in this field through the National Health and Medical Research Council process and in considering what are acceptable public health and environmental risks. The EPA has legislative responsibility for waste management and regulates waste management processes in both the public and private sector.

There are also National Health and Medical Research Council guidelines for waste management in the health care industry developed in 1999 and Australian standards for the management of clinical and related waste. Both are consistent with EPA legislation. The legislation requires government departments to have a strategic plan for managing waste.

While Queensland Health meets its legislative obligations for waste management, private sector compliance is a matter for the EPA. The EPA, in a letter to my director-general, described Queensland Health as one of the leading government departments in developing a waste management plan. Furthermore, a letter from the state's chief health officer, which I have tabled, advises that no significant issues were identified by the EPA or my office during the auditing of waste management and infection control procedures in private health facilities.

Interruption.

PRIVILEGE

Government Owned Corporations Act

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (11.05 a.m.): I rise on a point of privilege. The member for Callide rose on a matter of privilege relating to the Government Owned Corporations Act. I draw the member's attention to chapter 4 page 114 section 185(5) of that act, which states—

Without limiting subsection (4), the chief executive may direct the entity—

- (a) to give to the chief executive any information about the entity and its subsidiaries and proposed subsidiaries that the chief executive considers necessary or desirable in connection with the investigation; and
- (b) to permit persons authorised by the chief executive to have access to specified records and other documents about the entity and its subsidiaries and proposed subsidiaries that the chief executive considers necessary or desirable in connection with the investigation; and
- (c) to take steps that the chief executive considers necessary or desirable for the purposes of the investigation.

That is, to tape record the interviews. When I stood, the member for Callide said I should apologise. I would ask him to apologise, but I know that he will not.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Resumed.

Child Pornography

Mr JOHNSON: I direct my question to the honourable Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I refer to the 55 Queenslanders who have been charged with possession of child pornography. I know that the minister has been briefed on the matter. Can the minister now advise this House how many of these people have been previously charged with similar offences? If so, did they serve prison sentences?

Ms SPENCE: These are matters currently before the court so I will not comment on this particular case nor the previous offences. It would be inappropriate.

Cairns Education Renewal

Dr LESLEY CLARK: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education and the Arts. Minister, I note the Opposition Leader's recent criticism and ill-informed comments about the process to

renew state education in Cairns. Can the minister inform members where this process is up to and when she expects to make a decision on the proposals put forward by the community?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. As the member and other members with electorates in the Cairns region would be very aware, Education Queensland is currently undertaking a significant education renewal process. This process was announced by me via press release on 18 June. We announced a new model to support education renewal in local areas. Cairns is the first area to go through this process.

It is important that schools are positioned to embrace the government's education reforms in early, middle and senior years of schooling. Community consultation occurred between July and September. The region was broken up into three areas, with reference group meetings held in each. Those reference groups comprised a principal, P&C representatives, school council chairs from each state school in the area and other key stakeholders.

The issues raised during the consultation process included the sale of surplus assets of the Education Department, the location of the Smithfield State High School senior school at James Cook University, the possibility of a dedicated middle school in years 6 to 9 at Redlynch to provide an integrated prep to year 9 learning environment and the future of Cairns North State School in light of its declining enrolments. The proposal about the possible closure of Cairns North State School inevitably has created quite a bit of debate and media coverage. I can understand why parents would have a great deal of interest and concern about that proposal. Cairns North State School has 81 primary enrolments with the capacity to take more than three times that many students.

I was very disappointed to see the Opposition Leader weigh into the debate with comments in the *Cairns Post* to the effect that 'if sold that money would be gobbled up to service other needs'. These comments are plain wrong and ill informed. The government made a very clear public commitment. Any funds realised through the sale of assets that are surplus to requirements will be reinvested back into education initiatives in the Cairns region.

I am waiting for a report on the outcomes of the consultation on the full range of issues and proposals raised by the department and the subsequent advice. I will announce the government's response once I have carefully considered the information and make that available as soon as I can. The report of the consultation will be on the Education Queensland web site. There is nothing to hide on this issue. The Opposition Leader has been a loud and constant critic of the renewal process, with attempts to undermine it with dishonest and misleading scaremongering.

It stands in stark contrast to the position of the member for Toowoomba South, who understands the impact that changing demographics can have on a school. In August in this parliament he raised the issue of declining enrolments at Toowoomba South and whether the school should be closed to provide expanded opportunities for students. I congratulate the member for Toowoomba South for having the vision and commitment to education in his area. I only wish that he could talk sense to the Opposition Leader, who is dictating National Party policy on schools. Why is it good enough in Toowoomba South for us to look at renewing public education but it is not good enough for the children and families of Cairns? The Opposition Leader is just wrong on this. He is ill informed and his comments will not be informing my views.

Energex; Government Owned Corporations

Dr FLEGG: My question is to the Premier. Given that in response to the earlier question from the Leader of the Liberal Party the Premier refused to commit to put members with energy industry experience on the board of Energex and given that the Auditor-General has found damning evidence of poor corporate governance concerning Energex in no fewer than three separate reports, I ask: will he now bring GOCs under the CMC and FOI regimes in order to restore confidence, increase transparency and boost accountability?

Mr BEATTIE: I want to make a very clear point at the beginning of this—and I must admit that I am going on memory here—but my recollection is that the new chairman, Ross Dunning, is an engineer and to the best of my recollection Gordon Jardine is also an engineer. So the new CEO and the new chairman are both skilled people who are both engineers, and I think that that is one of the reasons why they were the appropriate appointments. So let us be clear about that.

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: After the member's performance today, I would be very quiet if I were him. Actually, I should not say that. Jeffrey, you are a great help to us and I should not say that.

The second point I want to make is that there are two board vacancies, because while the chairman's position was filled—and there were three vacancies—there are still two. We have made no decisions in relation to those, and they will go through the normal process that was identified before and we will find the best two people that we can to carry out this work. In terms of the appointment program, we need things to settle down a little and then consult with the chair. I will hear from the two

shareholding ministers, but the board is a functioning board. It has a new chairman and there is a new CEO. They need time to settle down, but it is a functioning board and so there are no difficulties or issues there.

The last part of the member's question relates to whether we would change the CMC Act to broaden the base to have responsibilities in relation to GOCs. I have not, to be perfectly frank—

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Yes. The difficulty is that I have not given that great consideration. The reason why it has been rejected previously is that there would be a significant disadvantage for government owned corporations that are supposed to act, as members know, as companies in a corporate commercial way. If we simply allowed the CMC to apply to government owned corporations only as opposed to all corporations, then our GOCs would be disadvantaged. That is part of the issue that we would need to grapple with. If the member is suggesting to me that the CMC should have unilateral power to apply to all corporations, that is a different issue. Philosophically, any concerns that I may have on this point would be removed. So they are issues that we would need to examine. My initial reaction would be that we would not want our GOCs to be commercially disadvantaged. That is my initial reaction. I give an understanding to the parliament today that they are issues that I would need to consider. If my view changes based on what I have said to the member, then I will advise the House.

Wine Industry

Mr ENGLISH: My question is to the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. Premier Peter Beattie committed this government to helping the state's wine industry when he appointed the member as the Wine Industry Development Minister and she subsequently established a Wine Industry Development Division within her department. Can the minister advise the House of progress on her stated aim of delivering an industry development strategy?

Ms KEECH: I thank the honourable member for the question and commend him for his absolute passion and enthusiasm in supporting the Queensland wine industry. The Beattie government is preparing an assault on the domestic and international wine markets with Queensland's first wine industry development strategy endorsed yesterday by cabinet and released for public consultation today. This draft strategy is a very important step in taking Queensland wines to Australia and the world. The industry is already experiencing rapid growth, with the number of wineries quadrupling in the past decade, and Queensland now producing many top quality wines.

The aim of this strategy is to harness the industry's enormous potential and ensure that Queenslanders reap the economic benefits. This strategy will contribute to a dynamic and competitive wine industry by generating more jobs, export opportunities and wholesale sales. It will encourage innovative partnerships, particularly in the wine tourism sector. As a government, we want the industry to achieve sustainable viticulture and better wine production technology and practices. We will create a competitive business environment characterised by strong partnerships with an investment and growth focus supported by effective regulation. We will foster robust industry links with the tourism and hospitality industries and we will promote smart sales by realising export potential to complement local and domestic markets.

This draft strategy is further proof that the Beattie government is delivering for the wine industry. It is the result of lengthy industry consultation, a series of nine forums in major wine producing regions—and many members attended those, and I thank them for that—and a collaborative approach to delivering key outcomes for the industry. We have proposed key actions across nine industry development areas including viticulture, wine production, education and training, investment, branding and marketing, partnerships tourism, export, and wholesale sales. I encourage the industry to provide feedback on this draft soon.

We are entering an exciting new era for this industry, with strong partnership between the government and industry at the heart of this strategy. Although the government will play a critical leadership role in the coming five years, it will be the industry members and peak bodies that will champion and drive the growth and development of the Queensland wine industry in the long term. The Beattie government will continue to work closely with the industry to deliver key outcomes and ensure that Queensland wine gets the recognition that it truly deserves.

Training Organisations, Far-North Queensland

Ms LEE LONG: My question is to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, the number of employment training organisations in far-north Queensland has dramatically decreased in recent times despite an increasing need, and I ask: will the minister explain what the future direction of training is? Does he still want private training providers, or will the future focus be directed towards TAFE?

Mr BARTON: That is actually a very good question, and let me try to give an answer that befits that question. Very clearly, we are strongly in support of increased training both through the TAFE network, which is of course a state owned and provided trainer and a long-serving provider trainer, and also through the private sector through registered training organisations. Far-north Queensland certainly is an area where the great bulk of training is conducted by TAFE, although it would probably be fair to comment that most of the traditional training right across Queensland, if we are looking at the traditional trades, is predominantly conducted by TAFE organisations and that registered training organisations—while they have moved into many of those areas, and the motor industry is one that I think particularly of in this case—have moved very rapidly into the traineeship type area or what is referred to by the federal government as new apprenticeships. Of course, one of the areas that the Beattie government did dramatically increase the budget for this year was for training overall. There were some major initiatives that we put into place with record budgets for training. There was also a record budget to address the skill shortages issue that is certainly out there which we are very concerned about and which we believe we are taking significant action on.

We also significantly increased the amount of funding that is provided for user choice—in other words, for funding to go to private training agencies that are registered training organisations—to the point where even Brendan Nelson, when he and I were both in Cairns several months ago for the opening of the new annexe for Aviation Australia, which had been partly funded by both the federal government and the state government as well as the private aviation sector in Cairns, congratulated me and the Queensland government on the very big increase in user choice funding. So I say to the member that this government's strategy is not only to support training and improved training and increased training through TAFE but also to increase training through registered training organisations. We certainly have a good look when registered training organisations either fail or simply wind up and close their doors. In many cases, we take very significant action to support private providers to keep their training systems in place. Otherwise, students lose their money and, in some cases, cannot complete their training.

There certainly has been a reduction in the number of RTOs in the far north. A bigger percentage of training is conducted by TAFE, but that should not be an indication or reflection that we do not fully support an increase in training by registered training organisations in the private sector.

Manufacturing Industry, Federal Government Support

Mrs ATTWOOD: I direct a question to the Minister for State Development and Innovation, and I ask: can the minister inform the House of the Howard government's poor track record on support for manufacturing?

Mr Johnson: Tell the truth now, Tony. Tell the truth about how good they are—how they've kept the interest rates down over the last nine years.

Mr McGRADY: I thank the member for Gregory for his comments and also I thank the member for Mount Ommaney for a very, very good question. This question allows me, on behalf of the government, to place our economic credentials before this House. We lead all other states in economic growth and our unemployment rate is the lowest since current records began.

Mr Johnson: Thanks to the federal government.

Mr McGRADY: I will come to that in a second. Business investment increased by more than 30 per cent in the years 2002-03 and we have helped secure more than \$25 billion in capital investment over the past three years.

Mr Johnson: Thank God for Peter Costello.

Mr McGRADY: I will come to that. Mr Howard and his ministers claim to be superior economic managers. Let us examine their treatment of the manufacturing industry. They have left the Australian manufacturing industry out in the cold. At a recent meeting of manufacturing industry ministers, the federal minister did not even bother turning up. It is little wonder that since the year 2000, 50,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost nationwide. On top of that, export growth for advanced manufacturing goods has slumped from 14.5 per cent in 1996-97 to 5.3 per cent last year. For the past eight years, the coalition has done nothing whatsoever for manufacturing, despite consistent calls for action from both the industry and, of course, the states.

The Queensland government supports federal Labor's agenda for manufacturing, because its policies include a \$25 million centre for excellence in advanced manufacturing, an advanced manufacturing council, a 10-year national manufacturing strategy to revitalise the manufacturing industry and a restructured and revived federal industry department with a renewed focus on the manufacturing industry. Federal Labor is offering new solutions and it is prepared to work with the states on this and not, which is certainly like the current government, against us.

In contrast, as both Minister Barton and Minister Bligh pointed out last week, Mr Howard's solution is to duplicate systems that are already in place. This is not the only area in which Mr Howard

has dropped the ball. As my colleagues would agree, he has dropped it on the areas of education, agriculture, housing and, of course, on sugar.

Queensland Rail, Forward Bookings

Miss SIMPSON: I refer the Minister for Transport and Main Roads to the allocation of forward bookings on Queensland Rail services that are usually provided to tourist operators in time for brochures to be printed and forward accommodation bookings to be made by September each year. Operators have been told by QR that they cannot supply allocations because they are waiting on a decision by the minister about these allocations. Interestingly, though, the government's Sunlover tours have their allocations. I ask: why is the minister sabotaging the tourist industry by not releasing these allocations? Is it because he is going to cut services on the QR Traveltrain network?

Mr LUCAS: The latter suggestion by the honourable member is ridiculous in the extreme. This government realises the value of Traveltrain, in particular in relation to our tourist market. Despite criticisms from other places, I might add, the Cairns tilt train, for example, is a very fine initiative of this state government. Of course, our commitments to the other tilt train and our long distance train travel is something that we hold very dearly.

At the moment, I cannot remember the exact amount of the CSA that we provide for Traveltrain, but it is significant. Recently, I was at regional community forums in Longreach talking to a number of tourist industry consumers, for want of a better word, about what they see as the pros and cons and shortcomings of our services. I am always happy to listen to people about things.

In relation to the honourable member's question about the allocation of forward bookings, I will get some information and get back to her on that. She could have easily asked me that question earlier.

Land Administration

Ms MALE: My question is directed to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Can the minister advise the House whether Queensland's reputation for having a world-class land administration system is creating export opportunities for the Smart State?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Queensland's international reputation for excellence in land administration resulted in Brisbane hosting the World Land Registration Congress in November 2001. Our reputation for having one of the world's best land registration systems is also creating export opportunities for the Smart State.

Today, I am pleased to announce that Queensland will play a key role in land reforms being undertaken by the People's Republic of China. China, which has a vast land mass and a vast population, wants to use Queensland's system as the model for its modernisation of land administration and registration. My department is working closely with the Chinese Ministry of Land to develop a customised program for key provincial, local government and municipal officers as they proceed with the land reforms that are part of China's move towards a more market based economy.

In fact, we have just signed a five-year contract with the People's Republic of China to train Chinese officials in the land administration methods that we use in Queensland. Starting next month, two groups per year of up to 25 participants per group will come to Brisbane to attend training courses at my department's land centre at Woolloongabba. They will be taught the skills needed to implement China's commitment to land reforms at national, regional and local levels. The program will focus on areas such as legal and taxation frameworks, effective acquisition and title registration processes, and associated legislative reviews. The first training courses will cover topics such as effective land registration systems, the Torrens titling system, land tenure and community titles development, and electronic processes for registration with both theoretical and practical components. Gaining an understanding of how Queensland's land registration system and legislation works in practice will be a fundamental part of that course.

Apart from the value of the training agreement itself, there are also potentially enormous flow-on benefits for local industries, including those involved in community development and land management. My department is working closely with local firms and other bodies to ensure that the advantages and opportunities that we are creating for Queensland are realised. This training contract is a testament to Queensland's reputation for excellence in land management and provides a solid base for us to export our Smart State expertise to the world.

Mudgeeraba Special School

Mr HOPPER: I direct a question to the Minister for Public Works and Housing. According to information passed on to me, I refer to a recently constructed undercover area at the Mudgeeraba Special School which, in fact, is a carport with four poles—and I have a photo of it here which I will now table—a roof and a painted wall at one end. I ask: can the minister indicate if this information is correct and, if so, why this construction has cost taxpayers \$100,000?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I do not have the details of that matter with me here today. Part of the—

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I know that opposition members hate Q-Build and that they are out to undermine it every chance they get. I do not carry around with me details of every one of the two million projects that have been undertaken since I have been minister. I know that it is unreasonable that I do not do that, but it is a fact of life.

I know where those opposite stand with regard to Q-Build. Every chance they get, they undermine it. Every single chance they get, they are on its back. There is no doubt about that whatsoever.

Mr Reynolds: They want to privatise it.

Mr SCHWARTEN: They do want to privatise it. These sorts of issues only serve to reinforce the point that they do that when they have a chance.

Mr Horan: No accountability.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Is the member going to go outside and call Bob Bentley a pimp? When he is game to do that, he will show that he has some courage.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The honourable gentleman interjects from a position of cowardice. He continues to use this parliament, as we have seen here this morning, to defame people when he does not have the guts to go outside and say it outside. So I place no store in his credibility.

With regard to the complaint I have received here this morning, I will undertake to get back to the honourable member by close of business today.

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

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Energex; Treasurer

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 a.m.): The Deputy Premier and Treasurer failed the test of accountability in this parliament this morning when he stood in this place and implied that if he had not done what he did in relation to the investigation into Greg Maddock then we would have stood in this place and asked for Greg Maddock to be sacked. That is an absolutely scurrilous, repugnant assertion from the Treasurer. Greg Maddock did nothing wrong. Greg Maddock was found to have done nothing wrong. Why would we call for an innocent man, who had done nothing wrong, to be sacked? That was a disgraceful assertion from the Treasurer and an act of a desperate man.

This morning we also saw the Treasurer cut Don loose. The other day when he jumped off his plane from Europe—maybe he was tired and emotional and jet-lagged—he said that he hoped the fallout from this whole affair involving Don Nissen would not affect their relationship and that Don and he could continue to be mates. When he was asked in this place this morning about who was telling the truth and who had lied—either the Premier or Don Nissen—the Treasurer stood in this place and said that he had known the Premier for six and a half years and that in six and a half years in cabinet he had not known the Premier to not tell the truth. That says to me that Don was not telling the truth—that Don has been cut loose, that Don is the scapegoat. Is there any way on earth that the Treasurer's former good mate Don Nissen will continue to be his mate, because he was cut loose in this place this morning by the Treasurer? This is what the Labor Party does. The Labor Party appoints these people and then these people become expendable. Its mates become expendable. Let us see how Don Nissen reacts to that.

Today in this place we saw the most extraordinary reaction from the Treasurer when I rose on a matter of privilege suddenly arising about what the Premier may have previously said. It was an extraordinary reaction. He stood up and said, 'The Premier was really only telling the truth for the last six and a half years but I will not go into what he had been doing before.' I refer to an article in the *Courier-Mail* of 14 December 1991, which goes into the events leading up to the resignation of Terry Mackenroth following on from the travel entitlements affair. The article contains quite a blistering interchange between Mr Mackenroth and Mr Beattie. It states of Mr Beattie—

He said he had to speak out because his position had been grossly misrepresented and he had come in for a vicious slur from Mr Mackenroth.

Maybe that is what Mr Mackenroth was referring to—that in the past Mr Beattie has not been honest, that in the past things between them have not been all beer and skittles as they have been making out in recent times.

How would Paul Lucas feel after reading the paper this morning? Both Paul and Anna desperately want to be Premier. If the Premier wants to work out which Labor mates are getting in there and starting to do the numbers, then he has to get used to the smell of Anna Bligh's perfume in his nostrils because he needs to look no further than that. We now know that to guarantee your chance to become Premier of Queensland you buy the Premier a takeaway curry. That means that you have consoled him, that you have sat there in his hour of need—in his most desperate hour—and that you are going to become Premier. I say to Paul Lucas: imagine the heights you can reach if you buy the Premier a takeaway pizza! Goodness knows where you will end up! You might even end up being trade commissioner to Los Angeles, London or somewhere like that. When I walked into my office this morning my staff lined up and said to me, 'We went and got you a takeaway kebab. Does that mean we are going to get a promotion?' Tomorrow I expect a whole range of apples lined up on my desk from all of these people expecting promotion. What a bizarre way to run the state: you buy someone a curry and you are in line to become the Premier of Queensland!

Let us look at where Mr Mackenroth failed. We do know that Mr Mackenroth is the common denominator in the whole Energex saga. He has been there from day one. He was appointed in July 1998. He has held very senior positions since that time. He has been Treasurer for a long time now—certainly right throughout 2001—and during the second and the third Goss terms. That was the case except for the last term. In that case the Premier was acting—certainly acting. The Treasurer has been there since day one. He ignored the warnings. He raided dividends from those corporations—billions of dollars in dividends from Energex, Ergon and other government owned enterprises around Queensland. The total is getting up towards \$10 billion. I will be having more to say about that in the future.

The Treasurer also says that he did not know that the electricity system was failing and crumbling. He also has us believe that he did not know when the blackouts were coming. We know that Mr Popple warned the government in the late 1990s that the system was in crisis and in chaos, but these people, who had been charged with the responsibility of running Queensland at the very highest level, did not know. They did not know or they ignored it. So they were warned by Mr Popple, by the Nationals and by a whole range of industry insiders, but they continued to ignore the warnings. We now have in parliament four former and current energy ministers and the Treasurer, who have been promoted and absolved from responsibility. Who will take ultimate responsibility? We have people being sacked and people resigning from the board of Energex, but no government minister has been lined up. At the very worst we can say that they are involved and at the very best we can say that they are incompetent. They would be incompetent if they did not know about it and they did not act.

Who is the best mate of the Treasurer? Scott Flavell, the then head of the Office of Energy, who we have to believe lost that infamous memo written on 25 August last year warning that the electricity system in Queensland was in crisis. It was lost. It got to the Office of Energy—or so the Treasurer and the others would have us believe—and it got no further. What action has been taken against Scott Flavell or his wife, Loretta Boman, who subsequently held that position? We are also to believe that they were the only ones with enough courage to pose with Kevin Rudd on the famous election brochure that was distributed. It is typical of the way this government does business.

Mr Mackenroth is ultimately responsible for the investigation into Mr Maddock. He appointed his Labor cronies to government boards. On three occasions he ignored the recommendations of the Auditor-General when it came to further probity guarantees and strengthening of probity in GOCs. The Auditor-General has warned him for years in relation to the taking of special dividends. The Treasurer did absolutely nothing. But, when issues were raised about the CEO and his expenses, they literally broke their legs to go in there and investigate him. When it involved the government and the government's complicity in potentially illegal acts in taking those special dividends, the Treasurer ignored the Auditor-General's warnings.

The Auditor-General, in his report on the Greg Maddock saga, on three occasions warned the government—that is, the Treasurer—that it needed to tighten oversight arrangements and accountability arrangements. They failed on all accounts. He said that he would have to keep monitoring it. That is what he has to do. That is the hallmark of the Treasurer; so he has failed. If he had performed like this in the corporate sector, he would have been out on his ear. When he failed Wayne Goss's very high standards of accountability and integrity, he had to resign. I simply say this to the Premier: Mr Beattie, you had better have exactly the same standards of accountability and integrity as Wayne Goss had and demand the resignation of Mr Mackenroth, because he failed years ago, he is failing now and the people of Queensland who are left in crisis with our electricity system crumbling are paying the price for his incompetence.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! Before calling the honourable member for Mudgeeraba, I welcome to the public gallery students and teachers from Patricks Road State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove.

Labor Members, Gold Coast

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (11.41 p.m.): Last week the member for Robina released a tirade of personal abuse at the six Labor members representing Gold Coast seats, including me, and he still has nothing more constructive to say when he comes into this House today than launching further personal attacks. While he is launching personal attacks for cheap political purposes, the Gold Coast Labor members are busy taking up the issues raised by the media and our constituents in relation to our hardworking local hospital. The letter to the editor was a team effort—a collaborative effort—and one which I coordinated but wrote with the assistance of my Labor colleagues, and it is just one communication in relation to the whole issue. It is called teamwork and it is a concept I know is foreign to the Liberal Party.

Let us acknowledge the great work undertaken on the Gold Coast each and every day. During the last year Queensland Health admitted a total of 41,834 patients into our hospitals on the Gold Coast.

Mr Quinn interjected.

Mrs REILLY: Perhaps if the member for Robina listened for a moment he might learn something. There were 47,396 attendances at the emergency department and there were also 39,081 dental treatments. That is providing quality care for the residents of the Gold Coast. However, I am not happy to simply rely on the good work that is already being done. The Labor team on the Gold Coast work together and with our ministers to get results.

We have been meeting regularly as a group and as individuals with the Premier, the Health Minister and his staff, and we have been doing this for years to continue to lobby on behalf of our constituents and all Gold Coast residents to make our health services even better. Just one of the results of that lobbying was the election commitment to establish an accident and emergency department and intensive care unit at the Robina Hospital and a coronary care unit. It is a \$9.5 million pledge, it requires an additional \$17.5 million in recurrent running costs, it will be open by 2007 and it includes the employment of an additional 97 nurses.

We recently sought and received a commitment to retain funding for the Gold Coast branch of the Mental Health Association which will ensure that a local presence is maintained for this vital community service. In fact, over the past three years, since the Gold Coast has placed its faith in Labor members, we have delivered massive increases for health services such as \$55 million to upgrade the Gold Coast Hospital, including a \$20 million enhancement of the rehabilitation endoscopy and orthopaedic outpatient areas, but we are not content to simply rely on our past achievements.

This year, as part of a \$5.31 billion Health budget, the Beattie government has committed \$2.5 million for a cardiac catheter laboratory on the Gold Coast; \$300,000 for a birthing centre; and \$1.8 million on new capital equipment including a new CT scanner, four new operating tables, two new ventilators and a new dialysis unit. The Gold Coast is the third busiest hospital in the country.

In recognition of our growth and increasing pressure on A and Es, during the election we announced that five GP-style clinics will be located alongside A and Es in public hospitals. This plan will relieve pressure on A and Es by providing a bulk-billing service to category 4 and 5 patients, who make up 40 per cent of presentations. I, along with my Labor colleagues—the members for Southport, Broadwater, Burleigh, Gaven and Albert—want to see one of those clinics on the Gold Coast, where it is needed most. We have invited the Premier to visit the Gold Coast Hospital and to spend some time with us in the emergency department as these decisions are being made regarding how, when and where these GP services should be located.

In 2002 I was a member of a ministerial task force which investigated the growing pressure on the Southport A and E. We tried to get a clinic of this type up and running then, but, without the support of local GPs who would have had all their overheads covered and who simply had to turn up on a roster and walk away with the Medicare rebate, it could not be done. That is right, not one GP put their hand up. We do not deny that there are problems, pressures and stresses on our hospitals and our hardworking staff, and we welcome the public debate and awareness brought on by the *Gold Coast Bulletin* because it has brought to light the scale of an issue which is enormously difficult to gauge by occasional letters or complaints to our respective offices. We will be keeping a close watch on developments at the Gold Coast Hospital because our commitment is ongoing and constant and, unlike the Liberal member's fleeting attention span, we are focused on getting results, not cheap shots and headlines.

ABC NewsRadio, Townsville

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.46 a.m.): Townsville is well served by commercial radio stations and by ABC local radio, along with the quality ABC Radio National, Classic FM and Triple J networks. But, like most other regional Australian cities, Townsville continues to be denied access to ABC NewsRadio. Regardless of where in Australia people live, they should be able to tune into this important and highly commended radio service provided by the national broadcaster. It is more

than 10 years since NewsRadio started, but in Townsville and elsewhere in north Queensland we still cannot listen to it. While the regions are being penalised by reason of geography, anyone who resides in or close to the capital cities of Newcastle, the Gold Coast and Gosford can listen if they so choose.

The Howard government has steadfastly refused to fund an extended coverage of NewsRadio despite the fact that ABC management and NewsRadio management and staff are reportedly anxious for that to happen. I am somewhat sceptical of a statement that was issued by the National Party candidate for Kennedy at the weekend that a re-elected coalition government would expand ABC NewsRadio coverage. Since when? This was a statement coming out of the blue without anyone in government backing it up. Given the coalition's past record on NewsRadio and its disregard for people living in regional areas, the statement must be taken with the proverbial grain of salt.

If what has happened—or perhaps I should say what has not happened—with NewsRadio is any guide, it is highly likely that we would still be waiting for Triple J in Townsville had it not been extended to the regions during the time of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. The same goes for SBS, which was also able to broaden its coverage area when Labor was in office. In the *Australian* on 1 July there was an account of NewsRadio's 10th birthday. Its headline read 'Birthday Wish for ABC's NewsRadio'. It referred to a sitting of the Senate estimates committee during which Senator Rod Kemp commended the ABC on the general quality of NewsRadio, calling it an excellent service. Despite that full-on praise, when the ABC's managing director, Russell Balding, told Senate estimates that extended reach for NewsRadio was what he desired and hoped for, Senator Kemp was reported as saying, 'In that case I recommend that you continue to pursue your desire.' Mr Balding's response was, 'Show us the colour of the money and we will extend the reach of NewsRadio.' The story in the *Australian* ended in this way: at last report the colour of the money had not changed and the news junkies of Ballarat, Wollongong, Townsville and the rest will have to wait for a couple more birthdays yet.

In June 2003 there was an absurd suggestion in federal government circles in Townsville at least that Radio National could be taken off the air in north Queensland and replaced by NewsRadio at no cost. The proposition was outrageous. Radio National's first-class programming has a devoted audience in north Queensland and is quite different in style and content to NewsRadio. As could be expected, there was a sustained public outcry in Townsville in support of Radio National and that piece of coalition claptrap died the death it deserved. NewsRadio should be accessible right now to regional Australia in its own right along with all other ABC services but not at the expense of one of them.

ABC television occasionally runs promos for NewsRadio, Australia's only continuous news network, which is more than a little incongruous when a large percentage of Australians cannot get it on their radio dial. Being accessible on the web is not the same as being able to tune in on the good old radio!

The amount of money needed to extend coverage of NewsRadio to north Queensland and other regional locations would be relatively small in the communication scheme of things. But, like all the diatribe coming out of the office of Peter Lindsay and his confusion about federal and state government roles, rather than looking after his Herbert constituents with appropriate federal support like road funding so desperately needed, port access so desperately needed, nursing home places for an ageing population, et cetera, he instead sends out ridiculous surveys about local and state government issues. He whips out the old curfew for young people ratbagery, and today he has even weighed into a local council street issue.

I think that, no, we will not be seeing NewsRadio in the north. In this day and age there is absolutely no excuse for people in regional Australia not to have access to the same specialised ABC radio services as capital city dwellers. Roll on NewsRadio!

Hospital Emergency Departments

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (11.50 a.m.): Overcrowding in Queensland's emergency departments has been an increasing problem over the past three years. While the Beattie government's spin links overcrowding in emergency departments with a reduction in bulk-billing by general practitioners, a report released by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine in April 2004 categorically refutes the government's propaganda. So, too, do the many patients' cases as well as the anecdotal evidence presented to my office on a weekly basis.

I again draw members' attention to the recent debacle at the Gold Coast Hospital which was reported thoroughly in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. Ambulances were being turned away from the hospital because the emergency department was overloaded. The Gold Coast Hospital's emergency department could not cope, and the hospital went on bypass. Hospitals go on bypass to avoid 'access block', which is the term that describes the delays experienced by patients who need to be admitted to hospital. When an inpatient bed is unavailable the patient is forced to wait in the emergency department, hence the term 'access block'.

But this is not only a Gold Coast Hospital problem. It is rife across the public hospital system and, unfortunately, for patients in need of treatment the result is very grim every time the hospital goes on

bypass or 'capacity alert', which is now the slick term being used by Queensland Health management. Due to the government's inability to accept that the system is suffering from poor management, inadequate funding and reduced bed numbers, the system will continue to deliver some very poor results.

As outlined in the report released by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine, overcrowding and access block generally show seasonal variations that reflect the demand for inpatient beds. The report revealed that seasonal variation was misunderstood by some to show that overcrowded emergency departments in winter were due to walk-in patients looking for alternatives to general practice. It is interesting to note that professional bodies representing emergency physicians in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom as well as in Australia are delivering the same message to their respective governments, and that is 'overcrowding in emergency departments is a consequence of increasing hospital occupancy.'

When can we expect the Beattie government to get the message, or doesn't the government care about sick Queenslanders? If the system is not changed, and hospitals wards remain closed due to lack of funding and resources, sick Queenslanders will be forced to face increased delays in obtaining hospital beds.

Last financial year the New South Wales government allocated an additional \$124 million to their emergency departments over four years, while Queensland could only find \$2.2 million. Recently I asked the Minister for Health for the number of additional emergency department doctors and nurses employed by Queensland Health over the last two financial years. The minister advised that the government allocates more than \$9 million each year for emergency departments as part of its state-wide emergency services strategy. However, members need to remember that this amount of funding is spread across some 21 reporting hospitals, and it is expected to provide additional doctors and nurses as well as medical equipment, training and education of staff, work process improvements and the implementation of improved information systems.

Is it any wonder that doctors and nurses are run off their feet? There are simply not enough of them to manage the demand by legitimate emergency patients. Is it any wonder that doctors and nurses are overwhelmed by the embarrassing lack of support by this government? While on the subject of the lack of support and embarrassment, members will recall the Health Minister's outrageous comments about full-time medical specialists working in Queensland's public hospitals. He said, 'The private sector takes the cream, the public sector gets the rest.'

The minister goes around the state espousing sentiments that 'the staff are the most important asset'. However, those words fail to impress when the minister denigrates public hospital doctors. He fails to recognise that the basic problem in public hospitals is the critical understaffing of senior medical staff caused by the Beattie government's unprecedented levels of neglect that are impacting seriously on the recruitment of full-time medical and nursing staff.

I mentioned previously the number of patient cases that have been presented to me in recent weeks which reflect those unprecedented levels of neglect. I will just name a couple because time is going to limit me: Mr Eric Brown of Mackay, who has had his heart surgery cancelled four times; and Mrs Boman of Everton Hills, whose 83-year-old mother-in-law with high blood pressure had to wait over six hours for treatment at the emergency department of the Royal Brisbane Hospital. There is another patient on the Gold Coast, one at Dimbulah, one at Hervey Bay and one at Townsville. This clearly shows that this is a statewide problem. Time does not permit me to present all cases forwarded to my office. Nevertheless, those cases I have outlined provide an overview of the patients who are suffering under a failed health and hospital system.

It is time for this government to recognise its duty of care to Queensland patients and to stop blaming the federal government for the Beattie government's inadequacy to deliver a quality health service in conjunction with a well-managed and functional hospital system.

Federal National Party Press Release

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (11.55 a.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker—

Ms Jarratt: Happy birthday, Kerry.

Mr SHINE: Thank you. I acknowledge the interjection.

I want to speak about a very serious matter. Last Friday the federal leader of the National Party issued a press release entitled 'Labor's Plan for Five Hundred Road Crashes a Year'. This was a most outrageous statement. It says—

Labor's plan to stop funding the road safety Black Spot program can be expected to result in 500 serious road crashes a year that could have been prevented.

I must agree with the federal shadow minister, Mr Ferguson, and his remarks claiming that Mr Anderson's claims were disgusting. He said—

This comes from a man who goes around promoting himself as Australia's leading christian politician, and the claim is nothing more than a blatant lie.

His claims are beneath contempt, and for anyone to suggest that the opposition is advocating a policy that will put people's lives at risk is a disgrace.

What is, in fact, Anderson's record in Queensland as federal Minister for Transport? What is his record for fixing arguably the worst black spot in south-east Queensland, namely the Toowoomba Range? Last year Anderson, in the AusLink report, downgraded the Warrego Highway from one of national importance to one of mere regional significance, a very effective attempt to ringbark the project. Last year Anderson withdrew the long-established undertaking that the federal government fully funds its own highways. The Warrego Highway is a federal highway. This year in the budget Anderson failed to commit to funding the range project other than the previously announced miserable amount for carry-on planning and resumption. In the AusLink 04 report Anderson failed not only to support Queensland—Queensland's share was indeed miserable—but also failed entirely to support the range crossing in any shape or form. Anderson failed recently in the election campaign when the federal government went on its spending spree of \$6 billion, only to find that provision for the range crossing was a few million dollars for a feasibility study.

The need for the second range crossing has been on the radar screen since about 1996. The Howard government has had eight years to deliver, and all we have are modest sums for planning, resumption and now for a feasibility study. The Howard government and the Anderson/Howard government have failed miserably.

Anderson cast aspersions on the federal Labor Party, but what has been the result of his inaction with respect to the Toowoomba Range? What has been the result of Anderson's continued and repeated default? The result is carnage on a continuing basis. Let us look at the record over, say, the last 12 years since 1992 to 2003. There have been 289 accidents. Ninety-eight involved trucks. There were 10 fatal accidents, and seven of those involved trucks. There were 152 casualties and 156 closures of the road.

The most recent major accident was on 8 September when a truck laden with timber slammed into the back of a semi-trailer. The policeman involved, Inspector Wood, was quoted in the paper as saying—

The range is a known black spot for heavy vehicles.

The southwest manager of the RACQ, Mr Gall, said—

The rate of fatal accidents on the range are increasing at a greater rate than the increase in usage.

These accidents, closures, casualties and indeed these deaths in this black spot must stop. This is a most grievous situation and it is an urgent problem. I call on the National Party members in this House to finally persuade their federal National Party leader, who has the control, power and money to stop these deaths to act finally. I also call upon the federal member for Groom to finally show some effectiveness in his representation of the people of Groom. He is, after all, a federal cabinet minister.

Last week the member for Cunningham called on me to support the Quarry Gardens project. Unbeknown to him, I have been a supporter of that project for many years, attending their meetings and most recently their AGM. I might say neither the member for Toowoomba South nor the member for Cunningham have been at any of those meetings.

Energex; Mr G Maddock; Mr D Nissen

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (12.00 p.m.): I rise to speak about the Energex crisis that is affecting Queensland. As more and more of the circumstances surrounding the tragic death and the investigation of the expenses of Mr Maddock become public, as more Queenslanders question the activities and motives of the Beattie government, the more the Premier is becoming sensitive to examination and questioning.

In the past three weeks the Premier has twice threatened legal action against the media. Why is he trying to stop journalists from doing their job? Why is the Premier attempting to stifle free speech in Queensland? Surely he cannot have something to hide. Just last week the Premier instructed his legal counsel to issue legal letters threatening people with defamation action and following it up with a public threat to all those who might dare to question his spin on events and that he had three years to take action against them. This was a not too subtle smack at Don Nissen to shut up for three years or he will sue him. This is plainly akin to blackmail. All because Mr Nissen has had the audacity to challenge the Premier's recollection of their meeting together. In the *Weekend Australian* Mr Nissen insisted his version of events was accurate. He went on to say—

Beattie said to come into his office where we could speak man to man. I handed him my resignations to the two Energex boards, WorkCover and the School Sport Foundation. We talked about Greg and he put on his practised, mournful face. He said everything was going OK until the *Courier-Mail* reported the investigation into his (Mr Maddock's) expense claims.

Mr Nissen then stated that he said—

Come on, Peter, don't tell me it (the leak) didn't come from here on George Street.

To which the Premier is quoted as saying—

I certainly hope not.

Mr Nissen then went on to further state that he wanted to move on to something else because he believed that the Premier was never going to admit it leaked from his office and that he, Mr Nissen, was not prepared to be treated as a fool.

His recollection sharply differs from that which Mr Beattie told this House last week and would have us believe. Mr Nissen has also questioned the statement by the Premier that had he known of Mr Maddock's state of mind maybe something could have been done. In the *Weekend Australian* Mr Nissen also claims to have expressed his concern to Treasury about Mr Maddock's health on the Friday morning, the morning of the very day Mr Maddock took his own life.

Mr Nissen is saying that he warned Queensland Treasury of his concerns about Mr Maddock's mental health and his further concerns that the investigation was going to exceed the time frame he was previously advised of. There has been no explanation as to why the Treasury inquiry was not wound up by the time the chairman of Energex expected that it would be. Yet now the Premier is trying to claim that had he known—well, according to Mr Nissen he should have already known.

In conclusion, one quote from Mr Nissen that also deserves some attention is the following—

I tried to cheer him up—make light of it—by saying the worst that would happen is we would get a dirty letter which we should throw away, and if we get sacked we could buy a brothel—we've been running one for the last couple of years.

What I would like the Treasurer to answer is what possibly could Mr Nissen be referring to? Was Mr Nissen referring to the Treasurer frequently screwing GOCs for cash or was his good mate referring to something completely different?

Last Tuesday in his ministerial statement the Premier categorically refused to release the transcript of the Treasury investigation interview with Mr Maddock. The Premier had no hesitation to suggest that the release of this transcript might drag Mr Maddock's reputation through the mud. This interview was, in fact, Mr Maddock's defence to the Treasury inquiry and the only chance Mr Maddock could have now to defend his name.

Selective release of documents in relation to Energex is all part of the cover-up and there should be an inquiry that releases all the documents, including the transcript of the Treasury interview with Mr Maddock.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I would like members to recognise staff and students from Groves Christian College in the electorate of Woodridge.

Dr G. Isbell; Ipswich Hospital, Ophthalmologist

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.05 p.m.): Last month the Ipswich Hospital lost its only ophthalmologist when Dr Graham Isbell announced his retirement from public work. With two public sessions a week Dr Isbell had treated ophthalmic patients in Ipswich since 1972. He treated Ipswich people rich and poor and provided the opportunity for hundreds of aged pensioners to see properly again, an opportunity they would not have had without public health care.

Dr Isbell's retirement means that Ipswich people who need their cataracts done will, for now, not have that opportunity at Ipswich Hospital. They will either have to pay the \$2,000 plus it costs to have them done privately or they will have to go on a waiting list in Brisbane.

For years Ipswich Hospital has unsuccessfully searched for another ophthalmologist. Now, with Dr Isbell's departure, we are embarking on a major international search to find a full-time public ophthalmologist. While this is a desperate situation for older Ipswich people who need their cataracts done, the truth is we in Ipswich are but small players in the bigger game of Australian health policy. The real question here is why must a good hospital like Ipswich search overseas for an eye surgeon?

The reality is that there is a desperate shortage of ophthalmologists in Australia. In Queensland there are just 50 ophthalmologists to cater for our ageing population and there is a severe shortage of newly trained specialists coming through. Queensland Health has no full-time staff specialists in ophthalmology. It employs 40 ophthalmologists as part-time visiting medical officers. Between them they do just 4.3 full-time equivalents. Rather than doing much public work, Queensland's ophthalmologists choose to earn the bigger dollars available in the private sector. The irony here is that as surgery goes, cataract surgery is not that hard. Australian ophthalmologist Fred Hollows famously did this work in Eritrea raising money to make cheap plastic eye lenses and training local doctors and nurses to do the work. The world record for the number of cataract operations any doctor has performed in a day is an Indian doctor, Dr Usha Kim, who did 155 in one day.

While here in Queensland we do not face Fred Hollows's challenges, we do have a serious shortage of doctors and specialists. Last year in Australia 5,000 people qualified to study medicine but the Howard federal government provided just 1,500 university medicine places. In 2003 the federal government stuck its chest out and said it would finally do something about training smart Australians to

be doctors. It announced that an extra 246 places would be offered in 2004. These extra places mean that by 2009-10 Australia will be producing a maximum of 1,716 new doctors in a year. Compare this to the fact that on the best available estimate: Australia needs 1,752 new specialist trainees—that is specialists not doctors—this year. With these figures you can see that there continues to be a gross shortage of new doctors being trained in Australia.

On top of this straight medical training, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists requires five years extra supervised training for doctors to become ophthalmologists. These restrictions, along with the severe shortage of graduate doctors, means that right now in Queensland there are only 12 trainee ophthalmologists, barely enough to replace those nearing retirement.

Before the specialist colleges come out with their standard line that it is the government's fault that there are not enough new specialists being trained, I point out that in Australia last year 1,489 specialist training places were funded of which only 1,250 were filled. A fundamental change in Australian health policy is required. We need to look beyond the mystique the medical hierarchies like to create around themselves and train far more young Australians to be doctors. The closed shop in specialist medicine in Australia must be broken.

While most Australians were appalled by the Howard government's tactics on the waterfront, there was no doubt there was a need for waterfront reform. Now it is time to do the same with ophthalmologists and other specialists. In this case, the price of doing nothing is not just a few extra dollars on the price of an imported Toyota; it is whether or not your grandma can see.

For too long Australia's most militant union, the AMA—or as Patrick Cook likes to call them, the 'painters and doctors'—and the specialist medical colleges have held governments to ransom using their trust with patients to protect their own market share. While the Howard government has proven itself unwilling and unable, I call on the new elected government this Saturday to deal with these issues, to dramatically increase the number of bright Australian kids being trained as doctors, to break down the training embargo of the specialist colleges and, as only Labor will do, properly fund the Australian public health care system.

Monto High School; Asbestos Removal

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (12.11 p.m.): The Asbestos Disease Foundation of Australia describes asbestos as a silent killer. According to the foundation's web site, asbestos is a mineral mined from the earth. It is composed of strong fibres which are long and silky in appearance. When this is processed many very small fibres are created. It is these deadly invisible particles that can kill. The asbestos fibres can become airborne because they are very fine.

Once in the air the fibres are easily inhaled or swallowed. If they are inhaled they can cause mesothelioma, asbestosis, lung cancer and pleural diseases. These effects can take up to 40 years to develop. Any industrial process that causes a worker or his or her family to be exposed to any foreign substance in a form which enables it to gain entry into the body should be regarded as potentially hazardous.

After hearing about the obvious dangers of asbestosis it is easy to imagine why I was shocked by a letter I received from Minister Barton, the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, which confirmed that during September 2002 Monto High School children were used to remove asbestos contaminated building material from a science laboratory block. On 9 September this year a constituent who is currently involved in a legal dispute with a Q-Build contractor approached me with very serious accusations. He claimed that Monto school children were used to load broken asbestos tiles onto a trailer. I immediately wrote to both the Education Minister and the Employment, Training and Industrial Relations Minister asking for an urgent investigation into the matter due to the serious nature of the claims and allegations which involved the health of school children and Queensland Education employees.

Mr Barton's lazy and unsatisfactory letter is the only explanation that I have received and, unfortunately, it has created more questions than answers. I will write to the Premier today and ask him to clarify a few issues for me.

Firstly, I would like the Premier to explain which minister should take responsibility for investigating why Monto High School children were used to remove broken asbestos tiles. Is it Minister Bligh, the Education Minister, who should be held accountable for the health and safety of our high school children while they are on Education Queensland property or is it the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations who confirms in a letter to me dated 29 September 2004 that compliance for the removal methods was most likely followed and it would be difficult now to gather evidence to the contrary? That is ministerial code for 'Let's put it in the too hard basket.' Or is it Minister Schwarten, the Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing, who has responsibility for Q-Build—the state government authority that subcontracted the asbestos removal job to an individual who may or

may not have had correct accreditation and who may or may not have supplied the proper safety wear for the school children while they shovelled asbestos tiles into the back of a trailer—who is responsible?

Most importantly, I would like the Premier to ensure that these students are identified and given the appropriate medical help, advice and counselling. A full investigation into this bizarre and shameful episode must be carried out. If it can be proven that school children were used illegally to remove asbestos contaminated building material from a school property then the full force of the legal system should be imposed on a person or organisation found guilty of breaking our industrial relations laws. There are 1,171 state schools identified on the government's asbestos register. I would like the Premier to guarantee this parliament that no more Queensland school students will be used to remove any school building material which contains asbestos.

In relation to the Monto High School incident, we need to find out urgently how many children were used to remove the asbestos tiles, were they warned that the material they were shovelling was asbestos, did they wear protective clothing and how long has the government known about this incident? This morning not one minister in a ministerial statement volunteered any information about this incident, which was reported in the *Sunday Mail* by Mark Alexander. What we need is full and frank disclosure, not another Labor Party cover-up.

Ipswich Historical Society

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (12.15 p.m.): As many people in this House are aware—and certainly those across the city of Ipswich are aware—I am a passionate supporter of Ipswich's heritage and history. I will talk today about what the Queensland government has done in comparison to what the federal government has done, particularly in relation to the Ipswich Historical Society. I place on record my absolute delight about \$50,000 from the Premier's Department for St Mary's Church. That is wonderful for our city.

The Queensland government puts its money where its mouth is. In relation to the projects of Ipswich Historical Society, the government gave \$138,000 for the refurbishing of the old Rhonda coal mine pay office and miners' cottages. This was supported by a wonderful contribution of \$50,000 from the miners' trust. The Queensland government has put in \$150,000 to refurbish the Cooneanna Homestead.

The government has also supported the retired coalminers in their efforts to have the history of coalmining remembered. A lot of our local coalmining history is buried underground. That includes assisting with heritage listing. It has also saved the Blackstone State School house by moving it to within the vicinity of the school. It worked closely with the historical society. It has also assisted local residents of Bundamba and Ebbw Vale in the heritage listing of the Ipswich Knights—St Helens—soccer ground at Ebbw Vale.

Recently, under the Community Gambling Benefit Fund guidelines, the government gave a grant of \$5,000 to the historical society for stormwater tank and irrigation and firefighting purposes. That is fantastic for them. I would also like to let members of the House know that we are progressing towards Queensland heritage status for the following locations: the mines rescue station; Aberdare No. 4, which is before the turnoff to Swanbank; the engine mounts; the Jessie Brown engine; the Westphalen pit head structure; and the Box Flat memorial.

The Ipswich Historical Society has had absolutely no help whatsoever from John Howard's Liberal-National Party government. They are all talk and no action. They are all talk and no money.

Mr Lucas: They are too busy mucking up the Ipswich Motorway.

Mrs MILLER: That is right. They are too busy dragging up rubbish about the motorway and the half northern bypass. John Howard's Liberal-National Party government is all talk and no action whatsoever. I want to know what the federal government is going to do to assist the Ipswich Historical Society retain the heritage and history of Ipswich.

The Ipswich Historical Society has received no funding from the federal government except for a small contribution of less than \$5,000 for a computer and a couple of fans. How shameful is that! Out of the big federal government budget it has been given less than \$5,000. I also understand from the Ipswich Historical Society that it has had no visit and no interest from the federal member for Blair, Cameron Thompson. He has never visited the Ipswich Historical Society. He has never offered any help. He has never done a tap of work for the society, which plays a crucial role in our community.

Mr Wilson: Come Saturday he'll be an historical item himself.

Mrs MILLER: That is right. I take that interjection. After Saturday, he might become a relic of Ipswich actually. It is very important that we do place on record our government's commitment to heritage and the history of Ipswich. We would also like to thank Ian Wilson, the President of the Ipswich Historical Society, for his leadership and his inspiration. I also want to place on record our thanks to Andrew Vickers on behalf of the miners union and the miners trust, to all of our wonderful coalminers and the wonderful retired people in the community and to those local businesses for their support.

In conclusion, I want to talk about the Sharing Australia's Stories grant. It is a \$50,000 Commonwealth grant that the Ipswich Historical Society would have liked to have applied for. However, the federal government will not accept an application with supporting documentation to come later. Basically, it has told the Ipswich Historical Society to rack off and apply next year. This is a disgraceful attitude of the federal government in the centenary year of Ipswich. It is typical, typical, typical of the lack of support of the tory government for our great community in the city of Ipswich.

Schools, Nanango Electorate

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (12.20 p.m.): Education of our children is one of the most important jobs in any society—in fact, at any time throughout history. It is in these early years that the foundation is set for a child's future attitude to life, their willingness to embrace a love of learning and expanding their mind, the way they may embrace or confront the world and their enthusiasm to be a contributor to that world or their apathy and willingness to be a drain upon it. Children spend a great number of hours of their waking time in the school environment, so what occurs there—be it negative or positive—will have lifelong consequences for not only the child and his or her family but also society. It is the teacher who can dictate children's views on the world and influence what a society might believe in the future. In these early and formative years of a child's life they can make the unacceptable acceptable.

So when a well-respected, overworked medical practitioner puts down his stethoscope and takes his valuable time to pen me a letter regarding a school in his area, I think it is time society was aware how a single person in any school—whether that be a child, teacher or even a principal—can impact on the students, all staff and the community as a whole. I want to read from this doctor's letter. It states—

I have been a GP in this area for 21 years and without question this year has seen an explosion in parental concerns regarding the inability to obtain a decent education for our children and upwards spiralling levels of staff distress, including both teachers and support staff. I have never before had to deal with so much staff depression than this year. The clear manifestation of this situation is that there has been an increasing need for staff to partake of stress leave and thinking parents are abandoning the school, and this is evidenced by falling school numbers despite an upsurge in the general growth rate of the area. I am also aware that within the teaching profession it is now well known that this school is a place to avoid. You will also appreciate that, as is usual in these small towns, the whole of the school is pivotal in the general social structure of the community and I am also seeing a flow on of dissatisfaction amongst the general community. The reasons behind this tragic situation obviously involve both local factors and Queensland Education Department policy. Over the years I have written to the Education Department. In those days my correspondence was directed to the Toowoomba office. I found this approach was far too parochial and that I tended to be confronted with a closed-ranks approach and I achieved nothing. For this reason, I have entirely bypassed the district office now located in Kingaroy and am now seeking your assistance to go directly to ... to intervene at a ministerial level. We all universally condemn terrorism, express our distaste towards unprovoked violence, careless disregard for human life and values and ask ourselves how it can possibly happen. Talk to any schoolteacher and they will report episodes of unprovoked violence directed towards them, of having their dignity destroyed and feeling insecure. Indeed, they have been terrorised.

There are many schools in my electorate. Taking into account both public and private schools, there are in excess of 50. Overall, they are schools of which we can be proud. They are run efficiently and the principals and the staff have worked hard and earned the right to be extremely proud of the students and the achievements of the school. So when any school which has had no complaints made to me by its community in the past six years suddenly does so, along with reports alleging student behavioural problems—there are also reports alleging conversations occurring within the student body talking of smashing windows and burning down the school—one has to ask: what the heck has happened to cause this change? When parents in small communities are reportedly removing their children from the school and incurring the greater cost of travelling to another school or choosing to conduct home schooling and taking the burden of that, which is not easy, upon themselves, there must be some problem. It has to be rectified. It may not be easy to resolve it, but it must not be seen as a case of closing ranks, which it would appear the community believes is happening at the moment.

When police are asked to investigate the alleged physical abuse by a teacher of a student and a witness described that treatment to me as 'no way to treat a child, totally unacceptable' but the issue is dropped because there is a belief that they could not be sure of a conviction, something is wrong. Now that witness states that she is in fear for her children's welfare—emotional and mental. So what is going on? What is happening? These are reasons why we see parents seeking out schools which they believe will give the best foundation for their children. That is why families who once would have been expected to send their children to public schools have now dug very deeply into their pockets—

Time expired.

Health Services, Gold Coast

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (12.25 p.m.): Health services have recently been in the spotlight nationally as a result of the federal election campaign and also locally on the Gold Coast as a result of a series of articles in the *Gold Coast Bulletin*. The Liberal Party has jumped on the bandwagon, because it is always struggling for relevance. It criticises us for not speaking on motions moved in this place. Of course when it moves a motion, there are only five of them so they all get a speaking spot. Unfortunately—well, it is a fortunate situation really—we have 63 members to choose from. There is no more important issue than health and associated issues such as Medicare and bulk-billing. I do not consider that the *Bulletin* is scaremongering as suggested by the Liberal Party. It suggested that we said

it was scaremongering. That is incorrect. Indeed, I believe it has a right and in fact a responsibility to report issues concerning the health system on the Gold Coast. However, that does not mean that journalists are always correct either, any more than politicians are. Journalism and politics are a fairly inexact science. Solutions are never simple or cheap.

I want to draw the House's attention to some issues confronting our health services and put some of the problems of the Gold Coast health service in perspective and also to document some of the advances made in the short time that the Gold Coast and Southport in particular have had Labor representation. Several months ago I spoke to a gentleman who rang my electorate office complaining that he had waited for seven and a half hours for treatment in the A&E section of the Gold Coast Hospital. I said that this was not acceptable but that there are sometimes extenuating circumstances and I would make inquiries as to why there was such a delay. Every government member down there virtually has a hotline to the hospital, so I was going to contact the hospital. But almost as an afterthought I asked what his injury was. He said that he did not have an injury; he had a rash. I asked why he would be in the A&E section when the complaint was not urgent or life threatening. He said that he could not afford to go to a GP. This ties in with the phone survey which I conducted some months ago of GPs in Southport, Labrador, Parkwood and Arundel. Of the 18 GPs surveyed, only three fully bulk-billed. For this poor gentleman with the rash, it was like searching for a needle in a haystack and he thought that his only option was the Southport Hospital. This contributes to the overcrowding in the hospital, especially in the emergency section.

The only way to improve this situation is to vote for Mark Latham on Saturday. He is the only person committed to preserving and indeed strengthening Medicare. Bulk-billing rates in the seat of Moncrieff have fallen by 13.5 per cent and are still heading south! Of course, we should not be surprised that some years ago John Howard told Sydney radio listeners, 'We will be proposing changes to Medicare which amount to its de facto dismantling. We'll pull it right apart.' On bulk-billing he said, 'The second thing we'll do is get rid of the bulk-billing system. It's an absolute rort.' Well, he is certainly well on his way to achieving his objective and if re-elected on Saturday he will finish off our universal health care system and we will move into an era of survival of the fittest and the well off.

Since coming to office, the Beattie government has delivered successive record Health budgets. The current budget is \$5.13 billion, up almost \$2.5 billion since 1997-98. The Beattie government is committed to increasing the annual budget by a further \$1 billion over the next four years, and the Gold Coast health service budget is well over \$200 million. It is still not enough as the *Bulletin* correctly, by inference, points out. But it would be churlish to ignore the advances made since 2001. We have completed the \$55 million redevelopment of the hospital, including the \$20 million rehab, endoscopy and orthopaedic outpatient section. There has been \$3.1 million for an MRI machine and \$1.4 million for refurbishment of the acute mental health unit at the Gold Coast Hospital. We have purchased the Robina Hospital to add to the range of public health services. In that regard, we have committed \$9.5 million to a new emergency and intensive care section in that hospital to take pressure off the Gold Coast Hospital.

Over \$6.5 million has been allocated for health technology replacement and \$500,000 extra for ophthalmology services, which provides for an extra 200 operations. There is \$7 million for a cardiac catheter centre and \$6.3 million for eight new chairs in the renal unit. So the members on the Gold Coast are achieving quite a deal.

But the hospital is not just about infrastructure and equipment; it is about people—doctors, nurses and support staff. This is another problem. Highly skilled health professionals are in great demand and short supply. Last year, 5,000 young Australians qualified to study medicine, but there were only 1,500 places available in our universities. Three thousand five hundred young people missed out and yet at the same time in Queensland alone we employed 1,200 overseas trained doctors to meet the needs of patients around the state. The Howard government's solution is to commit to 246 extra places for 2004-05, which is only a drop in the ocean. This is expected to increase further when students graduate. They will make up some of those places, but we are essentially playing catch-up football.

Time expired.

SITTING HOURS; ORDER OF BUSINESS

Hon. A.M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (12.30 p.m.): I advise honourable members that the adjournment may be moved today at 6 p.m. to be followed by a 30-minute adjournment debate.

PAY-ROLL TAX ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (12.31 p.m.): I present a bill for an act to amend the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971, and for other purposes. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. T.M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport) (12.31): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The Pay-roll Tax Administration Amendment Bill 2004 makes important improvements to payroll tax administration. I wish to make clear at the outset that the bill is not making any changes to payroll tax itself such as tax rates, deductions, exemptions, or the timing of periodic or annual payroll tax payments. What is changing is that the modern, uniform administrative provisions of the Taxation Administration Act 2001 are being applied to the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971. Taxation legislation necessarily contains rules about how the tax is administered. These rules cover such things as assessment, investigations, objection and appeal rights, confidentiality of taxpayer information and penalties for non-compliance. Traditionally, the legislation for each of Queensland's main taxes—stamp duty, payroll tax and land tax—has had its own separate administration rules. Over time, this has resulted in duplication, complexity and inconsistencies between taxes.

When introducing the Taxation Administration Bill 2001 on 17 October 2001, I said that the bill would establish a single administrative framework, providing a consistent basis for streamlined administration by the Office of State Revenue. Applying initially to the new Duties Act 2001, I said that the bill would be applied progressively to the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 and the Land Tax Act 1915. In the more than two and a half years since it commenced to apply to the new Duties Act 2001, the Taxation Administration Act 2001 has provided a modern administrative framework for duties administration and worked very well. Among the many improvements delivered by this consistent approach to standard features of tax administration are better provision for self-assessment, clearer review processes, greater certainty for taxpayers and facilitation of use of modern technologies in revenue administration. The Pay-roll Tax Administration Amendment Bill 2004, which I am introducing today, is now extending that framework to payroll tax as planned.

The other major change is that the bill will streamline payroll tax returns processes. Employers pay their payroll tax periodically during the year, usually monthly. Each month, they lodge with the Office of State Revenue a payroll tax return of the month's wages and pay the tax, after factoring in any deduction. At the end of each financial year, the Office of State Revenue undertakes an annual adjustment process. The employer's annual payroll tax liability is calculated and payments during the year are subtracted. Any tax shortfall is then payable by the employer and any overpayment can be claimed by the employer.

This bill will significantly simplify that process in line with developments in other states. Under the new system, employers will continue to work out and pay their payroll tax periodically throughout the year, usually monthly. However, existing periodic returns with wage details will be replaced by a simple preprinted payment slip. No wage details need be supplied at that time. For employers who pay their payroll tax electronically, no paperwork will be required at all. At the end of the financial year, employers will lodge an annual return with a detailed breakdown of the year's wages. They will self-assess any tax shortfall payable and pay the shortfall with the return. If tax has been overpaid, a refund entitlement automatically arises without the employer having to apply for a refund.

For employers, the new returns system means less paperwork during the year. Twelve-monthly returns and an annual adjustment are replaced with 12 payments and one annual return, making compliance simpler and more efficient. For the Office of State Revenue, the more detailed wage information in the annual returns will improve the capacity to manage the revenue base. The bill also contains provisions clarifying and modernising other payroll tax administrative matters, for example, when final returns must be lodged and the sharing of any excess deduction across group members to ensure that the group obtains its maximum deduction benefit.

Public consultation on the bill was undertaken over a four-week period in July this year. All employers registered for payroll tax and relevant professional, taxation and payroll associations were notified in writing of the public consultation process, and invited to make submissions on the draft bill. No submissions were received, which indicates that the changes will be well received by the community and professional advisers. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.

TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

First Reading

Hon. P.T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (12.37 p.m.): I present a bill for an act to amend the Transport Infrastructure Act 1994, other transport related acts and the Integrated Planning Act 1997. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. P.T. LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (12.37 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

The objective of this bill is to progress legislative amendments to reflect the intended role for Queensland Transport in respect to development assessment under the Integrated Planning Act 1997. This role is one of ensuring development decisions are made in a manner that supports the ongoing provision of public transport to communities, and secondly to protect rail corridors from potential negative impacts of development. These amendments will effectively help to safeguard the government investment in transport. The bill will also introduce amendments to the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995.

The first of those amendments deals with the regulation of explosives. In particular, it deals with the transportation of explosives on our roads. In June of this year, the Council of Australian Governments held discussions on a number of significant counter-terrorism issues. As a result of those discussions, COAG agreed on a national approach to restrict access to security sensitive ammonium nitrate to only those with a legitimate need. Ammonium nitrate is currently classified as a 'dangerous good' in Queensland. It is used in primary industry as a fertiliser and also is widely used by the mining industry as an ingredient in explosives. Regrettably, it does have the potential for misuse.

The COAG agreement seeks to put in place a consistent licensing regime throughout Australia for the manufacture, storage and use of ammonium nitrate. The states and territories are using their best endeavours to have the legislative regime in place by 1 November 2004, with administrative arrangements to be finalised as soon as possible thereafter.

As a result of the COAG agreement, Queensland's chief inspector of explosives will shortly be declaring ammonium nitrate to be an 'explosive' under Queensland's Explosives Act 1999. The licensing regime to apply to ammonium nitrate will include regulation of its transportation. It is in this area that the transport inspectors employed by Queensland Transport are ideally placed to play an important role.

There are currently around 130 transport inspectors in Queensland. Those inspectors have the power to stop and inspect vehicles to ensure they comply with our transport acts and, in particular, our transport of dangerous goods legislation. The Inspectors are, however, specifically excluded by legislation from dealing with the transportation of explosives. Once security sensitive ammonium nitrate is declared an explosive, our transport inspectors would lose the right to stop and inspect vehicles carrying it.

The amendments contained in the bill are about commonsense. We need to declare ammonium nitrate an explosive to help preserve the security of our state. With our 130 transport inspectors out there on the road network we are well placed to assist with the enforcement of the Explosives Act. While the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has the responsibility for the administration of the Explosives Act, the assistance of the transport inspectors in enforcing the requirements of the transport of explosives is invaluable.

The cooperation of our trained specialists to respond to a security issue such as this would be expected and demanded by our community. The transport inspectors involved will receive the necessary training and will be the appointed inspectors under the Explosives Act. They will also be given the power to stop and inspect vehicles to check that any explosives are being carried in accordance with the Explosives Act. In recognition of the right of ordinary citizens to go about their business, the inspectors will only be able to stop private vehicles where they hold a reasonable belief the vehicle is carrying explosives. This is an important change to our legislation—important to ensuring we honour our commitment to COAG but, more specifically, important to ensuring we continue to enjoy a safe and secure lifestyle.

A further amendment to the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act deals with 'approvals' issued by Queensland Transport to people authorising them to undertake certain activities under that act. Those approvals cover a wide range of transport related areas ranging from, for example, registration for your car to the accreditation of vehicle safety examiners to permits for people to operate oversize vehicles on our roads.

Many of those approvals have a direct link to road safety. For example, vehicle safety examiners are responsible for inspecting modified vehicles to ensure they are not defective and are safe to be used on our roads. Vehicle modifications can be as minor as the substitution of an air cleaner or as substantial as the lengthening of a vehicle's chassis or the installation of a larger, more powerful engine. Approval as a vehicle safety examiner therefore carries a significant responsibility to the department and to the general public in relation to road safety.

Occasionally approvals are granted and the subsequent activities of the approval holder are inappropriate. For example, there have been occasions when vehicle safety examiners have approved modifications to vehicles without conducting the appropriate inspection of the vehicle. This type of behaviour presents a real risk to public safety.

The Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act specifies circumstances in which approvals can be amended, suspended or cancelled. There is currently a power for the chief executive to immediately deal with a number of approvals if those approvals have endangered or are likely to endanger public safety such as overwidth load permits as an example. It is now proposed to extend that power to amend, suspend or cancel any approval where the chief executive considers it is necessary to protect the public interest. For instance, this could apply to an approved inspection station that might be charged with vehicle theft or fraud offences.

To ensure natural justice, the exercise of these powers by the chief executive will remain subject to the existing review and appeal rights. These amendments will not affect those rights in any way. It is expected that these provisions will rarely be used, but they are important provisions to ensure the public is not exposed to any unnecessary risk.

The Integrated Planning Act 1997 introduced a new regulatory framework for assessing and regulating development. Along with the introduction of this legislation came an expectation that, over time, all approvals relating to development would be assessed under the integrated development assessment system framework established under the Integrated Planning Act. This is the case with the legislative amendments proposed in this bill.

In relation to the amendments to be introduced, I will begin by addressing the amendments to transport legislation which deal with rail corridor protection and land use and public transport integration and conclude with the amendments to the Integrated Planning Act necessary to enable the operation of the transport legislative amendments. The amendments to the Integrated Planning Act will also enable Queensland Transport to take up its intended role in inputting into development decisions in a way to both protect and benefit sustainable transport systems.

The Transport Infrastructure Act 1994 is also to be amended to enable Queensland Transport to be involved in development applications with the potential to impact on the safety and operation of railways. Such development may include large residential estates close to a rail corridor. These estates may result in the need for a new rail crossing or may significantly increase the amount of traffic on an existing level crossing. Referral agency status under the Integrated Planning Act would allow Queensland Transport to assess potential impacts and respond to the application in a way to address impacts on the rail corridor.

Another example of development which may impact on the rail corridor may be a proposal adjacent to the corridor which involves filling of a site, with potential changes to drainage flows. Hence Queensland Transport would have the ability to assess potential drainage impacts to ensure the safety of the rail corridor would not be compromised. These powers are similar to existing powers for Main Roads for protecting state controlled roads against potential impacts of development.

The Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994 is being amended to remove the approval power relating to developments which could impact on the ability to provide public transport. This approval power is to be carried over into the Transport Planning and Coordination Act. The reason for the change in location for this power is related to the objectives under the Transport Planning and Coordination Act. These are considered to more closely reflect the intended outcome of increased integration between land use decisions and transport.

The changes being made to the Transport Planning and Coordination Act reinstate the approval power under the deleted section 145 of the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act. Further changes are included to clarify the intended outcome of this approval power. These include—

- ensuring development does not have a significant adverse impact on public transport;
- assisting public transport to become an increasingly attractive alternative to the private motor vehicle;
- promoting urban development that maximises the use of public transport; and
- increasing access to public transport, particularly through walking and cycling.

It is intended these changes will bring about better design of urban development to accommodate public transport. Outcomes such as connectivity between urban areas, access to public transport stops, good design in transport orientated development around identified public transport interchanges and

mixed uses around identified public transport interchanges can be assisted through the progression of development assessment powers for Queensland Transport.

One may wonder how the existing powers operate now. This is one reason for seeking the amendments, as the operation of powers relating to public transport integration and rail corridor protection has been of concern. The fact is, the powers as they stand are outside of the proper regulatory regime under the Integrated Planning Act and hence are sometimes neglected by various local government. This is due to their lack of linkage with the integrated development assessment system and also the lack of penalties under the transport legislation for not seeking the appropriate approvals. This has over time led to land use decisions that impact negatively on the transport system.

The current situation enables existing transport approvals relating to development to go unrecognised under the integrated development assessment system. Thus, if a development approval is issued under the Integrated Planning Act and no secondary approval is sought under transport legislation, the initial approval remains valid and the development may progress without the impacts on transport being adequately addressed.

Once the proposed amendments contained within the bill are enacted, Queensland Transport will have direct input through the second stage of the integrated development assessment system. This input will be in relation to outcomes on rail corridor protection and the ability to provide public transport. Conditions set by Queensland Transport during this stage will go onto the final development assessment notice to the applicant.

An example of impacts on transport interests can be given relating to strategic corridor planning, such as the Caboolture and Maroochy Corridor Study. The CAMCOS corridor, as it is more commonly known, is an identified corridor for mass transit in an area under significant growth pressures. Development decisions made over, and adjacent to, this corridor have the potential to affect its long-term viability. How would the corridor operate, for instance, if a large residential community was approved over the corridor with no provision for linkages and no input sought from Queensland Transport? This again would be a waste of strategic government planning and in the long run becomes a very costly exercise in playing 'catch-up' with the development industry. If we are smart, however, the government has the opportunity to put in place mechanisms to ensure that development can be designed in such a way to enable the provision of sustainable transport options as well as protecting identified strategic transport corridors.

I put it to the House that Queensland is leading the way in this field. Whilst New South Wales and Western Australia have statutory guidelines on land use and transport integration, these are guidelines for local government only to be taken into account for specific developments. What is being put in place here is the ability for state government to be directly involved in development decisions so far as they affect Queensland government investment in sustainable transport options, that is, conditioning developments impacting on public transport and railways. Queensland Transport will be able to be involved with the development industry through development applications made under the Integrated Planning Act to bring about better designed communities that maximise the use of public transport.

The amendments will form one part of the jigsaw of integrating land use and transport. It is recognised that other aspects can be dealt with through land use planning schemes and regional plans. Queensland Transport is also pursuing outcomes on land use and transport integration through these means, along with other state agencies and the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation.

There is a clear link between impacts of land use decisions on transport efficiencies, thus Queensland Transport has a legitimate interest in the management of the land use system to ensure transport systems are not detrimentally affected. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.

PRIMARY INDUSTRY BODIES REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

First Reading

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (12.50 p.m.): I present a bill for an act to amend the Primary Industry Bodies Reform Act 1999. I present the explanatory notes, and I move—

That the bill be now read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Second Reading

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Fisheries) (12.50 p.m.): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill will provide the final stage of a very significant change process that this government has implemented to modernise the operations of the major Queensland primary industry representative bodies which were formerly dependent on statutory arrangements. As a result of this change process, all of the subject bodies are now fully voluntary and successfully operating under the control of and for the benefit of their members, free of the strictures associated with statutory membership and compulsory levies. The organisations are the former statutory Queensland Cane Growers Organisation, Queensland Dairyfarmers Organisation, Queensland Fruit and Vegetable Growers, Queensland Pork Producers Organisation and the Queensland Commercial Fishermen's Organisation.

When I introduced the initial reform bill in October 1999, I noted that appropriate transitional arrangements should be provided to assist with the restructuring exercise to be undertaken. In a very real sense, the amendments in this bill complete this transition process. With its passage, and the completion of the processes it puts in place, all of the subject organisations will be completely free of enabling state government legislation with rank and file producers enfranchised to control their industry bodies.

This bill responds to the requests emanating from the representatives of the vast majority of growers of cane in this state. The Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Ltd (Canegrowers) has sought amendments to the Primary Industry Bodies Reform Act 1999 (PIBR Act) in regard to the matter of the asset trusts they are required to maintain under the act.

The bill also addresses some significant government policy positions with regard to the much needed sugar industry reforms. Circumstances have changed dramatically in the sugar industry since the PIBR Act passed through this House in 1999. Members will no doubt recall the extensive debate, following acute industry difficulties, on the nature of the Commonwealth-state sugar industry assistance and reform programs which culminated in this House in the passage of the Sugar Industry Reform Bill 2004 in April this year.

An important focus of these reforms, which was reinforced in the sugar assistance packages and the Commonwealth government's Hildebrand report, was the importance of enhancing development of local capacity and decision making. This bill gives local growers a choice in determining their future with regard to the type of local organisation to receive assets currently held in trust.

The principle of choice in this bill gives growers a choice in their future. It is consistent with the principle of grower choice in the sugar reform legislation, where for the first time compulsory collective bargaining is to cease, with growers given the choice of single or multiple bargaining collectives or individual supply contracts with no possibility of veto as in the previous legislation.

The process of determining these collectives is now under way and the changes in this bill may assist the process if growers in a particular area choose the entity to receive the trust assets to also be the collective bargaining agent. These amendments are also consistent with the other major sugar reforms implemented by this government.

We have implemented significant change with the formation of industry owned companies Queensland Sugar Ltd, Sugar Terminals Ltd, BSES Ltd and through the conversion of the Cane Protection and Productivity Boards to industry owned entities. In June 2002 the government indicated in a letter to all growers that it wished to facilitate local control of the trust assets and encouraged growers to take advantage of the provisions of the act that allowed them to vote to take control of the local assets. The government indicated that it wanted maximum flexibility in trust arrangements in order to facilitate transfer.

This bill delivers such flexibility by giving growers the choice as to the organisations to receive about \$25 million in locally financed assets currently administered by the Queensland Cane Growers Organisation Ltd as a trustee under the PIBR Act. These are assets held by local mill suppliers committees and district canegrowers executives located in sugar areas throughout Queensland. They were initially established by the old Primary Producers Organisation and Marketing Act 1926 and funded by statutory levies. However, these were abolished in late 1999, as I indicated earlier. Since then these groups have been supported by the fees of members. The current trust requires that the assets be used for the benefit of all growers in the relevant area.

Canegrowers has expressed concern that the current arrangements do not provide maximum flexibility for growers in deciding how the assets will be held in the future. Growers currently have the right under the PIBR Act to vote to either change the trustee of the trusts or to transfer the assets out of the trust into a replacement legal entity such as a grower owned company at mill or district level. This requires a 75 per cent majority of all growers in an area. I understand that these provisions have not been widely utilised, supporting the view that industry is seeking wider flexibility for its own decision making.

The core Canegrowers proposal is that the act should be amended to remove the present requirement that the assets, when transferred to a replacement body, have to be applied for the benefit of all sugarcane growers. As might be expected, obtaining an industry consensus on the future of these assets has not been a straightforward process. This proposal is not without the potential for controversy,

as there is a dissenting view within the industry as expressed by the minority grower representative body, the Australian Cane Farmers Association.

To deal with these concerns, the government has conducted an extensive consultation process, down to the level of individual canegrowers, in the development of this bill. The government is encouraging growers to consider local control by transfer of assets to a selected local organisation, and I have strongly urged growers to take this step regarding assets which have been funded in the local area first by compulsory statutory levies and more recently by membership fees.

All growers, whether supporters of Canegrowers or not, have a say regarding the disposition of the assets. Consultation has taken longer than initially proposed. However, there is now a need to act to allow growers to resolve the situation. The extra time has meant that growers have had more time to familiarise themselves with the situation and will now be able to make a more informed decision.

I have received strong and repeated representations from Canegrowers regarding these assets. Canegrowers' position is clearly outlined in its letter of 29 March 2004, and I hereby table correspondence to that effect. Canegrowers has advised that it has fully consulted its extensive membership on this issue. Equally strong representations have been made by the Australian Cane Farmers Association that the assets initially should be returned to those who paid the statutory levies. This, however, appears impractical given the length of time since those levies were repealed.

A lowering of the voting threshold from the current 75 per cent to a simple majority was also sought, as was the provision of more information on the issues to growers and for government to make rules regarding the constitutions of entities able to receive the assets. Such action on the latter request is not considered appropriate given the Queensland government's objective for industry to take responsibility for such matters.

The bill will provide maximum flexibility by making amendments which provide that—

- The definition of eligible growers will be amended to bring it into line with the intent of the definition in the Sugar Industry Reform Act 2004. This will make it clear that all current growers of cane can participate in the process for determining the future of these assets.
- A new section 46 is to be inserted to reduce the majority for transferring the assets from 75 per cent to a two-thirds majority. This is considered necessary to make local transfers more achievable while still providing the necessary legitimacy for such a change. The section will also allow for flexibility for splitting assets where more than one transferee entity is decided. The new corporation will also not be able to act for the profit or gain of any individual grower and all growers will be able to apply for membership in the corporation.
- A new section 46A requires Canegrowers to give each eligible grower a written notice by 31 December 2004 as to how it proposes to deal with its property should some trust property become its property. This is intended to provide growers with certainty in the event of a default of assets to Canegrowers.
- A new Section 46B terminates any remaining trusts on 1 July 2005 and transfers the assets and liabilities to Canegrowers providing that it has given the required notice. The trusts continue until the required notice is given.
- A range of notices are required to be given to the minister regarding the outcomes of the process and the act is to expire on 1 January 2006.

The Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries will support this process through providing information on its web site to assist with the decision process. These amendments will deliver on the government's commitment to provide maximum flexibility to the industry in deciding the future of these assets through an act of determination of all growers.

I understand that the opposition will be supporting this bill. By his letter dated 8 June 2004, the shadow minister for primary industries has advised me that he would 'support the process of bringing this legislation in as a matter of emergency' and that he would 'see no problem with it if it is based upon the principles and advice provided to me by Canegrowers'. I thank the honourable member for this advice and look forward to his support during the passage of the bill through the House.

Given that the opposition has offered its support, I do hope that Independent members opposite can also constructively support this legislation, which has been carefully developed to provide maximum flexibility to best balance competing interests and focus, most importantly, on the interests of the growers of cane and the long-term future of the sugar industry in this state. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mr Seeney, adjourned.

Sitting suspended from 1.02 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mudgeeraba Special School

Hon. R.E. SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (2.01 p.m.), by leave: The member for Darling Downs has today again attacked Q-Build in this parliament over the construction of an—

Mr Seenev: He's getting under your skin, isn't he? He's got you worried.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The member for Callide!

Mr Seenev interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr Schwarten: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. This is a very serious matter.

I will start again, Mr Deputy Speaker. The member for Darling Downs has today again attacked Q-Build in this parliament over the construction of an outdoor learning activities area at the Mudgeeraba Special School. Typically, he understated the scope of works, which involves a fully designed building to cater for students with disabilities. It involved a 12- by 10-metre covered area with a slab on the ground purpose-built for future enclosure. The entire structure was designed and built in accordance with Australian Standards. It also included 10 metres of covered way to link the area to other existing buildings. This work had to meet disabled specifications. There were also associated drainage and stormwater works, an access gate, a six-metre block retaining wall, and lighting and power.

This project was provided to Q-Build in March by Education Queensland. The successful tenderer started the job on 17 May 2004 and completed it on 30 June 2004. The building cost was \$85,000. The \$100,000 included \$7,358 for design and documentation, and \$5,449 for equipment for use by the children with disabilities. I say "tender" because this was not constructed by Q-Build; it went out to private tender. Of the three offers, Darmac was the cheapest by \$26,000.

Ms Nelson-Carr: They always get it wrong—always.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is always easy to blame poor old Q-Build. The opposition hate Q-Build; we know that. The honourable member, in his haste to again blacken the name of Q-Build, has defamed not only this organisation but also the private contractor. I call on him to apologise to that contractor here today because the assumption is that this government was being ripped off by a private contractor.

Mr Seenev: He asked you a legitimate question.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Of course, we hear the gentleman opposite defending that attack. It is no secret that he defames people in this place all the time in this castle of cowards, and he sticks out amongst the best of them. This really highlights the shadow minister's complete ignorance of the building industry and how it works.

COMMUNITY AMBULANCE COVER AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 18 May (see p. 1109).

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! Before calling the Deputy Leader of the Opposition I would like members to welcome teachers and students from Blackwater State School in the electorate of Fitzroy.

Mr SEENEV (Callide—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.04 p.m.): Once more in this parliament we are debating the Beattie government's infamous ambulance tax. This ambulance tax will be one of the things that Queenslanders will long remember about the Beattie government, along with the Energex debacle and the vegetation management injustice.

The community ambulance tax will be one of the things that Queenslanders long remember. It is because of the unfairness and the inequity of that tax that was introduced by the Beattie Labor government after it promised that it was not going to introduce a new tax that Queenslanders will always remember that dishonesty. They will always remember the unjust way in which this tax has been imposed upon them. The fact that we are here debating it again today is in itself an indication of just how unprepared the government was for the introduction of this new tax, how little thought went into it and how much it was a knee-jerk reaction to a situation in which it found itself. That situation was brought about, like so many others in Queensland, by the Treasurer's incompetence. In that regard it has a lot of similarities with the current Energex situation.

Every member of this House should remember how the Beattie government's ambulance tax came into being. The Beattie government made a promise that Queensland pensioners would get a free

ambulance service. It was a promise that was totally uncostered. It came up with an estimate of some \$20 million to provide that promise to Queenslanders. In the end it cost \$120 million. The former minister, who sits on the other side of the House and shakes his head, needs to take some responsibility along with the Treasurer because the two honourable gentlemen represent better than anything else the incompetence of the Beattie government that has brought about the introduction of Labor's ambulance tax. It ended up costing \$120 million to deliver that promise. One hundred and twenty million dollars! How is that for financial discipline? How is that for budgeting skills?

The government made a promise, estimated that it would cost \$20 million and in the end it cost \$120 million. It is a good indicator of the level of ability of both the Treasurer and the former minister. Both of them can forever share responsibility for the introduction of the Beattie government's ambulance tax. It will be the legacy that the member for Townsville takes with him when he leaves this place. His crowning achievement will be the fact that the government had to introduce a special ambulance tax to pay for his own incompetence—to pay for the fact that he had no idea how much it was going to cost to provide a free ambulance service to Queensland's pensioners. It is a great idea. We would all love to be able to provide free ambulance services to Queensland pensioners. Of course everyone supports that, but in the end it has to be paid for.

At the moment we are seeing Labor's counterparts at a federal level making a promise that to me sounds ominously familiar—that they are going to provide free medical treatment to all pensioners in Australia. I wonder if Mark Latham's costings are going to prove to be as accurate as those of the Treasurer and the member for Townsville. I suspect that if Mr Latham gets the opportunity to try to do that—and I have every confidence that he will not—he would find out that his costings are about as far out as were those of the member for Townsville and the Treasurer. He would find out that there would be a need to introduce the same sort of new tax that had to be introduced in the Queensland parliament to pay for that rash promise that the member for Townsville and the Treasurer made to the pensioners in Queensland.

The ambulance tax has been debated so many times in this House because it is resented by the people of Queensland. It has been resented by the people of Queensland as it broke a promise that the government made not to introduce new taxes. The tax has been resented because of its inherent unfairness. This bill before the House seeks to address some of that unfairness. The fact that we are doing it this far down the track is a indicator of how little thought the government gave to the introduction of this tax. The government was in a financial pickle. It had a financial problem and it had to find a solution. It came out with a knee-jerk reaction to introduce this new ambulance tax.

As the tax was put in place the government found that it impacted on a range of people in ways that were unfair and could not be justified; the government had to put in place a range of exemptions. This bill gives statutory backing to those exemptions that have had to be put in place by the Treasurer in response to the public pressure that built up because of the introduction of that unfair and inequitable ambulance tax.

The bill before the House is notable not for the exemptions that it puts in place, but for the exemption that it does not put in place. The bill leaves out the exemption that would have addressed the single biggest injustice and the greatest inequity in the imposition of the government's ambulance tax—that is, the imposition of that tax on all electricity accounts right across Queensland, especially for small businesspeople who pay that ambulance tax any number of times. Small business operators have to pay it on their domestic electricity account, they then have to pay it on their business account and, if they have a number of connections in the operation of their business, they have to pay it on every one of those connections. The small business community, more than any other sector, has objected to the imposition of this ambulance tax, and so it should. There is no creditable justification for imposing a tax across-the-board that impacts on some individuals once, on some individuals not at all—people who do not pay electricity accounts do not pay it at all—and, as is the case with the small business community, some individuals who pay it over and over and over again.

There have been many debates in this House that have illustrated clearly the unfairness and the injustice of the way that this tax has been put in place. There have been many examples given to this House about individuals who pay this ambulance tax a large number of times. In my electorate there is a married couple who run a small business who have built that small business up from next to nothing. I know them particularly well. I knew them before I was in parliament. They operated a business in the town where I live; that is where they started. This couple pay the ambulance tax 19 times. Is there any member in this House who can stand up and justify why one Queensland couple should pay this tax 19 times when other Queenslanders do not pay it at all? Most people pay it once on their domestic connection. Some Queenslanders do not pay it at all. These two people I cite as an example pay it 19 times. That is the sort of injustice and unfairness that the government has imposed on Queenslanders.

As we have seen in previous debates in this House, there is no way that that can be justified, just as there was no way that the range of situations that are covered by these exemptions that are included in this bill could be justified. The tax was put in place without any thought, consideration, or proper study of its impact on Queenslanders either individually or across the community.

This bill will put in place officially a whole range of exemptions, but it does not address the main one. It is a shame that this parliament has not had the opportunity to address that injustice. It is a shame that the minister and the Treasurer have not been able to acknowledge that unfairness and that they have not been big enough to put forward a piece of legislation that will not only address the injustices that are covered by the bill but will also address that single biggest imposition on small business.

Many small businesses are determined not to pay the ambulance levy. There have been whole communities that have taken a decision not to pay the ambulance levy more than once. I congratulate them for that determination; I congratulate them for that resistance. Taxes that are unfair, unjust and inequitable, as this one is, should be resisted. It is clear from consideration of the legislation in this House, both when it was brought in and in subsequent debates in this House, that the legislation has been structured so that it will be electricity accounts that will not be paid. One of the tricky little things that the Treasurer put in the legislation means that it makes it very difficult for people to not pay their ambulance tax; it will be seen as though they are not paying their electricity accounts. The fact that the original legislation was written in that way in itself anticipated the degree of anger and resistance that there would be to this tax. The fact that the Treasurer anticipated that frustration and anger and so structured the legislation to make it almost impossible for an electricity consumer to refuse to pay the ambulance levy without being disconnected is in itself an indication of the arrogance of this government.

The government anticipated the fact that it would be resisted, anticipated the fact that people would be angry, yet went ahead anyway understanding and knowing full well that the injustice and unfairness would cause anger and resistance. This parliament should be considering a bill that includes all exemptions: a bill that includes an exemption for small business operators who already pay their electricity tax through their domestic electricity tariff. That would go a long way towards alleviating that anger and dealing with the frustration in the community. The government has refused to do that.

I again put on record the position that the opposition took to the election and reaffirms today: we believe that Queenslanders should not have to pay this tax more than once. It would be simple enough to ensure that entities, either individuals or partnerships, that pay the electricity tax through their domestic tariff would not be required to pay it again on their business tariffs. That is a position that the opposition has taken to the election as a policy and it is an opposition policy that we will retain. That is a position that is fairer, more equitable and more creditable than the government's stubborn resistance to the mood of anger that has built up within the Queensland small business community.

The exemptions that are listed in this legislation are certainly exemptions that we support. Those exemptions have been applied up until now. This legislation therefore will have a retrospective effect; it will give legislative backing to the fact that these exemptions have been applied as public pressure has built up and highlighted the injustice and the sheer stupidity of some of these situations where the ambulance tax was levied when it was first introduced.

Those exemptions include an exemption for stand-alone electricity accounts for hot-water systems. How ridiculous was the situation where the tax was applied to a domestic premises for its main electricity connection and then applied again if they had a stand-alone electricity connection for their hot-water system? That is no more ridiculous and no more ludicrous than the existing situation for small businesses where they pay their household electricity account and then they might have a shed in the backyard where they operate whatever sort of business but it has a separate electricity connection so they pay another ambulance tax on that connection.

I have an example of one constituent which once again will illustrate the stupidity of this situation. This constituent has a connection to his domestic premises. He is a mowing contractor and has a shed in which he parks his tractor and slasher. It is the equivalent of a two-car garage next to the house. In any other circumstance that would have been the storage for the family car. Because he operated this small slashing and mowing business he parked his tractor and slasher in the shed. That means that he is not able to get the exemption. He has to pay the ambulance tax twice. Had he parked his car and his wife's car in the shed it would have been fine; he would have got an exemption under the exemptions we are considering today. That would not have been the case under the original legislation because there was no thought put into those types of situations and injustices. Because he was earning a few bob with his tractor and slasher which he parked in his shed he was not able to get an exemption. How absolutely absurd that is.

Mr Terry Sullivan interjected.

Mr SEENEY: It represents your attitude to small business. It represents the attitude that members such as the government whip have to small business. The gentlemen I am talking about had retired. He retired and bought a little block of land—half an acre or so—and put a shed and house on it. He thought he would earn a few bob mowing the grass. What happened? Your government came along and treats him like some sort of capitalist that they have to take.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wallace): Order! The member will address his comments through the chair.

Mr SEENEY: I am entitled to respond to the interjections. No matter how inane and stupid they are, I am entitled to respond to them.

Mr Terry Sullivan interjected.

Mr SEENEY: You interject through the chair.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Mr SEENEY: That would be handy. There is a range of such stupid situations which illustrate quite clearly the foolishness of this ambulance tax. While we certainly support the exemptions that are part and parcel of this bill, they certainly do not go the whole way to addressing those injustices.

The second exemption listed in the explanatory notes provides exemption for multiple electricity accounts for a place of residence provided that it is not used for income producing or income purposes. It is the last part of the provision that results in people like the person I was talking about being caught and having to pay the ambulance tax more than once. Those who run businesses from home are caught by that. It is simply not fair. It is unjust.

I have heard arguments put in this place before that if a building is used for business purposes it increases the chance that the Ambulance Service is needed and it puts an extra burden on ambulance services so therefore those people have to pay more. How on earth does storing a tractor and a mower in a shed put an extra burden on the Queensland Ambulance Service? How on earth does that justify someone paying extra to keep the Queensland Ambulance Service going? That is not a credible argument.

If that gentleman had parked his tractor and slasher on the footpath and not in his shed and instead put his wife's car in it, this government would have given him an exemption. How absolutely absurd is that. It really illustrates how unfair and unjust the application of the ambulance tax has been and how unfair and unjust it remains. Because of this government's blinkered approach to small businesses it will not recognise that that is a sector of the community that has been most unfairly impacted upon.

I will run through the list of other exemptions which, I reinforce, we are only too happy to support. There is an exemption for stand-alone electricity accounts for public park facilities such as barbecues, picnic shelters, walkways, rest rooms and war and similar memorial sites. Once again, I am pleased to see the exemption for war and similar memorial sites, which is the terminology used in the bill. It provides an exemption for some of the more ludicrous situations that were exposed when the ambulance tax was first put in place.

We had memorials to our country's fallen that were lit up at night and, therefore, had to have an electricity connection. That connection was taxed. The ambulance tax was imposed simply because there was a separate electricity connection so that light could be provided for the memorial. That was the extent of the stupidity when this tax was first introduced.

Under the weight of public pressure, the government had to buckle. It had to back-pedal from the Treasurer's original position. That exemption in this bill today provides statutory recognition and backing for that exemption. So it should. That type of application of the ambulance tax should not have existed in the first place. It would have been recognised in any reasonable consideration of the application of the new ambulance tax if the government had thought it through rather than having a knee-jerk reaction due to the extreme financial pressure the Treasurer found himself under simply because of his own mismanagement and incompetence.

The next exemption for common property electricity accounts is master electricity supply accounts for buildings such as retirement villages, home units, attached townhouses, flats, shopping centres, offices and industrial buildings where the levy or an exemption already applies to each occupied unit, shop or office. This exemption applies once again to a ludicrous situation where people were being charged the ambulance tax on the original account and when that account was divided up amongst the units within the common property they were again taxed. They were being taxed twice. The government recognised that under the weight of public pressure and this exemption is part of the bill today. It is certainly not dissimilar to the situation of small businesses, especially when those small businesses operate from a single premises or an associated premises. The fact that this exemption has been agreed to only reinforces the argument that small businesses should be exempt from paying the ambulance tax more than once.

The next exemption is for stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applies to the premises. Once again we had a situation where people were being taxed twice simply because they had installed security lighting which, in some cases, needed to be located far enough away from the original connection and therefore required its own connection.

Another exemption is for stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by people because of a medical condition. I think that exemption speaks for itself. The fact that they were taxed under the original legislation reinforces again—if any reinforcement is needed—the haste with which the government introduced this ambulance tax and imposed it upon Queenslanders.

It is worth while looking at what has happened since the introduction of the ambulance tax. The shadow minister, in his contribution to this debate, will talk at some length about what has happened to the Ambulance Service since the introduction of the ambulance tax. It has not provided any great improvement in ambulances services.

That was clearly illustrated in this year's budget. It was clearly illustrated in the estimates committees when the opposition had a chance to examine just what the changes in the spending patterns had been and what the changes in the provision of equipment to the people at the front line had been. It clearly illustrated that even though this extra tax had been applied it had not resulted in an increased service to the people of Queensland. All of the money that was raised by this extra tax was being used to fill in the black hole that the Treasurer created simply because of the fact that he got the budgeted figure so horribly wrong when he made that rash promise that I referred to at the beginning of this contribution. This ambulance tax was introduced simply to cover the Treasurer's incompetence, and the facts and figures that have been demonstrated since then show that the ambulance tax that is being collected is simply being used to continue to cover the Treasurer's incompetence.

It is the opposition's intention not to oppose the bill, because the bill does put in place a whole range of exemptions which we do support. However, I would reinforce on behalf of the opposition that this bill does not go far enough. It does not correct the injustice that was imposed on the people of Queensland when the ambulance tax was introduced. It does not address the single biggest injustice and it provides no relief for the small business sector of the community which has been so unfairly and unjustly impacted on by the Queensland ambulance tax. I look forward to the day when the Community Ambulance Cover Act is amended in this House—that is, when a future government can bring into this House a bill that will amend that act to make it fair and just in order to provide some relief for the small business sector of Queensland.

It is a sector that provides an enormous contribution to the economy of Queensland as a whole. It is a sector that provides a huge contribution to the economy of communities all over the state. In particular to the communities that I represent in rural and regional Queensland, the small business sector is not only critically important; it is the very basis on which the economics of those communities operate. For that sector of the community to continue to suffer this unfair and unjust imposition of the Treasurer's ambulance tax is a situation that they will never accept and that I as their representative will never accept. No matter how long it takes and no matter when it is, one day in the future a government in this House will amend the Community Ambulance Cover Act to ensure that it is fair and that that injustice and that unfair imposition is corrected. For today we will support the Treasurer's legislation because it does provide some exemptions, but it certainly does not go anywhere near addressing the injustice of the situation.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (2.32 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill, a range of anomalies have occurred because of this ambulance tax. I do not want to get away from the fact that great work is done by ambulance staff throughout the state of Queensland. They have to attend accidents at very unpalatable hours of the day and night in rain and all sorts of conditions, and they do a tremendous job. In the initial stages of my speech, I want to echo some of the issues raised by the minister this morning in terms of Queensland Ambulance Week and the services that are provided. Queensland Ambulance Week occurred last month, and it is extremely important that we acknowledge a lot of the good work done by ambulance staff. It is unfortunate that this tax does not truly reflect on the work that they do, but some issues that are raised reflect on their ability and their future direction.

The events of last month's Queensland Ambulance Week gave people the ability to be able to learn about first-aid courses, attend information sessions on how to use the 000 number, the CPR for Life program, baby capsules and all of those types of services that the ambulance provides. That is the good side of the ambulance—that is, the enormous amount of involvement in the community. I want to recognise and acknowledge the outstanding achievements of the paramedics and the communications officers and all those people involved in the Ambulance Service. Without them the service would not operate, and it would not operate as efficiently as it does at the present time. There are also the many volunteers. Those people do so much good work like those on the LACs and so on. They are very much involved in the process and have been over a long period of time. However, that does not detract from the problem of this ambulance tax. The issue of this tax meaning that there is better delivery of services also has to be acknowledged, because that was not reflected in the budget. It is disappointing, because there are so many people doing such good work. This tax is about overindulgence, while those people are dedicated to the service. I want to acknowledge the work that those good people do.

If we look back on the Ambulance Service, years ago enormous efforts were put into fundraising. With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker Wallace, I want to tell the parliament about a person who was involved with the ambulance for 36 years. His name was William 'Skip' Chalmers. An article in the local press stated—

Family and friends from throughout North Queensland gathered to say 'tally ho' to former workmate, Scout leader, ambulance officer and friend William Skip Chalmers.

A long time Ingham resident, Skip, also known as Tom, was a local ambulance officer for 36 years and also a popular leader of the Ingham Scouts.

He passed away on September 13 aged 79.

The article continues—

Tom Chalmers was born in Innisfail on February 8, 1925.

He learned quickly the value of ducking his head through doorways as it became evident he would grow to a towering 1.96 metres (6 feet, 5 inches).

Tom married his bride of 53 years, Sybil, in 1951, in the beautiful setting of the Blue Mountains, near Sydney.

It continues that Tom's life had many loves, his family first and foremost. His work with the ambulance and the game of scouting was something that was extremely important to Tom. Tom joined the ambulance in 1954 and retired some 36 years later. He had many experiences in the Ambulance Service such as vehicles being fitted with poor communications, dealing with emergencies, limited resources and certainly services that were inadequate at the time. As with other ambos who earned the respect and gratitude of a very thankful community, Skip was acknowledged for all of the good work that he had done. He is typical of the people who served with the ambulance some time ago.

I now want to turn to how this whole issue came about. In the past people were dedicated and worked extremely hard for the ambulance in order to provide money for buildings in Ingham. In particular, the sugar community contributed a certain amount of money per tonne in order to build the Ingham Ambulance Station. The same thing happened right throughout north Queensland, because within the sugar industry and other primary industries it was acknowledged that they needed a good, sound Ambulance Service. Unfortunately, they contributed very strongly whereas some areas did not. That caused a major degree of concern over a period of time, because there were inequities as to who would fund the service and who would not. Because of this, ownership was gained by the community over the ambulance. If there was a need for a four-wheel drive or something of that nature, there were no qualms about the farming community and the harvesting community contributing money towards that aim. That money then meant that a vehicle could be purchased which could locate people who were in trouble in canefields, on cattle properties or in the hinterland.

That became a very, very important service for the Ingham community. But in many instances that happened throughout Queensland. Where there was a need, people rose to the occasion and contributed. Of course, we have the LACs who do an enormous job. Those people have volunteered their services and worked very hard over a long period. I can remember many of them who have been there for as long as 15 years and even 20 years. In the early days those people worked tirelessly and now they are involved in the whole process of directing the ambulance. If a defibrillator or something of that nature was needed, those people certainly did the necessary fundraising to ensure that the equipment was installed in the ambulances and that the paramedics who were involved in using that equipment received the necessary training to ensure that the service was provided.

But it is a degree of concern that since June last year the Ambulance Service has been funded through people's electricity bills. Of course, that has created a range of inequities. That is what this legislation is about. It addresses some issues that needed to be looked at very closely. If we read the minister's second reading speech, we can see exactly what those issues are. This bill addresses the issue of the community ambulance cover being applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for hot-water systems. I think that is fair and reasonable. As the shadow treasurer indicated, the opposition is not concerned about that issue. The bill also addresses the issue of the community ambulance cover being applied to multiple electricity accounts for places of residence in a building, provided that that residence is not used for an income-producing or business purpose. I have an example in my electorate where people had a house and a shed. They had a meter in both places. When they went to pay their Ergon bill, they were hit twice. That is totally unfair and inequitable. Those people were using the shed simply for their own purposes. Of course, because they had two meters, they was no way out of paying the community ambulance cover twice. I think that is unfair. The shadow treasurer has already gone through this.

I think that such issues need to be addressed. Maybe we can have a look at such circumstances where the community ambulance cover is applied in the future, because there are anomalies. Through this bill we are trying to rectify the anomalies that are within the system. In fact, this bill should be called the 'Trying to Rectify the Anomalies Within the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill'.

This bill rectifies the situation in terms of the stand-alone electricity accounts for public parks facilities such as barbecues, picnic shelters, walkways, rest rooms and war and similar memorial sites. That is very commendable. Those facilities should not have attracted the community ambulance cover levy in the first place. But somehow or other they did. Fortunately, as I understand it, from November last year there will be some retrospectively in terms of those facilities.

The bill also addresses the issue of the community ambulance cover being applied to electricity accounts for common property, such as retirement villages, home units attached to townhouses, flats, shopping centres, offices and all of those sorts of things. There is little doubt that the amendment as it relates to electricity accounts for common property has been brought about by pressure on the

government to rectify this situation. People do not want to pay the community ambulance cover levy two, three and four times in developments such as townhouses, offices and industrial buildings. The bill also amends the application of the community ambulance cover for stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where a levy or exemption already applies to the premises. That is another instance of a facility that should not have been caught up in the whole process. The bill also amends the application of the community ambulance cover to stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by a person because of a medical condition, such as home dialysis units. It was ludicrous that in the first instance that equipment was even included. Very often the people who use that equipment are on very low incomes. They have a very small annuity given to them by either the government or through compensation that has been awarded to them as a result of an accident.

In recent times we have seen a loss of ownership in our Ambulance Service's assets. Over a long period these assets were generated by the goodwill of local communities. Of course, to a large degree that goodwill has been lost by the way in which revenue is gained for the Ambulance Service. Yes, there have been improvements in the ambulance vehicles and the services offered. As technology moves on, there will be an even greater demand on ambulance equipment and services. It is indicative that in the last budget there was a fair acknowledgement of that. We really need some buffer to ensure that the future requirement for new vehicles and for the construction of new ambulance stations is met. Unfortunately, certain members get political gains from the provision of such services and equipment in their electorates. It is also unfortunate that it is probably solely for that political purpose that we get these new buildings and equipment.

It is also important that we recognise what is involved in setting up the call centres for the Ambulance Service. We have gone away from people just simply ringing up the Ambulance Service. We now have these call centres. In the initial stages, they were an absolute disaster. There was no coordination in exactly where the call was coming from. In the instance of a call coming from an area that was not in the location of where the accident occurred, there were problems in identifying where those people were. The SES, the police and other emergency services personnel had to go to where the OOO number was accessed. I saw the situation where the call centre could not distinguish between Cordelia in Ingham and Cordelia in Townsville. We had ambulances going all over the place. But I have been to the computer aided dispatch centres both in Townsville and on the Sunshine Coast. They certainly have state-of-the-art technology. It is very often that the response time is so critical in saving lives and ensuring that people have access to the ambulance itself. So it is important that the link between the call centre and those who attend an accident is kept well in tune.

I want to talk now about what will happen in the future with the community ambulance cover. At present we still have anomalies in the system. We have three or four people who live in shared accommodation receiving one electricity account. As a result, the electricity account is split between those people. That might mean that the \$90-odd is paid by three, four or five people—and we went through the process of looking at whether the community ambulance cover should be increased in line with increases in the CPI, but we could not support that. Many other people are paying three, four and five times. So we have one group of people at one end of the scale who are paying the community ambulance cover excessively because of the way in which this whole legislation has been set up and then we have another group at the other end of the scale who, because they live in shared accommodation, pay only a small percentage of what they really should be paying.

I believe that is totally unfair and unreasonable. The National Party went to the last election saying that people would pay the community ambulance cover only once. I think that is fair for those people who are paying the levy excessively. I believe that the adoption of that policy would have made it fair and equitable for everybody who contributes to the Ambulance Service.

I raise a few issues important to providing a service. Recently in Bowen there was a young lad who had a ruptured appendix. I wrote to the minister about this issue on 28 September, but I have not received a response. This episode goes back a few weeks—

Mrs Lavarch: Last week.

Mr ROWELL: It has been mentioned earlier, so there is nothing new about it. Unfortunately, this young chap had a ruptured appendix. His mother brought him in to the ambulance station in Bowen. A situation had developed there with a baby diagnosed with a malfunctioning lung. The mother brought the baby in in the morning and hoped to be taken out by helicopter by 3 o'clock. This did not eventuate and it was 7 o'clock before the mother and child were able to be taken to Proserpine and then on to Mackay.

This lady and her son, who is only 14 years of age, came in at about 6 o'clock. They were aware of the situation. The hospital made arrangements for an operation to occur at the Mater Hospital in Townsville at 10.30 that night. Knowing what had happened with the ambulance for the mother and her baby, the boy's mother had to make a decision whether she would take her son to Townsville or wait for an ambulance. Because the mother was aware of the poor record in accessing the ambulance and she had to get him up to Townsville, she made the very difficult decision to drive him to Townsville herself. It is a two-hour drive from Bowen to Townsville. When she did get to Townsville, the surgeon who was to

carry out the operation said, 'You have really taken a terrible risk doing this. You have put your son's life in jeopardy.' When a child is in such a desperate position, sometimes people are forced into making these choices. Unfortunately this mother was faced with this dilemma, but at the end of the day there was good news: the boy came out of the operation quite well.

I recount this story to demonstrate that there are some problems in the system. The level of financial support needed has escalated. As the shadow minister said, it started at a low of about \$20 million and got up to about \$100 million. The required level of financial support has now exceeded that amount. This bill is now chopping off about \$1.96 million in finances—

Time expired.

Mr NEIL ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (2.53 p.m.): I am pleased to say a few words in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill because it fulfils a promise of the government to make the community ambulance cover scheme an efficient and effective method of providing a sustainable financial base for our Ambulance Service and of supporting the work that is performed by our ambulance officers. In this instance the government has listened very carefully to the community's issues in relation to the community ambulance cover scheme, which was implemented last year. The proposed changes in this bill will ensure that around an additional 50,000 electricity accounts will be made exempt from paying the levy.

As expected, here today we have heard the opposition, particularly the member for Callide, continue to attack this scheme. The interesting thing about the community ambulance scheme is that it was introduced before the last election. Since that time the opposition in particular has raised issues. It has made this into what it believes to be a major issue. It campaigned heavily on it during the Maryborough by-election. It campaigned heavily on it in the lead-up to the state election and subsequent to it. What has been the judgment of Queensland on that issue since that time? In terms of a rating from one to 10, it has been a zero. The opposition's proposition has been basically rejected by the people of Queensland in terms of election outcomes.

Unfortunately, the opposition just cannot seem to acknowledge that the community ambulance cover scheme has provided the Queensland Ambulance Service, for the first time in its history, with a reliable and long-term revenue stream. Access to a reliable revenue stream is an issue which has plagued emergency services in this state for decades. Before 1991 ambulance services in this state were in a state of flux due to the difficulties faced by local fundraising committees which, as we all acknowledge, worked so hard to support those local ambulance committees that were established throughout the state. Labor abolished the old QATB system after 1991 and introduced a statewide service which, for the first time again, extended the full coverage of ambulance services to the entire state of Queensland. Additionally, at that time we moved to improve pay levels for ambulance officers. We introduced new and improved training standards which led the way for Australia, particularly for paramedics. We also established a career structure for officers to follow. While we had a first-class Ambulance Service as a result of these reforms, the funding stream continued to be an issue and the voluntary subscription scheme was failing to adequately provide the necessary funds for the service.

Unfortunately, the work we started back in 1991 was put on hold during the term of the Borbidge-Sheldon government from 1996 to 1998. The priority that the National-Liberal government gave to emergency services in those two and a quarter years stands in stark contrast to the reforms and effort this government has put into supporting our ambulance officers. Soon after gaining power, the then National Party Minister for Emergency Services, Mick Veivers, commissioned Lyn Staib to investigate the Ambulance Service and report on its needs. One recommendation she made was that the Queensland Ambulance Service needed an immediate cash injection of around \$32 million. However, as we know from history, that recommendation fell on deaf ears in the National Party government.

When we returned to office in 1998 the declining support base for the voluntary subscription scheme continued to be an issue and was putting increasing pressure on the Ambulance Service. Last year the government made the tough decision to ensure that the service received a guaranteed and substantial revenue stream via the community ambulance cover levy. The funds collected from the levy are supplemented by significant additional funding allocations from the state budget, thus ensuring that the service is now in the best financial position it has ever been in.

Since the establishment of the scheme the government has been able to exempt more than 500,000 electricity accounts from the levy. This bill formalises a number of exemptions that have been put in place since 11 November last year in response to extensive community discussion about the scheme. In that regard I make a special mention of the efforts of the Banyo sub-branch of the RSL, which drew to my attention and ultimately the Treasurer's attention the issue relating to war memorials. I personally thank the Treasurer for his swift response to that issue, acknowledging that it is an issue that needs to be addressed. It has been included in this legislation, and I thank him for that.

Given the constraints on the state's revenue raising powers and the Commonwealth's refusal to fund the service via the Medicare levy, the community ambulance cover levy is the best and most equitable way in which the government can raise the revenue required for the Ambulance Service. Despite the opposition's hypocrisy on this issue, the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders support

the concept and principle of having a universal levy in place. This is in spite of the mock outrage of members of the opposition. I refer particularly to the performance of the member for Callide a little earlier in the debate.

The ambulance levy is similar in principle to the application of the urban and rural fire service levies that appear on our rates notices. With these levies, if you own more than one property then you pay the levies more than once. I do not hear the opposition standing in this place suggesting that it would abolish the fire service levy. Is it because the opposition realises it is a fair and reasonable way to raise money for that service? Alternatively, is it because it was the National Party government which introduced that levy in 1984? The opposition National and Liberal parties have been exceptionally hypocritical in their public condemnation of the community ambulance cover scheme. We know that they would never abolish it if they were ever returned to government, just as they would never abolish the fire services levy, which they put in place in 1984.

In closing, I want to knowledge the dedication and contributions made by members of my local ambulance committee at the Northgate Ambulance Station. I want to place on record the current executive members: president Flo Kemley, vice-president Kym Moss, secretary Dea Weston and treasurer David Harrison. Because the former minister is in the House, I want to mention in particular the late Norah Bennett, who was a stalwart of the ambulance committee and many other community organisations in my electorate. I also want to acknowledge the great work of the many fine officers who work at the station under the leadership of the officer in charge, Matt McGregor. They do a wonderful job in working with our local ambulance committee and in delivering a fine service in a caring way to people in need on the north side of Brisbane. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—NPA) (3.01 p.m.): I rise to speak in favour of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. This bill provides for certain exemptions not previously outlined in the original bill and to make minor drafting changes. The hardworking committed staff of the Queensland Ambulance Service provides one of the most excellent services available to Queenslanders today. In all weather, at all times of the day and in all circumstances our Emergency Services people will turn out, and the dedication and skill of these wonderful people must never be undervalued. To this extent, I certainly support the government in the need to financially maintain these services to a higher level and to allow for the professionalism of these excellent people to be developed and to be preserved.

The introduction of a levy scheme by the government to replace the subscription scheme is an attempt to assist towards this necessary funding. However, I do concur with the feelings of so many people that a community ambulance levy through the electricity scheme is not justifiable. The Premier in his media release of 18 February argued that the families who had previously paid \$98 per year under the subscription scheme would save significantly under the new ambulance levy through the consumer's electricity account. This has not been the case in many circumstances.

Single people are totally disadvantaged by the levy scheme, bearing in mind that they have had to cope with a very significant increase in their fees from the original single subscription rate. However, perhaps one could argue that there is a fairness in the levy scheme if families paid the levy once and only once. To this extent, this bill has amended the original bill to provide various further exemptions to ensure more reasonable methods of levy administration. I note that additional exemptions include multiple accounts for a building or part of a building which is used as a single self-contained place of residence and is not used for producing income. Also, the additional exemptions to other stand-alone electricity accounts for various areas will alleviate some anxiety of community members. However, many small businesses are still being unfairly targeted.

Recently I made contact with a group of local businesspeople in my area about the number of levies they pay within their electricity accounts, and I have to say that I was quite appalled by their answers. These are businesspeople from the country towns of Home Hill and Ayr—towns that are struggling in the current economic downturn of the sugar industry. These are small businesspeople—small family businesses—and in most cases their businesses have diminished considerably over the past decade. The owner of one particular family grocery shop in Home Hill tells me that he pays seven levies. He pays four levies for his shop—his shop is all in one premises—one for his farm, one for his house and another one for his beach hut. This beach hut has no sewerage and no reticulated water but it does have an ambulance levy.

I also happen to know that that same businessman has for many years been a committed member of the local ambulance association. He and his family have worked long hours over many years to raise funds locally for the Ambulance Service—funds that have helped provide, amongst other things, a new ambulance vehicle. This vehicle was removed from the area by the government because, in its view, another area had a greater need. No wonder these and many other wonderful people who have worked very hard to assist their local communities justifiably feel let down. Local people had a feeling of ownership towards their local ambulance committee once, but sadly this has been removed by this government.

Another food store owner in Home Hill pays six ambulance levies. Four are levies for the shop—and this shop is not a Coles or a Woolworths; it is just a small, local business—and two are personal levies. Out of the eight businesspeople to whom I spoke, all pay three or more levies. How equitable is this? The recent budget saw an increase in funding to the Queensland Ambulance Service of 9.2 per cent—from \$225 million in 2003-04 to \$246 million in 2004-05. This is an interesting contrast to the total levy returns. The 2003-04 estimated actual levy returns were \$92 million and the budgeted 2004-05 levy returns are \$104 million. This represents a 13 per cent increase in levy revenue. This comparison raises many more questions of equity.

We all agree that there are no greater heroes than our ambos. They need every support that we can give them. However, it is disappointing that this unhappy situation exists amongst the community—these situations of inequity are still observed with the implementation of this levy. From the perspective of my local community, the residents of Ayr are looking forward with much joy to the building of the promised new ambulance centre. To this extent, I sincerely thank the minister for this commitment and look forward with great anticipation to the proposed starting date of the venture. Comments have been expressed in the community, though, that because of the extended time line the original plan may be cut back because of rising costs from the original estimate. Should this occur, it would be a major disappointment for the community, and I appeal to the Emergency Services Minister to not allow this to happen.

The Ayr community will be very proud of the new health precinct that has developed in Chippendale Street. The new hospital is progressing very well and is set to open within the next few weeks. Just across from the hospital is the recently built Ayr Medical Centre, and opened in September the Burdekin Centre for Rural Health building, known as the Homestead—the Joan Heatley centre—provides a very wide range of health care needs for the whole community. To completely complement these facilities, the new ambulance centre in the same area will provide a complete suite of health provision services. To this extent, it is important that this new state-of-the-art building is not compromised in any way. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (3.08 p.m.): We will be supporting the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill as it moves, in part, to address the inequity the original act continues to impose on many people throughout Queensland. The exemptions contained within the bill are based on commonsense, yet they do not go far enough. They do not go far enough in that the equity the people of Queensland expect to achieve with regard to legislation has not occurred. This legislation has caused ongoing problems to people throughout Queensland, and there are many who are paying multiple accounts and will be for many years to come.

People who are least able to afford it are being required to pay multiple accounts, yet the service they receive is no different from that received by a person who is exempt or paying only one levy. The imposition of the levy has a long history within Queensland and I suspect that, as time goes by, that history will continue to darken until a system that provides equality of cover is achieved. In his second reading speech the Treasurer states—

The government is listening to the community about the community ambulance cover scheme.

This is simply not the case. A large part of the community is being hit with more than one levy, and that part of the community is asking why they should be sectionalised yet receive the same coverage as other members of the community. There is little question that the government is not listening to these people, otherwise the bill before the House today would encompass changes to make equity in relation to those who are required to pay the bill a paramount principle of the legislation.

The Treasurer's second reading speech then states—

The government considers that these changes will help ensure the community ambulance cover works fairly while providing a reliable funding source for Queensland's world-class ambulance services.

The Treasurer's use of the word 'fairly' is inappropriate. That word means in a position that applies evenly across the population. The government could not impose the levy on those in receipt of a pension or benefit as there had been statements made to them that they would not pay for the cost of ambulance transport. However, the government had made no such commitment to the balance of the population. Though there is uniform agreement on the necessity to fund the service, it is inequitable to those who are least able to afford to pay it. To say that the imposition of the levy has been fairly placed upon the shoulders of all Queenslanders is, of course, ridiculous. It is far from fair.

The minister also referred to QAS officers providing 'world-class ambulance services'. There is no question about that. In fact, in a publication titled *Queensland Ambulance Service: A case study in organisational reform* by the Institute of Public Administration Australia, at page 23 it states—

According to Russell Linwood ... the key elements of the QAS ambulance officer ethos are the strong cultural background, the service ethic, pride in doing a good job, and their nurture and care for others. As an example of their humanity, Linwood cited the awarding of 12 Humanitarian Overseas Service Medals to QAS ambulance officers for volunteer service in East Timor, and two for Rwanda, among more than 700 other awards made each year, including bravery awards. More recently, QAS was involved in coordinating the response to the Bali bombing.

That publication occurred in 2002. As I have stated, no-one questions the bravery or integrity of the men and women who work for the QAS. However, there are concerns within the ranks of the QAS, and it is those concerns that are a great worry to me and should be to this government and the public.

As recently as 28 September 2004 the *Sunshine Coast Daily* reported the concerns of officers with regard to their new rostering arrangement introduced 18 months ago. The article states—

One paramedic who did not want to be named for fear of his losing his job said the new rostering introduced at Maroochydore, Caloundra and Nambour stations meant an increasing number of ambulance officers were working under extreme stress and many were simply 'burning out'. The new system replaced two 10-hour day shifts and two 14-hour night shifts with a series of 10-hour shifts.

To make the rosters work you need a lot more staff and the problem on the Sunshine Coast is, they changed before they had the staff, he said.

Now you do up to five or six days in a row and only have two days off and we're coming back bleary eyed.

This, of course, raises some serious questions not as to the dedication or desire of the officers to assist those in need—which is part of the ethos of the men and women who work for the QAS—but rather on the effect of the rosters on these men and women. The minister is equally aware of a number of questionnaires having been sent out by email to officers of the QAS in recent months asking a number of questions in relation to the new rosters. The minister would be aware that these surveys in part were forwarded to Bundaberg, the Burnett Coast, Caloundra, Hervey Bay, Maroochydore, Maryborough and Nambour stations.

The responses of the QAS officers do not paint a picture in which the officers support the new roster system. In fact, many have found it detrimental to their health, their sleep patterns and their family life. This concern in relation to the new shift hours and extended hours of work has some very important effects. Firstly, employees on shiftwork are often required to attempt sleep at times when they would normally be awake. This shiftwork can be considered a biological disrupter, and such disruptions can significantly disrupt performance. Shiftwork can therefore impact on the quantity and quality of sleep and on task performance, and it can create a perceived sense of personal imbalance. Secondly, normal sleeping routines occur at night, but the major difficulty in relation to night-time work is attempting to obtain adequate undisturbed sleep during the day. Over time these disruptions can lead to increased fatigue and decreased performance. Thirdly, work scheduling based on organisational requirement does not acknowledge personal, domestic and social needs. In many cases social workers have great difficulty in maintaining a satisfactory social and family life. This dislocation may result in pressures on relationships, domestic workloads and community activities. Again this impacts upon task performance, health and safety, morale, absenteeism, productivity and attrition rates.

As the article in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* pointed out—and is substantiated by the results of the questionnaire—the current shift arrangements are very negative with regard to the performance of QAS personnel. These are clear concerns that the minister must address if the men and women who perform the tasks that we ask of them in such heroic fashion are to continue to do so for the benefit of all in our community. We will be supporting the bill, but it is wrong to call it fair. It cannot be when we have different categories of payees. The minister must also address the concerns raised by the QAS personnel as a matter of urgency. They are the ones we all rely upon.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (3.15 p.m.): I rise in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. Late last year additional exemptions from the community ambulance cover levy were announced and have been in place since that time. Residents of my electorate in Mount Ommaney were pleased that these exemptions were put in place. Since the community ambulance cover levy commenced in July last year, I have had a number of constituents call me to say that they were unhappy that they had to pay twice because they own a unit in a unit complex.

When the levy was introduced, conditional exemptions were provided for pensioners' principal place of residence, farming sheds, pumps, Commonwealth, state and local governments, and certain religious and other institutions. Local businesses were relieved to hear that the levy would apply only once to a place of business in a building. The Treasurer ensured that he listened to community concerns as they arose during the introduction of the new levy scheme. A number of other changes were called for by people who thought parts of the scheme were inequitable. Consequently, this bill has been introduced to allow these exemptions to be given effect and include stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems; a place of residence not used as a business which has multiple electricity accounts; stand-alone electricity accounts for public park facilities such as barbecues, picnic shelters, walkways, rest rooms, and war and similar memorial sites; common property electricity accounts—the master electricity supply accounts—of buildings such as retirement villages, home units, attached town houses, flats, shopping centres, offices and industrial buildings where the levy or an exemption already applies to each occupied unit, shop or office; stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applies to the premises; and stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by a person because of a medical condition.

Since 11 November 2003 system changes have been made by electricity retailers, and the necessary forms and information sheets have been made available to enable the exemptions to be processed. Initially the levy continued to apply to exempt accounts on the basis that the necessary

adjustments to the account would be made once the system had been updated to allow administration of the exemptions. That is now happening. The exemptions apply to accounts issued after 11 November 2003, even where the period of the account started before that date, and the bill will therefore have retrospective effect.

As the Minister for Emergency Services stated previously, the community ambulance cover goes towards providing Queenslanders with the best community ambulance system that we can, and the money will be well spent and well accounted for. This is the first time that the Queensland Ambulance Service has the security of funding. This government cares about life and death situations, whether they are at the workplace or whether they are at home. We want to ensure that we have fully trained ambulance officers out there saving lives. I believe that there has been very strong community support for the levy from a large majority of Queenslanders. These exemptions are welcome changes, and they satisfy the many inquiries I have had in my office since the introduction of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill.

I know that the operational staff working out of the Centenary Ambulance Station feel much more secure knowing that the Ambulance Service is fully funded and that customer concerns have been addressed. Richard Fowler has proven a hardworking and competent OIC who is always on the lookout for opportunities to improve conditions for his very dedicated staff and, consequently, service to local residents.

The local ambulance committee is also pleased that local residents will receive the best service available. The president of the LAC, Dr Gordon Young, has been doing tremendous work since the formation of his committee back in 2000. He has provided great stability for the committee and support for the staff at that station. I wish him and his family all the best during these difficult times of his illness.

It is absolutely essential that the broader community maintains support for the community ambulance cover. There is no dollar limit that you can put on the value of a life. It is clear that the government is keen to ensure that the scheme is fair and equitable, and through this bill we have gone a long way in achieving this. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (3.19 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. It is appropriate that accounts for war memorials are made exempt. Exemptions for certain equipment used by people with a medical condition are also justified, as is the exemption for stand-alone hot water system accounts. Public facilities, such as barbecues and picnic shelters in parks, should also never have been caught up in this unfair tax.

There can be no argument that it is an unfair tax. Here we are looking at a range of welcome exemptions which will nevertheless still leave many Queenslanders paying more than their fair share while others pay nothing at all. In my electorate the outrage is still very strong. In fact, small businesses are now beginning to receive final notices from Ergon Energy and warnings that their power may go off. As headlines say in our local papers, the *Cairns Post* and on television shows, the gloves are coming off. Many people in my electorate, especially those involved in small businesses, are refusing to pay this tax more than once. Now after months of threats Ergon Energy has issued a notice of intention to summons against a Malanda resident who it claims owes \$71.65. This could mean court action and ultimately affect her credit rating. This woman had been an ambulance subscriber for 10 years and had never used an ambulance. She said—

This is looking like communism to me.

She went on to say—

I am not paying—

Government members interjected.

Ms LEE LONG: I am quoting what she said. If members want to laugh at her, laugh at her, but this is what she said—

I am not paying three or four times; it's like paying rates three or four times. I'm not prepared to pay more than once.

And I do not blame her.

Government members interjected.

Ms LEE LONG: Do members opposite pay more than once? I would like to know how many of them pay more than once. Anyway, I will continue with what she said—

Other groups like those with solar power don't have to pay and are still covered.

This is not even a user-pays tax; it is a compulsory tax on one part of the community. My constituents believe that they are paying their way in relation to the ambulance tax on one electricity bill but refuse to pay the ambulance tax portion on other accounts.

This is the reality: businesses are about to have their power cut; they are about to be forced on to generators. Some may be forced to close and place more people on the dole. The reason is very simple: they do not believe they should have to pay more than their fair share of an ambulance tax. It is not unreasonable for them to feel this way. We hear from members opposite about how important it is

that ambulance services are properly funded. No-one is arguing about that. But to use the need to justify something that is so unfair that average Queenslanders are ready to go to the wall over is sending out a very loud and clear message.

I have a letter from a constituent that was sent to the Premier which I would like to read—

My husband and I own a small business in your home town of Atherton. We are one of many businesses refusing to pay the Ambulance levy more than once. We pay it on our home account, but will not pay it on our business. At the moment we are on borrowed time with Ergon Energy who are threatening to cut off our electricity along with many other businesses. Quite a few businesses and individuals are getting notices of 'Intentions to Summons' because they refuse to pay the Ambulance levy more than once. We have had a lot of media coverage highlighting the unfairness of how this levy is applied. There are thousands of people not paying an Ambulance levy because they do not get an electricity bill. The example of this: People living in Caravan Parks, Boarding houses, Share houses, people running solar power and generators. We have customers in the above categories and they do not pay a cent towards the ambulance but are all covered. The list goes on.

People from all walks of life are contacting me, including pensioners, who have more than one meter and are being slugged multiple times. One business that contacted me is paying the levy 11 times.

The anger in the community is gathering as Ergon Energy is now threatening us all with either Disconnection or Legal Action. The letters all make a real point of highlighting the fact our credit rating could be affected, making loans in the future difficult to get. All over \$75! Using the threat of withdrawing a utility to extract extra money from everyone is the lowest tactic any government could stoop to.

The argument that the Ambulance Service will be better off does not wash, as you cannot penalise people for having more than one electricity meter and making them pay multiple times when a large amount of the population pay nothing. You are, in fact, making us subsidise the non payers.

I cannot believe that this is what your vision is for Queensland, a State of unfairness. Small business has enough to do trying to survive droughts and economic downturns, let alone their own government punishing them.

You referred to small business in the media as 'a bunch of whingers'. Well Premier, this 'bunch of whingers' will not give up on this. There are many of us prepared to fight. It looks like we will lose our electricity but we will run a generator. This will make life difficult for us, but no more so than you are doing now. Many others say they will not pay fines and are willing to go to jail in protest. We are true Aussies who believe in a fair go to all. There has been no consultation on the Ambulance levy and the method of applying, done in haste.

In conclusion, I ask that you sit down and revisit this and change the Legislation to make the levy more fairly applied so that all Queenslanders pay ONLY ONCE. It can be done! At the moment you are hurting a vast amount of people, worse than that you are destroying our faith in Queensland. Businesses are not asking for special privileges, just the same treatment as everyone else. You have already made concessions to Farmers, so please take it a step further. I do ask you personally, take time to read this letter and really think about how you would feel if someone forced this upon you.

While these amendments are welcome, the entire scheme is in need of a complete review. In arguing for the scheme the Premier said on 30 November last year that what went wrong with the old subscriber scheme was that a large number of people were not paying their fair share. He went on to say that that meant those who were paying were paying for those who were not making a contribution. So what has changed? At least the previous scheme was voluntary, unlike this scheme which is both unfair and involuntary and still leaves some paying for others while some are not paying at all.

By the Premier's own definition his tax is also unfair and discriminatory. This tax will rise annually along with CPI. If it is good enough for the Beattie government to raise it annually in this way, it is a pity our world's best treasurers in Keating and Costello have not done likewise with the Medicare rebate threshold. After being in for 20 years the threshold has only risen from some \$20 to \$25, another blatant rip-off.

The costs of these amendments are listed in the explanatory notes as being \$1,960,000—a very exact figure. It would be very welcome to see such precise estimates given on other bills put before this place.

I understand also that under Corporations Law a corporation cannot charge for a service it cannot deliver. As we all know, our electricity suppliers do not have anything to do with supplying ambulance services. So it may be that this tax is in breach of corporate obligations.

Emergency services are a core state government responsibility and as such I believe they should be fully funded from consolidated revenue.

Mrs CROFT (Broadwater—ALP) (3.27 p.m.): I rise in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. During 2002 the state government conducted a review into the Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme. The review was needed due to a range of factors which were combining to put a considerable strain on the scheme as it operated then.

Increased costs for medical equipment and training, an ageing and growing population, the decline in bulk-billing, the reduction of 24-hour emergency facilities and increased private health fund membership were all contributing factors.

The federal government refused to extend the 30 per cent health insurance rebate to the QAS subscription scheme and so its policies of favouring the private health insurance industry, while at the same time running down bulk-billing, have led to declining subscriptions while demand for the Ambulance Service continues to rise.

The Queensland Ambulance Service enjoys a 95 per cent satisfaction rating. Many Queenslanders are rightly proud of the quality and dedication of our paramedics. I know that the officers

at the Runaway Bay station do a fantastic job providing caring, efficient and effective service to the residents of Broadwater.

In order to maintain a world-class service standard at the QAS it was necessary to secure a predictable, long-term funding source. The Queensland community ambulance cover scheme has ensured the Queensland Ambulance Service has a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history.

The government introduced the Community Ambulance Cover Act 2003 to enable an ambulance levy to be applied. The levy applies to electricity sale arrangements including standard contracts, power card arrangements and on-supply arrangements. As the levy is collected by electricity retailers, as agents for the Commissioner of State Revenue, and the electricity accounts issued by them include a statement of levy, which is the liability for each sale arrangement, the government recognised at the time of implementation that a number of exemptions were necessary.

The exemptions initially announced were for pensioners, principal place of residence, farming sheds and pumps, Commonwealth, state and local governments and religious and other institutions. Further to the implementation of the scheme and the provision of these exemptions, the Beattie government announced a range of other exemptions in November 2003. The announcement followed consultation with some concerned groups.

Those exemptions applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems and public park facilities such as barbecues, picnic shelters and walkways. There was also an exemption announced for common property electricity accounts of buildings such as retirement villages, home units, attached townhouses, flats, shopping centres, offices and industrial buildings where the levy or an exemption already applied to each occupied unit, shop or office. It also applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applied to the premises. An exemption also applied to stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by a person because of a medical condition. This bill provides for those exemptions and is therefore retrospective. Further exemptions are also announced in the bill.

Every cent the QAS receives from the Queensland ambulance cover scheme is spent on Ambulance Service funding. This financial year's record budget for the QAS of \$300.8 million is tangible proof the Queensland community ambulance cover is working for all Queenslanders. Such a solid budget enables the Queensland Ambulance Service to continue to deliver world-class patient care to all Queenslanders.

In April this year the Minister for Emergency Services travelled to the Gold Coast to hand the keys to a brand new ambulance vehicle to the officers at the Runaway Bay ambulance station. This new vehicle has meant that our paramedics are now better equipped to provide vital ambulance services to this area. Our Gold Coast paramedics play a vital role and deserve praise for their dedication and commitment to emergency health care in our region.

Recently, local Gold Coast ambulance officers turned out to display their skills and resources at the annual emergency services day in the park. The residents and dignitaries who turned out were impressed by the skill, dedication and compassion that the officers displayed during accident demonstration. This is where the ambulance works together with the fire brigade and police on an accident scene. They rescue a victim out of a crashed car. They work in front of an audience—the audience being the residents. They were able to see how well they work together and the fantastic job they do. I take this opportunity to congratulate Alan Gant who received a long service award from the minister on the day.

Some members opposite have made comments to the effect that we should go back to the good old days of the QATB system with its separate boards and separate funding. I remember too well how the Ambulance Service struggled to raise funds through chook raffles, chocolate wheels and similar fundraising drives. The local ambulance committees also did a huge amount of tireless fundraising during those dark days and we cannot thank them enough for their efforts.

The Beattie government values its hardworking paramedics. They are the most trusted professionals out there. The government is committed to the community ambulance cover as the fairest way to give security and ongoing excellent ambulance services. I am pleased that the Treasurer has considered the extra exemptions. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (3.34 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill. As the shadow minister has indicated the opposition will be supporting the amendments to the community ambulance cover being considered by the House today.

Fundamentally this bill relates to the exemptions from ambulance cover. With a few more amendments this bill might get somewhere close to the National Party's policy which is that there be only one ambulance cover charge for each individual. It is all very well to have exemptions in legislation but, as others on this side of the House have pointed out, throughout our electorates many people are being disadvantaged by this unfair tax on production or the delivery of services.

Most business people pay their ambulance levies more than once or twice depending on their situation at home. They pay it for their office, workshop, storage and the signage they use to advertise their business. In my electorate we have had a huge number of calls from people saying that they feel the tax is unfair. They have indicated the number of times they have paid it.

I can relate very easily to what the shadow minister had to say about the number of times people are paying this tax. Those on the other side of the House have pointed out that people would not vote the government out simply because it brought in an ambulance tax. That is correct. That stands to reason. The reason for that is that the impact of the ambulance tax has been on a minority. People who were paying a voluntary contribution before would be saving some money now. The huge number of people who were not paying the contribution at all before are now paying it.

The whole issue of the ambulance tax goes back to prior to the 1998 election when things were fairly tight. The Labor opposition at that time was looking for a way to gain a huge number of votes. By committing itself to free ambulance cover for pensioners, I believe the government was able to garner quite a substantial number of extra votes for its position.

Unfortunately, as with a lot of promises made late in an election campaign, that was not properly funded. However the new government put aside \$20 million to fund that promise. As others have pointed out, that promise cost the government more than \$100 million. That is where this problem came about. Those in our community most committed to the ambulance cover were older people who know and rely on the Ambulance Service. They were paying a contribution, even if it was a smaller amount. They were contributing to the running costs of the ambulance. By giving them a free ambulance service they did not continue to be contributors to the Ambulance Service.

Within a short time there was chaos. It required a significant amount of funding from the government to fix this situation. That is why we had the ambulance tax that was firstly proposed to be added to the rates notice. Local government kicked up a stink about adding that level of responsibility to the very onerous responsibilities that local governments already have. The next step was to add it to every power meter box around Queensland.

Some exemptions were put in place initially. There was a system for processing those exemptions. In my office—and I would assume this would be the case right across Queensland—those exemptions were very difficult to follow up. Many people collected exemption forms from our office and sent them in. Months later the ambulance tax was still being charged to supposedly exempt premises.

One wonders at the level of competence in terms of putting the legislation together originally which allowed such a mishmash of issues to arise. One would think that with the exemptions there would be clear-cut guidelines which could be easily followed. The real problem with that system was that—and I say this in a contrived way—the government made sure that the ambulance tax was the first portion to be deducted from the power bill. In actual fact, if a person did not pay the ambulance tax or deducted it from their power bill, that amount was taken off their power bill and their power bill would be seen to be in deficit. Sooner or later—a couple of accounts down the track—there would be questions asked as to why they had not paid their power bill rather than why they had not paid the ambulance tax. In some ways, it was self-enforced and there was no objection to it in terms of not being able to pay it. It was part and parcel. It was compulsory. That is how it happened.

Putting in place an ambulance tax meant that it would contribute substantially to the Ambulance Service. Therefore, there would be a better service because it had a certain level of income that meant that those services would be ongoing and enhanced. I have to say that I totally support all of the ambulance officers in my electorate and those outside it. As the shadow minister I always ensured that I recognised the hard work that our dedicated Ambulance Service personnel do in our community, and they do it under very adverse conditions in many cases and sometimes without the level of support from either the government or their executive officers that one would hope they would receive. From time to time there are still delays and other issues in our electorates with regard to supply of service.

Returning to the issue of exemptions, I had a person from Dows Creek in the Pioneer Valley contact me in January this year. When the levy was first introduced, exemption forms were sent out for a water pump. The forms were completed and lodged. Six months later he was still being charged a levy on the water pump which, as most people in the House would know, was a legitimate exemption. There were similar situations with the Sporting Shooters Association of Mackay and the Sarina Community Indoor Sports Centre. Those issues have since been sorted out, but unfortunately it took some time and caused some angst to the committee members and those volunteers who run those associations. I hope that the latest round of exemptions run more smoothly than they have previously and that we do not have a situation where the exemptions are delayed or made difficult for people to apply for.

With regard to the issue of ambulance services for our community, some time ago I talked about the need for a service into the Pioneer Valley and the Peak Downs Highway from Mackay. This has been of serious concern to me for a long period of time, and I have presented petitions in the House and raised issues with the minister in respect of that matter. For those who do not know, the Peak Downs Highway is the main connection between Mackay and the service area for the mines and the actual mining areas in the Bowen Basin—that is, Hail Creek, Glenden, Newlands or further out to Coppabella

and further out again to Moranbah or Saraji and those bigger mines. Currently, because of the expansion of the mines, there is a huge amount of equipment being moved on that highway, which is not necessarily a great highway. It has been upgraded over a number of years but is certainly not as good as it should be given the amount of traffic that uses it. As an example, probably something in the vicinity of 40 or 50 B-double fuel trucks travel that highway a day. Also, oversized machinery is being hauled out there. There are B-double cattle trucks using the highway. Also, all of the explosives are carried out to the mines on that road. It was only two weeks ago that a B-double with a fuel tank with close to 1,000 litres of diesel and loaded with 50 tonnes of ammonium nitrate—the very issue that the minister mentioned in this place before lunch and about which a bill was introduced into the House—caught fire. The road was closed for two days and was a huge inconvenience to everybody concerned.

In terms of the Ambulance Service, the closest ambulances had to travel from Glenden and Nebo and then all the way back to Mackay—that is, 250 kilometres. If that truck had exploded, it would have cleared an area five to 10 kilometres around it. Some 50 tonnes of ammonium nitrate certainly would make one hell of a mess. We were fortunate that that did not happen. I congratulate all of the emergency services people on site who were able to contain the traffic in order to keep it away from the situation. That was a huge risk to everybody concerned. The point I am making is that west of Mackay and up the Peak Downs Highway there is at least an hour delay to get an ambulance. Promises have been made with respect to building a new ambulance station close to the airport fire station which would reduce the response time by probably five minutes—five minutes would be an exaggeration. However, they still have to travel the 50 or 60 kilometres into the Pioneer Valley to retrieve patients.

I could speak for an hour or so in terms of the number of contacts I have had from people in the Pioneer Valley about response times. That station was supposed to have been started by now. I understand that in recent times the site has not been available, so we go back to square one. We are in a situation where all of this equipment is using that road. It is important to also understand that men are now working four days on, four days off in the mines. They drive to the mines and do their four days, which entail 14-hour shifts. If they then drive from the mine site back to Mackay, they are looking at 16 hours. They are totally fatigued. It is an issue that the police are concerned about. There have been some horrific accidents on the Peak Downs Highway, but there is still a response time of up to an hour to get an ambulance. I say to the minister—he is not in the House—that we really need to be looking at better coverage on that highway.

We are blessed of course with the rescue helicopter in Mackay, and my grateful thanks go to all those who sponsor the rescue helicopter in Mackay and Rockhampton with the support of the state government. My thanks also go to the people who maintain and fly the chopper, to the paramedics who man the helicopter, and to the clinical nurses and doctors who often fly with the helicopter. There was an horrific crash of the helicopter with multiple fatalities in Marlborough, and I know the minister opposite, Robert Schwarten, was very quickly on the scene. It actually turns you cold to think about how that happened and why it happened. Then of course a year and a half later there was also the horrific situation of a chopper going down in Mackay and the death of three very admirable young people who were risking their lives to help others.

I digress. As I said, we certainly respect the work that goes on behind the scenes—the Ambulance Service people who put their lives at the forefront when those sorts of things happen. I just quickly recognise Peter Warren. I think that Peter has been area manager in Mackay for many years—certainly almost the whole time that I have been in parliament. I would have to say that Peter does a wonderful job in Mackay. In recent times the North Mackay Ambulance Station was recognised as the best in Queensland. My hat goes off to all of those people who worked so hard to get that level of competency.

I would have to say that I smile to myself when I hear the members opposite talk about the bad old days when the LACs had to raise money. I can assure those members that all the LACs that I know in my electorate are still raising money—thousands and thousands of dollars for equipment that is supplied to the ambulance stations. The ambulance stations come with very basic equipment and the LACs have to fund that extra equipment. I do not think that, really, anything has changed that much. I noticed in the minutes from my old Apex Club in Sarina that that club is donating \$500 towards the ambulance this year. I know that Lions donates to the ambulance regularly. Sometimes I just wonder where some of those members opposite are coming from. I also recognise the LAC in Sarina under the chairmanship of Bobby James and her committee. As I said, the LACs are right throughout my electorate and they do a marvellous job.

There are a number of other issues that I can talk about in terms of response times. Of course, one of the big issues in my area is the communications centre. For many, many years the Ambulance Service has been endeavouring to combine the communications centres in Rockhampton and Mackay into one bigger centre based in Rockhampton. A new ambulance centre, the headquarters for the QFRS and the rural fire brigade was announced for North Mackay. The combination of the Mackay and Rockhampton communications centres then went ahead under that announcement. I have always been of the view that it would be of some difficulty for a communications centre officer in Rockhampton to be able to direct an ambulance to a place in the Pioneer Valley that may be fairly obscure. I just wonder

how many Alligator Creeks there are in my electorate. There are at least six that I know of. I have had many instances related to me—and I will not detail them all because I do not have the time—of ambulances being sent to the wrong place. This has occurred even in the past six months. So the communications centre is not working. Until this matter is addressed properly and effectively, mistakes will continue to occur. Unfortunately, that is putting people's lives at risk. The combining of the communications centres was premature and it was a bad decision. However, we are stuck with it. The issue of the combining of the communications centres should have been left to a later time when all of the GPS coordinates and all the vehicle identification codes were set in place. With those few words, I support the legislation.

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (3.53 p.m.): The ambulance levy has given secure, adequate funding to this essential service, enabling equipment upgrades and additional paramedics to ensure that the service functions at the highest level of efficiency. Of course, the secondary bonus to this levy is that it brings peace of mind to every citizen in Queensland—that they are covered regardless of their financial situation and wherever they go throughout the nation. My constituents are extremely grateful to this government for ensuring such protection. We all remember the struggle of the ambulance officers themselves as well as those wonderful volunteers who make up the local ambulance committees to raise funds through raffles and such for equipment, which could be considered an essential for such a service.

When the levy was first brought in, a small number of residents and businesses in the electorate of Woodridge contacted my office advising that they were adversely affected by having to pay multiple accounts. One of them was a small business owner who occupied three small units, which comprise his showroom and workshop. He was very grateful when advised that the government had listened to his concerns. This legislation will address such anomalies as well as stand-alone hot-water systems; common facilities in our communities such as walkways, parks, picnic shelters and rest rooms; common property in blocks of units; security lighting; and certain equipment relating to medical conditions, to name just a few. These exemptions have been operational since 11 November 2003 and this legislation will retrospectively cover that period.

I would like to commend the superb men and women such as Cary Strong at Woodridge who perform this very stressful but very rewarding function in our community. The lives that are now saved through fast-response, well-trained officers and paramedics using the high-tech equipment now available will have saved countless lives and saved many families from the grief of losing a loved one. In years past the Woodridge LAC has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars and it continues this valuable work, with stalwarts such as Danny Daniels. I know that my community has benefited a tremendous amount from their dedicated support.

Finally, I would like to commend two services in Woodridge. One of the Neighbourhood Watch groups, led by Robert Houston, which is part of the community safety scheme, has developed a junior Neighbourhood Watch at the nearby Harris Fields Primary School. That group is now implementing the training of students in CPR, which I think is a very commendable effort. The Logan Community Safe Group, under the leadership of Donna Van Druuten, is also making a tremendous contribution to the Woodridge-Kingston community. Donna has received funding through the Community Renewal Program and the Gambling Community Benefit Scheme to subsidise hundreds of local community members to complete their St John's first-aid certificates. My community is thus a safe place, with many people trained and prepared to meet an emergency.

It is good to meet up with our ambulance officers and see the smile on their faces. They are now fully supported as never before to carry out their life-saving work. I am very happy to support this bill.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (3.57 p.m.): It is a great pleasure to speak to this bill and, like the member for Woodridge did on behalf of her constituents, I would like to extend to all of the ambulance officers and other people in the Queensland Ambulance Service in the Toowoomba and south-west regions my thanks and appreciation on behalf of the constituents of Toowoomba North for the fine and invaluable work that they do. I want to speak about a couple of matters in relation to what the department is supplying to my electorate and my region with respect to the Queensland Ambulance Service. A new mobile training appliance, being a purpose-built mobile breathing apparatus, has been completed for the Toowoomba region. The unit consists of a tilt tray and a trailer with two containers that have been fitted out to facilitate breathing apparatus training. The approximate cost of this vehicle is \$230,000. Members will appreciate that this is a facility supplied on behalf of the Department of Emergency Services. As well, 15 Laerdal 14,000 defibrillators, at an average cost of \$9,915 each, were provided to stations in the south-west region in 2003-04, including one each for Texas, Jandowae, Meandarra, Miles, Wandoan, Tara and Roma; two for Charleville; and three for Dalby and Warwick, the total expenditure being \$148,736. These machines are of integral importance with respect to the prevention of death following heart attacks.

I also acknowledge that the department continues to support 12 local government areas within the Darling Downs district that are undertaking natural disaster risk management studies. The studies will identify disaster management risks and vulnerabilities within communities which will ultimately

contribute to enhancing community safety and prevention capability within these communities. Obviously this is an area which extends beyond the QAS. It also involves the SES and the fire service.

A very important project is currently under way at Highfields in my electorate. The south-west region is currently working with the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to bring planning into alignment to start construction of a combined ambulance/fire station at Kratzke Road at Highfields within the next 12 months. The state government has committed \$825,000 for the construction of a new co-located QAS/QFRS facility at Highfields. Staged construction of the co-located facility will begin with development of the fire station in the next 12 to 18 months. Current planning will see the ambulance station completed in the 2006-07 financial year.

As well as bricks and mortar, the area of Highfields has benefited by the allocation of up-to-date equipment. The Highfields station received a new urban pumper tanker medium four-by-two, No. 923, in July 2004, this built on an Isuzu FTR 900 crew cab chassis. The new appliance cost approximately \$310,000. The urban pumper tanker medium four-by-two type 2 appliance comes equipped with \$45,000 worth of RAR equipment. The cab chassis has seating for five operational personnel, with breathing apparatus seating for two rear-seated firefighters and two breathing apparatus sets in the nearside wheel arch locker. The cab chassis incorporates all of the latest safety features and pollution controls for crew and public safety. The arrival of this new appliance, carrying state-of-the-art road accident rescue and firefighting equipment, will greatly enhance the station's response capabilities. As I said earlier, these are items of equipment supplied to operations of the Department of Emergency Services other than the QAS.

Turning to what is to operate at Highfields pending the construction of the combined fire and ambulance station, I advise that 23 members of the Highfields community have expressed interest in becoming first responders. These members have been sent application packs. Once these applications are returned the recruitment process for first responders at Highfields can commence.

Finally in relation to this new facility at Highfields, I acknowledge the work of the current minister and his predecessor, Mr Reynolds, in gaining this facility. The interest shown by these ministers in the Highfields area is added to the interest taken by the government generally. I mention the Premier in particular in relation to his support for and opening of the Mary MacKillop Catholic school and the Highfields shopping centre. The Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for Sport opened the indoor sports facility at Highfields in January this year. There have also been significant additions to Highfields State School. The list truly does go on with respect to the government's support for the needs of this rapidly expanding section of my electorate. With those few words, I place on the record my appreciation to the government for its widespread support across all portfolios with respect to the needs of Highfields.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (4.03 p.m.): I rise to support the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. We have now revisited this legislation a couple of times. In relation to the exemptions that apply, I applaud the government on the fact that it sees that other aspects have to be addressed. We see multiple electricity accounts for a building or part of a building used as a single self-contained place of residence. We see stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems, stand-alone electricity accounts for public facilities, stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting, common facility electricity accounts and master supply electricity accounts for retirement villages. We also see common facility electricity accounts and master supply electricity accounts of multi-unit residential buildings, such as home units, attached townhouses and flats, and multi-unit commercial buildings, such as shopping centres, office buildings and industrial buildings, where the levy or an exemption already applies to each occupied unit, shop or office.

I ask the Treasurer to refer to multiple electricity accounts for one residence in his reply to the second reading debate. Whereas there is one account for one residence, there is also a situation—I have it in numerous places in my electorate—of one person owning a couple of businesses within the one complex. I know that they are paying on separate electricity accounts. Whilst one person owns those businesses, they are paying this ambulance levy time and time again. I find this a little unfair. If that issue is not going to be addressed here, perhaps the government will see its way clear to find a solution or revisit this to make it fairer and more equitable.

I refer to the speech of the member for Nudgee. I have great respect for the member for Nudgee. Most times his judgment is pretty accurate. He made reference to the statewide service, going back to 1991, just after the Goss government came to power. I know that I was a late starter on the then ambulance survey committee under the leadership of Jim Elder. I was put onto that committee as a result of a resignation. Today the member for Nudgee said that all places in Queensland were to have a QAS service. That is not totally right. Places such as Alpha, Barcaldine and Quilpie had hospital board operated services. In recent times—thanks to the former minister, Mike Reynolds—we have had a QAS service in Barcaldine. We still need that stand-alone service in Quilpie. QAS services right around the state are manned by professional people—there is no doubt about that—but I believe that we need to ensure equity across the state, not just in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Roma, Charleville, Mount Isa and so on. That equity has to apply across-the-board. I appeal to the Minister for Emergency Services to address this issue in time.

At no time did the National Party say that we would abolish this scheme. We said that we would make it fairer by ensuring that people pay only once. A fair and equitable subscription scheme is exactly and precisely what we would institute. I know many people working in positions that pay extra-good dollars who do not pay the levy at all. That highlights the unfairness and inequity in this scheme. I believe that these are issues we have to resolve. We have to make things fairer for all and sundry. I can give tons of examples of this inequity. I ask the government to revisit this issue and find ways of addressing the inequitable impost on people.

To ensure world's best practice in the QAS we have to have fully operational vehicles with state-of-the-art technology. No doubt we have that, but it is no good having state-of-the-art technology if we do not have fully trained professionals operating the vehicles or the technology in question.

Officers from many of the stations in my electorate have said to me, 'Vaughan, we need extra training in certain aspects.' I know it is difficult to get country officers away to the coast or away to the south-east for training, but at the same time it is absolutely paramount that these officers receive fair and equal training. If they are transferred from a country area to a big regional centre like Rockhampton or Townsville or here to Brisbane or to your home city of Toowoomba, Mr Deputy Speaker Shine, they need to step straight into the breach and carry out their professional duties as a fully trained paramedic.

I do not believe anyone in this chamber is using this as an exercise to score political points, because we all want a fair and equitable service. We want to make absolutely certain that we have a world-class, best practice Ambulance Service by ensuring those people can uphold their professional duties and can be proud of their professionalism in the execution of their professional duties in question. I do not think anyone would deny those people that.

I have heard members on both sides of the House talk of the important roles their ambulance officers play in providing that mantle of safety to their communities in question. I just touched on the Ambulance Service in Quilpie. Whilst that was formerly a hospital operated service, we need to have those stand-alone personnel put there. We need to have them trained so that, if someone is on call, we have someone to back them up. That is the case whether it is Quilpie, Biloela, Brisbane, Mount Isa or Bamaga. Wherever people live in the state, they pay this subscription. I have heard the Premier say in this House time and time again that everybody will have an ambulance service regardless of where they live or who they are. That is one flaw which I believe still exists and which needs to be revisited.

I touched a while ago on the issue of people paying multiple levies as a result of owning businesses. There are many people who I believe are paying the subscription two, three and four times who do not know what their entitlements are. I do not think this has been explained properly to some of these people. I have read the explanatory notes, but it is a very complex issue. I think it should be put in clearer terms so that people can understand, because we get lots of calls into my offices in Emerald and Longreach with people asking, 'What are we entitled to here and what are we not entitled to?' I know we make representations on behalf of some of those people and we get those exemptions as such, but for a lot of people who feel it is beyond their comprehension they do not bother making applications for the concessions that they are entitled to. This is one of the inequities in this legislation which we need to address so that all people who pay the levy multiple times receive exemptions. A lot of people pay the levy eight, 10 and 20 times. I know how many times I pay it: four times. As I say, there are people who are paying the levy too many times and who should not be because they do not understand the legislation.

The other aspect I want to touch on here today—and I hope the Minister for Emergency Services will take note of it—is the provision of ambulances for sporting events within country areas. This is something which for as long as I have lived in the bush has always been an honorary operation. As the Premier says, we now have a service for everybody. There is a cloud hanging over the heads of many operations as a result of indemnity insurance, and we are not seeing a lot of sporting events take place because of it.

The one thing I believe we can sacrifice is the presence of our ambulances at those events in question. Whether it be the annual race meeting, whether it be the annual pony club gymkhana or the annual rodeo or campdraft or at football matches in local towns, whilst it is in their capacity for ambulances to be at those events, if there is a major disaster up the road they can be called away. If there are two or three operations within those communities, they can be called away to provide that level of professional service. The point I am making is that we have seen a lot of these small country events crucified because of the legislation which looks after the ambulances and which comes under the QAS and the Minister for Emergency Services. This is something that is crippling our areas.

I have been involved in football all my life in the bush before I came here, and I know how important it is to have that ambulance on the sideline. You would know yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker Shine, coming from Toowoomba, how important it is to have ambulances there. You know there is that mantle of security if a player is injured so that player can have a professional service to get him to the hospital or to ensure he does not need a medical practitioner.

I believe we need to be honest about these aspects with this legislation. We talk about levies, we talk about subscriptions, we talk about pensioners not paying. Nobody wants pensioners to pay, but we

need a service that is fair and one that will not cripple communities because we live in remote areas, country areas or rural areas where we do not have four or five units at the local station. We might have only one unit. Training is a very important function in country areas and one which is not going away.

Ambulance officers have talked to me about it, and I bet they have talked to many of my colleagues on this side of the House, too. A lot of them are fearful of reprisals against them if we make a representation on their behalf to get extra training for them in those stations. A lot of times they cannot leave those stations for training because there is only person or one person might be on leave. This is a sad indictment on this very professional service. We need to be man enough and woman enough to know our responsibilities and make absolutely certain that there will not be reprisals against these people because they are asking for that service. We do not want to be criticised because we make representations on their behalf. That is what a member of parliament's duty is: to make sure, regardless of the government facility or government agency, that those people are treated fairly and that they are receiving proper training regardless of where they live.

I do not say that lightly here today, and I hope the government takes on board the importance of providing that service and that training to our ambulance officers in country areas. With those remarks, it gives me pleasure to support this legislation.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN (Pumicestone—ALP) (4.18 p.m.): I am pleased to rise today to support the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004, as I did the community ambulance cover levy introduced into this House in July 2003. Since the introduction of the levy, the Pumicestone electorate office has received few complaints about its perceived unfairness on those who have had to pay more than once. However, I have received inquiries by some people who wanted to contribute voluntarily to the scheme, and that is certainly encouraging. There have also been a couple of inquiries about working relatives moving into households where the levy was not previously paid. We obviously rely on the public to let us know if they are not paying and should be, and this shows that people are wanting to contribute to a very valuable community service.

This amendment bill provides further exemptions from the original community ambulance cover levy. The majority of these exemptions were announced on 11 November 2003 and have been operating on an administrative basis since then. I am very pleased that this bill covers an exemption for stand-alone accounts, electricity accounts and power card arrangements for certain equipment used by any person who has a medical condition. However, a person is required to have written medical advice specifying their conditions saying that because of this condition a person needs to use the equipment or needs to have it for a medical emergency.

The types of equipment covered could include medical equipment, lifts or communication devices at a person's place of residence with the exception of TV antennas. These new exemptions will apply to an additional 50,000 electricity accounts at a cost of about \$5 million per year.

However, as with any new scheme, there is always going to be a few teething problems. The government continues to listen to the community and is determined to get it right. That is why these new amendments are necessary. However, no legislation—no matter what political party is in government—can cover every person or every group in every individual circumstance. While most individuals and groups will be happy with these further amendments, I want to bring to the attention of the parliament the plight of the voluntary marine rescue, or VMR, on Bribie Island.

Mr McNamara: Hear, hear! It's important.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: It is important. I am glad the member for Hervey Bay realises the importance of these types of voluntary organisations. VMR consists of a very dedicated group of volunteers who work 24-hour shifts to keep the waters off Bribie safer for all users. The VMR does receive an annual state government grant of \$20,000, but this falls far short of the \$154,000 needed annually to operate its headquarters. Members rely heavily on donations from the public. It runs an annual major art union, raffles at the Sylvan Beach hotel every Friday night and raffles at the RSL every second Friday night. I am a proud supporter of the group. I understand that VMR membership is \$55 per year, and VMR members have to pay for their own uniforms.

I would like to give members an idea of just how dedicated these volunteers are and the incredible service that they provide to the community. They have been in operation for about 25 years, but since 1998 the VMR has performed over 800 rescues. Countless lives and property have been saved. Even last night, and into the early hours of this morning, a number of VMR members were rescuing a 37-foot, 13-tonne timber ketch which ran aground three kilometres north of the Woorim Ocean beach. The unit resource controller, John Mould, with the assistance of vessel commander, Mike Strange, coordinated the rescue from the beach, but they had to wade into the water up to their armpits to secure a towline while the crew of the VMR boat *Patrol 1*, including commander Ross Evans and crewmen Trevor Botham, Nathan Gundry, Dudley McKenzie and Rob Darlington eventually towed the distressed ketch back to the Bongaree Jetty. All this time the radio at the VMR was manned by Anita and Noel Hudson. The drama lasted from 8.40 last night until 1.20 this morning. Probably all this was going on when most of us were asleep.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Yes, they do. The problem is that despite their non-profit community based status the VMR still has to pay the ambulance levy twice, and this is something that we have been trying to rectify for some 18 months.

Mr Seeney: Good. You're on our side.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: No, I am not on the member's side. I am on its side.

Mr Seeney: I am on their side, too, so you're on the same side as us.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: On 21 July 2003 the organisation applied to have an exemption to the levy. The form it filled in made no provision for two accounts so an additional account number was written on the form outside the relevant box. Unfortunately, the exemption applied to only one account, and that was of the VMR headquarters, but not on the second account which is that of the security light and power to the VMR's pontoon where the patrol vessel is moored. It received another bill this morning still showing the ambulance levy.

The VMR wrote to me previously and asked for my assistance. The latest reply I received from the Treasurer, dated 1 September 2004, stated—

... that the Commissioner of State Revenue has indicated the security light for the pontoon may qualify for exemption if it relates to the headquarter premises.

I can say—and I can verify—that the pontoon's location is directly opposite the VMR. This proves that there is some light in this long saga, and I hope that this problem is fixed soon once and for all.

This amendment bill makes provision for the exemption of security lighting. It states that where there is an existing electricity account for the premises—which in the case of the VMR is its headquarters—then this bill will exempt an electricity sale arrangement which relates solely to security lighting which, in the VMR's case, is its pontoon. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (4.25 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill because it addresses in some way the unfairness of the ambulance tax as it was initially levied, but there is still a way to go. This bill enshrines in legislation issues which previously have been covered by administrative arrangements. It exempts places like public parks, barbecues and toilets. I am sure that every single one of us has local authorities which have been aggrieved by the fact that, in providing public amenities for the community, in the same way that state and federal governments do, they have been caught up in the ambulance levy. It also covers multiple accounts.

I have to say that right up until the time that this ambulance tax was put in place there was no disadvantage to rewiring a house or having additional electricity points in a house involving a new meter's installation because there was no impact as a result of the additional meter. If it was easier, simpler or more direct for an electrician to place an additional meter onto a house—perhaps because of a new configuration of the living arrangements or perhaps because of the way extensions were done and it was easier to put in a second meter—then that is what occurred because there was no disadvantage and there was no additional impost on the landowner as a result of that additional meter. Now the chooks have come home to roost, if members like, in relation to additional meters and this exemption is well and truly welcome.

Additionally, there is now an exemption for war memorials and similar sites. It is a grievous tragedy that they were caught up in the issue in the first place. We regularly stand in this place and talk about the importance of our veterans, whether it is World War I—and they are very much a diminishing group of people—World War II or subsequent conflicts. We have said how valuable these people are, how important our memorials are, how important it is for us as a community to realise, to remember and to pay homage to the sacrifices they have made and then they have had to fight to have their sites exempted from this tax. The extension of this exemption to war memorials and similar memorial sites is welcome.

I refer to family units within houses. Some of the examples included units where perhaps aged parents are staying. I believe that, if everybody in Queensland—indeed everybody in Australia—who is supporting ageing parents either in their home or in granny flats attached to their houses turned over responsibility for the care of those parents or dependent children or dependent relatives to government, the cost incurred would be extraordinary. Being able to exempt them from \$90 a year is a small recognition to give for the wonderful service that these families provide to Queensland and, more importantly, to their own family and loved ones in ensuring ongoing care.

However, there continue to be examples of people who are caught up in the ambulance tax who have a justifiable and defensible position in relation to an exemption. One outstanding person in my electorate—and there are quite a number of them—whom I have written to the minister about on a number of occasions, without success, is John Nixon of John Nixon Communications. John's business pays the levy 22 times. Three of those are for his business premises in Bundaberg, Gladstone and Mackay. The remainder are for unmanned repeaters throughout that sector of the state.

To add insult to injury, he allows—and has done so for a number of years—the emergency services, including ambulance and fire, free use of those repeater towers to enable them to have unimpeded communication. Nixon Communications has unsuccessfully made a number of requests for an exemption from the additional payments, particularly for the repeaters. The Treasurer needs to take a serious look at situations where there are clear and defensible reasons why businesspeople should not have to pay double, triple or—in this instance—18 times the levy for unmanned stations, particularly where they are providing, and have done so for a number of years, a community service. John is not a Labor mate. He would never ever purport to be a Labor mate. Clearly, he would probably be on the other side of politics. However, his contribution to the community is no less important.

I have had contact with a young couple up home who are also businesspeople. I think it will be a long time before the Treasurer allows them an exemption, but they are another example. This young family bought a motel at Boyne-Tannum and have been working long hours to build up the business. They have been hit with multiple taxes. They have been very vocal to me in the expression of their dissatisfaction with the multiple levy. They pay their payroll tax and all of the other taxes that are required of them. I have written to the Treasurer on their behalf and I received the standard letter about supporting the Ambulance Service, et cetera, et cetera—which they already do. They want to see some fairness in relation to the impost of this tax.

The member for Nudgee said that the overwhelming majority of people support the concept of the ambulance levy. I would have to concur with that. I believe that, in all of the electorates, and certainly in my electorate, where there has been some expression of dissent, overwhelmingly the residents concur and support wholeheartedly the concept of an ambulance levy. However, they overwhelmingly support the concept of paying it once, paying it fairly, and paying it transparently.

It has been stated in this chamber that this is a way of ensuring that the Ambulance Service has a clear and ongoing income stream. Well, not too many years ago the income necessary to run the Ambulance Service came out of consolidated revenue. Yes, ambulance boards and ambulance officers did raise money through chook raffles, and the like. Now the LACs do it. I would like to place on record my appreciation of the LACs in my electorate—and there are a number of them—that work tirelessly to provide additional equipment, extra comfort for officers and all those incidentals that the ambulance levy still does not provide for but which the community representatives on the LAC consider essential and necessary for a state-of-the-art Ambulance Service. In effect, the chook raffles have not stopped. Maybe the people who run them have changed, but fundraising in the community continues. The application of the ambulance levy must be fair and equitable and then the community will more open-handedly support the LAC, I am sure, in its fundraising efforts.

I thank the Minister for Emergency Services for coming to Boyne-Tannum and opening the new station at Boyne Island. It has been implied that the station was built with the new ambulance levy. However, it was promised and funded in prior years as a necessary piece of infrastructure for a growing community. Mount Larcom Ambulance Station, also a new ambulance station, was built prior to the tax.

Like many members here, I place on record my appreciation for all the ambulance officers who work in our electorates on a day-to-day basis. Queensland Ambulance Week is a great time to focus our attention on and express our thanks to our ambulance officers. Throughout the year we need to be mindful of the sacrifices that they make. Additionally, we need to be mindful of the sacrifices their families make. In multiple ambulance officer stations it may not be to the same extent, but certainly ambulance officers' wives, husbands and families support these officers in, effectively, a debrief capacity. They support them through the long hours and very tragic circumstances that they have to face.

We also need to remember the special ambulance officers—the dying breed, if you like, of ambulance officers. One officer I would like to mention on the record is Jim Brodie, an officer who retired this year. He worked at Calliope for many, many years—as many years as I can remember. Jim was of the old school. He provided a tremendous service to the residents of Calliope. Young people and older people would go to him with bits of metal in their eyes, splinters in their fingers or feet, or suspected breaks when they did not want to travel in to Gladstone. Since the new roadworks it is only 20 or 25 minutes drive away, but a few years ago it was 30 or 40 minutes away. They would come to the ambulance station and check with Jim and he would tell them whether he felt that they needed to go through to Gladstone. He is and has been a truly valued member of the community. He provided first-aid lessons, he provided support to the Calliope Shire Council and, indeed, to any agency interested in doing first-aid courses.

One service that Jim provided has now disappeared from the Calliope community because we do not have a doctor in residence. The older people in the community would go to Jim and he would check their blood pressure or sugar levels. It could be argued that that is not a core ambulance responsibility. Now that that service is no longer available, I suspect that the older folk still do not go to their doctor or to the hospital; they just sit at home and hope that everything is okay. Jim would check their blood pressure and say 'You need to go off to the doctor'. He would check their blood sugar levels and give

them very well-informed advice in relation to their seeking or not seeking medical advice. I am not sure where those people go now because there was a steady stream at the Calliope Ambulance Station.

Congratulations to you, Jim. You deserve a wonderful retirement. You provided many, many years of reliable and valued service to the community at Calliope and, in particular, the Boyne Valley.

I would like to commend the Calliope Shire Council for its prompt response to rural house numbering. With 000, we have had a lot of problems with the reliability of 000 reporting. We are like many rural communities. Joe Bloggs lives at the first turn left after the big gum tree near the white tractor tyre. That is fine if you live there, but if you do not live there, if you are in a call centre in Adelaide, it is very vague instructions. One of the advantages that we lost when we went to the 000 call centre was the local knowledge and understanding of the geography of our rural and remote areas. The 000 call centres do not have that same personal touch. Whilst it may be high technology, there is something missing as a result.

The legislation talks about retrospectivity and it talks about people having to apply. My question to the Treasurer is how will they know about the paperwork that has to be filled in? We had a situation in Treasury in relation to off-road fuel tax where the information was poorly disseminated and two years later people were still being advised by Treasury—which, significantly, could find them—that they now owed back taxes in unpaid off-road fuel tax. However, at the time the tax was actually applied, those same small operators could not be advised directly. My question to the Treasurer is how will people who should be putting in paperwork to claim exemption under this new legislation be advised in relation to their responsibility to put their application in?

I place before the House concerns raised with me in relation to the new EBA and the new manning hours. The hours are two 10-hour days and two 14-hour nights. That will change over time to 10-hour days. I have had concerns raised with me about the adequacy of those hours. More recently, I have had concerns expressed to me in relation to the impact of these shifts on family life. More ambulance officers are required to fill the shifts.

I have raised with the Minister for Emergency Services concerns relating to the secondment of officers from Gladstone Ambulance Station to Rockhampton. That beggars belief because Rockhampton is such a big station and we have minimal crewing levels as regards the Gladstone community, particularly in light of the community ambulance levy. The minister has responded with some statistics, but they have not allayed the concerns of members of the community who are aware of the secondments.

I indicate to the Treasurer, because this has financial impacts, and the Minister for Emergency Services that there are ongoing concerns with the new rostering system. I seek their review of not only the theory but also the reality of the new roster. These exemptions are welcome. There is still a way to go in relation to ensuring equity in the application of the community ambulance tax. I look forward to further amendments to bring that equity to reality.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (4.41 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. This bill proves that the Beattie Labor government is a listening government. We listen intently to the people of Queensland and act on their concerns.

A number of exemptions were announced on 11 November 2003. These exemptions apply to, firstly, stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems. Secondly, they apply to multiple electricity accounts for a place of residence in a building provided that it is not used for business purposes or income producing purposes. Thirdly, they apply to stand-alone electricity accounts for public park facilities such as barbecues or even walkways, rest rooms and, importantly, war and similar memorial sites. Fourthly, they apply to common property electricity accounts of buildings such as retirement villages or attached town houses, shopping centres and industrial buildings where a levy or exemption already applies to each occupied unit, shop or office. Fifthly, they apply to stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applies to the premises. This is a very good amendment. Sixthly, they apply to stand-alone electricity accounts for certain equipment required by a person because of a medical condition. As parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Health, I think that is an excellent exemption.

I place on record my community's admiration for the work of our local ambulance committee. The local ambulance committee president is a young man called Aaron Broad. He is absolutely dedicated to our community. The secretary of the local ambulance committee is Teresa Demmers. We also have Graham and Colleen Katz who are dedicated community workers in other areas of my electorate. Greg Broad is a member of the local ambulance committee. He is renowned in Ipswich for his community commitment to the scouts association and our local P&Cs, particularly the Riverview P&Cs.

Clem Knight is also a wonderful and tireless community worker, particularly in relation to our local schools as well as the ambulance committee. Robin Cross is not only a member of the ambulance committee but is also the local Redbank newsagent. He is a wonderful man. I place on record our thanks to Frank Demmers and Daryl Bryan and other members of the ambulance committee such as a fellow called Axie.

Ms Keech interjected.

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I thank the minister for that interjection. Axie is also my electorate officer.

Ms Keech: He does a great job.

Mrs MILLER: He does do a great job. He is not only my hardworking electorate officer but also a tireless community worker. He is also on the base committee in my electorate and on the committee of the Bundamba Neighbourhood Watch. As members can see, our local ambulance committee is made up of tireless community workers. When they set their dates for LAC meetings they have to take into account the other calls on their time by school P&Cs and other community organisations.

Our local ambulance committee and our local ambulance officers are proudly supported by our local businesses and industries. The Redbank railway workshops are proud supporters of our local ambulance officers and the committee. Redbank Plaza has indicated its continuing supporting for the Queensland Ambulance Service. It intends to have centre displays and promotions for the ambulance committee in future months. I thank Redbank Plaza for its commitment to our local ambulance officers.

Our wonderful ambos do a great job in caring for our community. We think that they are absolutely fantastic. Starting 29 October from Friday to Sunday our local ambos will be at the Goodna RSL Jacaranda Festival along with all our other Queensland government departments. The government pavilion at the Jacaranda Festival is the biggest display on behalf of our local community. We will have people from the ambulance, police and fire brigade there. We will also have displays from Education Queensland, the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Housing and the other departments that look after our community.

The local ambulance committee is at the present time buying new radios for the ambos. It is also purchasing first-response kits which will be an excellent addition to our Ambulance Service. The local ambulance committee also owns, believe it or not, a mini ambulance. The mini ambulances are very cute. In fact, ours is called the 000. We hope the mini ambulance will have another outing at the Goodna RSL Jacaranda Festival at the end of this month. The mini ambulance goes on the display circuit. It goes around school fetes and Neighbourhood Watch meetings. Basically, wherever it is invited, the local ambulance committee makes sure that the 000 mini ambulance and the real size ambulances are available.

We believe that our ambulance officers do a fantastic, caring job in our local community. We have also benefited from the fact that we have a new ambulance station, which we think is great as well. Our community over many decades has supported our ambulance officers. We think they are great. They are doing a great job. We also believe that our local ambulance committee does a great job on behalf of our community. I thank the Treasurer for bringing this bill into the House. I pass on the thanks of our local residents for this bill because it is a commonsense bill.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (4.47 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill. There are a couple of things that I would like to look at. There seem to be some inconsistencies in the way the exemptions are framed. I wrote to the Treasurer recently on behalf of the QCWA. Basically, the response said that they would not be exempt from the levy. I have in my possession a list of four QCWA branches that already have an exemption. I ask the Treasurer why there is inconsistency. If some QCWAs are allowed to be exempt from the ambulance levy, why not all of them? They all do excellent community work.

This does not involve the Treasurer so much, but recently I put to the minister in the House the issue of the transfer of obese patients not being up to scratch. If someone who was very obese and could not be transported by an ambulance was dying on the side of the road after a road accident, what would actually happen? The minister apparently did not understand, because he said that he had looked into the incident and found that the officers behaved in a quite satisfactory manner. I actually agree with the minister 100 per cent on that—they did. What I am saying is that the actual system does not cater for the transport of obese patients. For the information of the House, we are talking about someone around 150 kilograms. We are not talking about something outside the realms of possibility.

The ambulance officers in my area do an absolutely sterling job. What I am querying is the fact that they do not have the appropriate equipment. It is not the officers' fault. They are taking all care and are being very responsible in the way that they discharge their duties, but in this particular case the minister appeared not to understand the full nature of the question—that is, we need different equipment to allow these patients to be transported safely. There are many progress associations in our electorates that do untiring work for their community—work that would have to be paid for by governments both state and federal if they did not do that work out of the goodness of their hearts. I put on the record of the House that I would like to see progress associations in general exempted from the ambulance levy.

I concur with the member for Gladstone in that I also have many concerns about call centre delays. Even though we have tried to raise this issue and iron it out outside of a public forum, unfortunately there still seems to be some problems. A couple of weeks ago an elderly gentleman in Maryborough collapsed in the Woolies supermarket at 9.33 a.m. Despite 000 being called three times—that is, two times by the supermarket and one time by a member of the public—the ambulance did not

arrive until 10.02. A 29-minute response time when an elderly gentleman is lying on the floor of a Woolies supermarket is simply not acceptable, but again I am not in any way blaming the local ambulance service.

In this case obviously the fault lies with the 000 service, because by the time the ambulance officer actually arrived 29 minutes later the lead ambulance officer was severely frazzled. When he was questioned about the response time, he was alleged to have said, 'Who cares?' When a member of the public said that they were going to report him, he said, 'I don't give a stuff. Tell whoever you like.' This is not in the nature of the ambulance officers who work in our region. They are very good people. They are absolutely fantastic. Lisa Gees, who used to work for me in my accountancy and financial planning practice, tried for four years to get into the Ambulance Service. She now operates out of Maryborough as a fully fledged ambulance officer doing an absolutely brilliant job. I again say—and I want to make this absolutely clear—that I am not in any way questioning the local officers; I am saying that they are working under unacceptable duress.

Mr Lawlor interjected.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: I take the interjection from the member for Southport, who obviously has not listened to my speech. What I am saying is that the 000 centre is to blame when people arrive at a job that stressed out.

Mr McNamara: Have you ever seen the numbers?

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: Yes, I have seen the numbers. I take that interjection from the member for Hervey Bay, who went out with the minister to open the ambulance station in my electorate. The minister said that it was actually the electorate of the member for Hervey Bay. It would also be good for the minister to figure out who is in what electorate, because many people complained bitterly to me about that.

Government members interjected.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY: I will keep going despite interjections and rudeness from those opposite. I again say that I think the exemptions need to be ramped up and the call centre needs to properly support the local officers who work their butts off. I know full well what the member for Hervey Bay is grinning about, because I look into call times regularly. I have worked behind the scenes not in the public domain and talked through these issues at length. I again say—and I do not know how many more times I can say it—that it is not the fault of the local ambulance officers. It is the fault of the call centre.

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.53 p.m.): I support the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill. I do recognise that the government is working on a range of exemptions. However, there is much more to be done to ensure that ambulance cover is fair. Many people perceive this to be a grossly unfair tax and an unfair system of gathering revenue. It is unfair because it discriminates against Queenslanders who pay this tax over and over again. People who have a fishing hut which is used once or twice a year still pay two full ambulance levies. People who have power to their shed in their backyards on separate meters have to pay two levies. Miners who work away from home who live in rented accommodation and then drive home for their days off pay two ambulance levies. I know people who own their own business and homes in Charters Towers who have recently purchased a home on the coast so they can retire. They currently pay three ambulance levies.

Some smaller towns do not have a full-time ambulance officer in attendance. Greenvale, which is 200 kilometres from the nearest medical service, has an ambulance but no ambulance officer, nor does it have a driver. People in some of the smaller regional towns do not have a full-time ambulance officer in attendance—for example, Greenvale. Another disappointing factor for these people who pay the ambulance levy in this township is that they are unable to drive that ambulance during emergencies as there are no public servants and laws prohibit locals who are not public servants or ambulance staff from driving that vehicle. Legislation should be changed so that members of these rural communities could do defensive driving courses so that these people can have the ability to use the ambulance vehicle during emergencies.

It is also ridiculous that Richmond has been left without a dedicated ambulance officer. Hospital staff at Richmond have to drive and operate the town's ambulance vehicle because the government is too miserable to provide the people of the town and the district with a dedicated ambulance officer. Hospital staff are doing a great job in ensuring that residents have access to ambulance services. However, unfortunately the hospital staff are virtually on call 24 hours a day which puts pressure on staff and patients. Georgetown is another town in the same situation as Richmond. Hospital staff travel hundreds of kilometres to assist accident victims. Jericho is another town without the services of a full-time ambulance officer.

In parliament recently the Minister for Emergency Services told the residents of Jericho that they did not deserve a full-time ambulance officer because they were too careful. Their rate of incident was only one per month, and this, according to the minister, does not warrant a full-time ambulance officer. The minister may be aware that there have been a number of incidents where people in the Jericho

region have been in life-threatening situations because of no ambulance services. Does this mean that they do not need to pay the full ambulance levy? We all know how valuable an ambulance service is to our rural communities, and it is ridiculous that these towns do not have an ambulance officer. The residents of these townships pay the full ambulance levy yet only receive minimum service. If the government wants to charge top dollar for services, it needs to be very sure that each and every person receives a fair go and has equal access to these services.

The Premier stated in a media release on 18 February 2003 that 412 families that previously paid \$98 per year under a subscription scheme would save significantly under an ambulance levy. With this latest increase in the levy there is now only a difference of \$7.80 between the two fees. Many families are paying more than once and many rural communities are not receiving appropriate services like the metropolitan areas are. The idea that this scheme is more affordable for families is now looking very weak. Under the old scheme, single subscriptions previously paid an estimated \$76 a year.

Mr Cummins interjected.

Mr KNUTH: The minister should go and talk to the people of Jericho and ask them some of the life-threatening situations that they have been in.

Mr Cummins interjected.

Mr KNUTH: He should go to Jericho and Richmond. They are paying the ambulance tax. He is imposing this ambulance tax three or four times on these people, is he not? Isn't that enough?

In the past there was a subscription service. If a person subscribed, they in turn received the services of the ambulance free of charge. If they did not subscribe, they paid. Unless the government can ensure the smaller towns in rural and remote Queensland access to 24-hour ambulance services, it has no right to charge people three or four times over, nor does it have the right to inflict an increase on these people. I do recognise that the government is working on a range of exemptions. However, there is much more to be done to ensure that ambulance cover is fair. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (4.58 p.m.): I rise to support the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. This bill provides for the statutory entrenchment of six additional exemptions to community ambulance cover. I note, however, that many of these exemptions have been operating on an administrative basis since 11 November 2003.

The introduction of the additional exemptions followed a period of bedding down the new system of funding for our vital Ambulance Service. These exemptions resulted from listening to and taking on board community feedback about the community ambulance cover. As members will well recall, it was after careful consideration of the methods that were available to collect the community ambulance cover that it was chosen to put the levy on the electricity accounts as this represented a sufficiently broad base to which the vast majority of Queenslanders would contribute either directly or indirectly to our great Ambulance Service. It was also seen as a method of collection that presented few anomalies and was more equitable than a levy on other transactions that were available to the government at the time.

The new exemptions that have been applying administratively and now by virtue of the statutory entrenchment under this bill will apply to an additional 50,000 electricity accounts, representing a cost of about \$5 million a year to the community ambulance cover scheme. As I said previously, it was after listening to and taking on board community feedback that these exemptions were required to make it a fairer system.

Since July 2003 and the introduction of the community ambulance cover, the Queensland Ambulance Service has for the first time in its 112-year history been assured of a stable funding base. This stability of funding has brought benefits to all Queenslanders, and we must not forget that—benefits such as a free ambulance service to all state residents for acute and non-acute prehospital emergency cases. It has also brought benefits such as additional staff, additional vehicles and equipment and, of course, new and refurbished ambulance stations.

The Kurwongbah electorate is serviced and supported by the Queensland ambulance stations of Petrie, Dayboro and Eatons Hill and will soon be serviced by the proposed new Narangba ambulance station, which will be situated in the electorate of Kallangur. The ambulance stations of Eatons Hill and Dayboro are also ably supported by the local ambulance committees. We are extremely fortunate to have highly trained ambulance officers and paramedics and the highest standard of ambulance service delivery that can be offered. I want to place on record my most sincere appreciation for the work that the ambulance officers and paramedics do in Pine Rivers and throughout Queensland. I cannot imagine doing the work that they do on a day-to-day basis. I certainly admire them for their professionalism and dedication to their job. Can I say that this dedication and commitment to the work that they do was no more demonstrated than by the recent outstanding response from our Ambulance Service and also other emergency services and the police to the recent Bray Park bus accident.

The Beattie government's election commitments over the next three years to the Queensland Ambulance Service include \$35.9 million to recruit 240 extra paramedics. This is in addition to the 110 extra paramedics employed by the QAS during the 2003-04 year. The commitment also includes

\$28.6 million for 22 new or refurbished ambulance stations and \$29.5 million for 200 new or refurbished ambulances.

I might also add that the electorate of Kurwongbah is home to a number of industries that support our emergency services, such as Superior Industries, which is a well-respected and well-known family industry that has built Queensland ambulances since, I believe, about the 1960s. The Brendale estate, which is situated in the Kurwongbah electorate, is also home to Mills Tui, which is a New Zealand company that builds rural fire trucks and which has recently had a contract let to them to build Queensland ambulances. Kurwongbah is also home to Ferno Australia, which designs and builds the stretchers that are carried in ambulances.

I want to let members know that earlier this year Ferno Australia won an Australian design award for its latest stretcher, which alleviates the strain of lifting for ambulance officers. Also, I think that it was in August of this year that Ferno Australia received a grant from the Department of State Development and Innovation under the Queensland Industry Development Scheme to enable them to branch out into rescue equipment for the high-rise construction industry. I believe that this move will lead to an increase in jobs in my area. This grant of \$27,500 will enable Ferno to finetune operations and bring new manufacturing techniques on line to cope with its new range of safety equipment. This is an exciting next stage of development for Ferno and is another example of a smart Queensland firm innovating to stay ahead of the competition. I wish them well with their exports into the US, Japan and Singapore.

In closing, I want to make mention of a number of inquiries that I have had into my office since the introduction of the community ambulance cover and how that cover has been received by private health insurers, whether in relation to their reimbursing Queensland residents for paying the ambulance cover or whether they have taken it into consideration when working out premiums for health insurance for the members of the health insurance fund who reside in Queensland.

The one group of people who have spoken to me on a number of occasions are those who are Australian defence personnel who reside in the electorate of Kurwongbah. Recently, I wrote to the Premier to draw to his attention the fact that the Defence Health benefits scheme is still ignoring their requests to take into consideration that they are paying the levy in Queensland. The board has not taken that into consideration in relation to the premiums that defence personnel pay. I thought that it might be beneficial to this debate to read into *Hansard* the response that I received from the Premier in relation to the Defence Health fund. The relevant paragraphs of that letter state—

As you are aware, health funds, including Defence Health were advised of the changes to the Queensland Ambulance Cover arrangements, as was the Commonwealth Government which is responsible for approving health insurance premiums and which regulates the industry. Prior to the announcement of the CAC Scheme in its present form, in 2002 the Queensland Government called for expressions of interest from private health funds for a privately run ambulance insurance scheme. However, in September 2002, Senator Kay Patterson, then the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, made it clear that the Commonwealth Government would not accept any responsibility for funding State Government ambulance services, particularly by providing States with access to the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate. Due to the Commonwealth's intransigence, the Queensland Government developed other arrangements to provide Queenslanders with universal emergency ambulance coverage in the form of the current CAC Scheme.

While the Queensland Government has no role in setting health insurance premiums, it wrote to health funds requesting they take the CAC Scheme into account when setting premiums for their Queensland members. Both Medibank Private and MBF publicly acknowledged they would take the CAC Scheme into account however, I am not aware of any similar announcement from the Defence Health Fund.

The Premier's letter goes on to state—

The Queensland Government's decision to provide free ambulance services to Queensland residents has resulted in reduced costs to private health insurers. The fund's decision to effectively share that saving across all members from its national approach to benefits and premiums is a matter for the fund and its members.

In other words, we have seen a situation where Medibank Private and MBF have taken on board the community ambulance cover scheme here in Queensland for the benefit of their members, but the Commonwealth government and the board of the Defence Health fund continue to ignore the requests of their members and ignore the requests of the Premier to take that into consideration when setting their premiums. I have directed those constituents to get on to their federal member and take the matter up with the Commonwealth government. This scheme is a good scheme for Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—Lib) (5.10 p.m.): I rise to support the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004, and why wouldn't I? Let us look at the exemptions that are included in the bill. The first is for multiple electricity accounts for a building used for a single place of residence. Why should people in a single place of residence pay multiple accounts? Others are: stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems; stand-alone electricity accounts for public park facilities, including barbecues, picnic shelters, rest rooms, et cetera; stand-alone electricity accounts for security lighting where the levy or an exemption already applies to the premises; and common facility electrical accounts and master supply electricity accounts for retirement villages. Not only would I be delighted to support these; I find it amazing that they were not thought of when this legislation was first introduced. Here we are, for the second year in a row, amending this hotchpotch piece of legislation.

Unfortunately, these amendments do not make the system fair. We still have people paying multiple levies. We still have people paying no levies. We heard the member for Gladstone tell of one of her constituents who pays 22 times. I also have constituents in that league.

I was particularly impressed by the contribution of the member for Pumicestone in relation to the VMR in her area. Three issues arose from the speech of the member for Pumicestone—three issues that show why this is a bad piece of public policy. The first reason is complexity. The volunteers at the VMR at Bribie Island are struggling to fill in the forms and to understand them. Members can bet their bottom dollar that someone in the government has to receive the form at the other end. Complexity is bad public policy. The second reason is uncertainty. Even with the passage of the present legislation, the member for Pumicestone is unable to assure the VMR that its pontoon security lighting will definitely be exempt. Uncertainty is bad public policy. Above all, why should the VMR be paying two ambulance levies and why should the constituent of the member for Gladstone be paying 22 levies? Unfairness, above all, is bad public policy and leads to resentment in the community, as this legislation has done.

The ambulance tax arose out of a badly funded election promise that ambulance cover would be free for seniors, with an estimated cost of \$20 million. Blind Freddy could see that we were never going to provide free ambulance cover for all seniors for \$20 million. That cost now stands at \$130 million—six and a half times greater. This created a need for the government to look at the subscription system, which was not quite covering the cost of ambulance services and was becoming a drain on consolidated revenue. The government needed a new tax to cover the blow-out in this cost.

On the subject of badly funded and poor public policy, the comparison between the ambulance tax and the federal Labor Party's Medicare Gold policy could not be more striking. Here is another policy with appalling costing based on a very inadequate understanding of what makes the medical system for senior people operate. Again, it will produce a blow-out in cost that will lead to a tax burden being extended to the whole community to fund poor public policy.

When faced with the situation of a blow-out in costs the government and the Treasurer had to cast around looking for something else to tax. They had already taxed land and dwellings in relation to fire services. They could not really hit that again. The Treasurer is a great student of history and I know that he appreciates the heritage aspects of his portfolio, so he delved back into history, into medieval London. Then it was deemed that if people could afford glass in their windows they could be taxed. They introduced a window tax for people who could afford glass in their windows. It is hardly good public policy. If one walks around the old parts of London today, one can see where, hundreds of years ago, people bricked up their windows in order to avoid the window tax. The Treasurer, as the keen student of history that he is, looked at his electricity meter and saw that it has a little piece of glass in the front—very much like a little window. This is just a modern-day version of London's window tax. The Treasurer, having struggled to find something new to tax to pay for his poor costings, decided that he would tax the little window in the electricity meter. So he introduced the electricity meter tax.

The irony of the Treasurer's decision to tax electricity meters comes to my mind at two levels. One relates to the issues we have had in the electricity industry—cutbacks in the maintenance program, trees growing over and grounding powerlines and cutbacks to the staff on the ground who respond to issues in the electricity system. Maybe he could see a parallel whereby taxing electricity meters was justified to pay for ambulances because the poor performance of electricity, for which he is also a shareholding minister, inevitably led to greater use of the Ambulance Service. Perhaps that was in his mind. There is another level at which it is ironic that the Treasurer decided to tax electricity. That is, for years now, as shareholding minister for Energex and Ergon, he has been siphoning special dividends out of electricity, leaving electricity underinvested and underfunded and electricity consumers vulnerable and without reliable service. So perhaps he thought that he had got the electricity consumers on one occasion so he could tax their electricity meters as well to fund the ambulance system. That is a fairly ironic sense of humour. I favour the first reason for taxing electricity windows.

Seriously, is there any link between electricity meters and ambulance services? I do not see any particular reason for singling out electricity services, any more than one might single out motor vehicles or water services. Given the propensity to underestimate the costings, we have seen a situation arising in the health system—in other areas apart from ambulance services—whereby the ability to fund the services that are promised to the community in public hospitals and through public health is being stretched more and more. The Treasurer is faced with the same problem he had when he failed to properly cost the ambulance system. He has to look at ways of funding the shortfall he is now seeing in the health system with attempts to cost-shift in the health system, to place bulk-billing clinics next to public hospitals to try to move patients out and to send referring GPs letters requesting that they order all the necessary tests outside of the hospital system so that they are paid for by Medicare and not the public hospital system.

It is just a matter of time before the logic that led to the introduction of the electricity tax is extended to the hospital system and we see the Treasurer thrashing around to introduce the hospital tax. Having taxed properties to pay fire levies and now electricity to pay for ambulance services, a very entertaining evening of speculation can be had as to what the Treasurer will find to tax in order to cover

the ailing state of the Commonwealth public hospital system. I think he would be tempted to have a look at motor vehicles. Drivers seem to be pretty ripe for some of these things. Maybe water would be another good thing to tax. We already have payroll tax, so people's jobs are already taxed. This is despite the fact that this government is one of the highest taxing state governments we have seen, with revenue growth in the last budget at 13.3 per cent in an environment where inflation is running at only three per cent.

On this side of the House, as Liberals, we have accepted the principle of universality of levy in providing ambulance services. Universality applies in some sort of rational and reasonable way. Unfortunately, this tax does not do that—

Ms Male interjected.

Dr FLEGG: The universality is not there because some people do not pay it and some people pay it 22 times.

Ms Male: Why doesn't the Prime Minister allow it to attach to Medicare, then? That would make it far more universal.

Dr FLEGG: The member for Glass House is back on federal issues again. She cannot help herself. Everything that happens in Queensland is blamed on the federal government.

Ms Male: You're the one making the claims. Answer it for us now.

Dr FLEGG: Anyway, in conclusion—

Mr English: Well done, member for Glass House; you beat him.

Dr FLEGG: In conclusion—in amongst the interjections over there—most members who have spoken in this debate have made some reference to the ambulance services in their electorate. Perhaps more than most members, over my 25-year working life I have had a great deal to do with ambulance officers and the Ambulance Service. Members will notice that my diatribe about the unfairness of the way in which this tax has been devised is no reflection at all on the Ambulance Service and the many fine people with whom I have had professional contact on a regular basis over 25 years. These people knock themselves out for the community, and I, for one, along with the other members who have spoken today, will place on the record my recognition and thanks to them.

The member for Kurwongbah said that she had three servicing ambulance stations in her electorate and a fourth one on the way, which I think is wonderful. In relation to my electorate, Moggill is serviced principally from the ambulance station in Kenmore, which does a fine job for us but under what can only be described as pretty difficult circumstances. The difficult circumstance I refer to is a thing called Moggill Road, which at certain times of the day, particularly in the afternoon and morning peak hours, can almost become impassable. There are a number of recent episodes of serious and in some cases life-threatening accidents where the ambulance station from Kenmore has been almost unable to attend those incidents. Because as soon as there is any incident on this goat track of a road it becomes impassable and even emergency services are unable to get there. It is important to support the Ambulance Service on this issue. The road system has to be of a sufficient standard so that emergency services can be safely and expeditiously delivered, and that is certainly not the case with Moggill Road.

We support these amendments. I think they confirm what we have been saying now for some time: this piece of legislation was not well thought out in the first place. The fact that the Treasurer has to keep coming back and amending it—and I am pretty certain these will not be the last amendments—indicates that it was a revenue raising exercise, it was ill thought out, it still is not right, it still is not good public policy, it is still complex, it is still uncertain and it is still unfair.

Ms MALE (Glass House—ALP) (5.23 p.m.): It is a pleasure to rise this afternoon in support of the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. What the original bill did was provide for the first time a reliable funding stream for the Ambulance Service. I worked in the office of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in the early nineties and was all too well aware of the difficulties faced by the Ambulance Service in receiving voluntary contributions, making sure that people across Queensland understood the value of being a subscriber to the Ambulance Service and paying their money every year so that they were covered. Some people treated it as a lottery. There were some people who would not subscribe. They would not voluntarily subscribe, which meant if they were caught short and they needed an ambulance to take them somewhere they were hit with large ambulance bills which on the whole a lot of them could not pay. Then there was the bad debts recovery problem that went along with that.

This legislation resolves that issue. Everyone in Queensland is covered for ambulance cover no matter where they are so they can get to the nearest hospital if they have been unfortunate enough to have an illness or accident. This legislation provides surety and security for all of our Queensland residents, and we have to applaud that. It is a much more sensible situation than allowing people to opt in and opt out. Under that system we did not have full coverage and people ran the risk of a large bill at the end of it.

It was a Labor government in the early 1990s that took the difficult decision originally to abolish the old QATB system, which had inconsistent funding and which relied heavily on fundraising committees. Those fundraising committees did a marvellous job. They raised urgently needed funds to prop up the Ambulance Service, but it was not enough. When we discovered that, we as a Labor government bit the bullet and said, 'This is what needs to be done. We need to provide this secure funding so we can have a world-class ambulance system.'

Mr Mackenroth: Who was the minister then?

Ms MALE: Paul Braddy was the minister I worked for.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Ms MALE: The Deputy Premier was the minister at the time who did that, and I acknowledge that here in the House. His forethought is unparalleled and it was the most magnificent decision then.

So we faced up to the issue, through the Deputy Premier, of properly funding and resourcing a world-class Ambulance Service. We now have improved officer pay levels. We have for the first time ever a career structure for our ambulance officers to work through, we have increased training standards and we see the professionalism in the Ambulance Service everywhere we go. This year a record \$300.8 million budget has been allocated to the QAS, and this will boost paramedic numbers and provide new and redeveloped stations and new vehicles. We will see that rolled out over the next year.

I am seeing the results in my electorate. I have two ambulance services in my electorate—Maleny and Beerwah. The Caboolture Ambulance Station, which is just outside my electorate in the electorate of Pumicestone, services a lot of my area. The Minister for Emergency Services officially handed over to the Maleny Ambulance Station a Mercedes Sprinter. It comes fully equipped to the station and costed about \$140,000. If we add this to the other four-wheel drive Toyota at the Maleny station, we have a commitment of a quarter of a million dollars in vehicles alone. This high level of equipment would not be possible to maintain without the community ambulance cover scheme.

We have some excellent officers at that station such as Steve Tooley and Peter Griffey. Peter is one of our advanced care paramedic officers who recently travelled to the United States as a member of the Toowoomba Road Accident Rescue team. They received second place overall in the world. They are an amazingly dedicated group of emergency service workers who train incessantly so they can provide the best service possible to the members of their community, and I congratulate them for that. This is the high level of officer training that we have and that we as a government support.

The Beerwah Ambulance Station was refurbished last year and now has a secure vehicle plant room with drive-through access. We have modernised the staff quarters and facilities, and we have expanded the training room. They too have two ambulances there which are used quite frequently throughout our area. The Beerwah station has a very active local ambulance committee, and it has provided funding and support to the station since 1977. They do an amazing job and they fund things like the heart-start defibrillators, pulse oximeters, BSL units and other administrative equipment that the ambulance needs. They do a fantastic job, but these are the extra bits that make the ambulance officers' job so much more worth while. It still comes back to the fact that the community ambulance cover provides ongoing funding that we can access and it provides security so that we have a world-class Ambulance Service.

I briefly want to talk about the issue of the icebox, which some members have raised. We are down to one lane on the icebox, which is the road between Maleny and Landsborough. The Department of Main Roads has done excellent work to ensure our ambulances and other emergency vehicles have the ability to get through in an emergency. It is a difficult situation. The road will be finished hopefully by May next year. In the meantime it has been difficult, but our ambulance officers, our Emergency Services officers and our DMR people have worked very hard to make sure no-one is disadvantaged through this process, and I would like to commend them for that.

Some members opposite, as I have been listening to the debate this afternoon, have made comments to the effect that we should have gone back to the old days of the QATB system, back to the days of voluntary contributions. I do not want to see our communities struggle to raise funds to support this very essential service.

I was outraged at the comments of the member for Moggill this afternoon. He obviously does not support—

A government member: He's always outrageous.

Ms MALE: It is outrageous. He obviously does not support older people in our community being able to access the Ambulance Service for free. That was quite obvious. He obviously does not support Medicare Gold, which is about looking after our older citizens and making sure they have access to the hospital services they need. These are two fantastic policies that we see here that the member for Moggill obviously does not support. He was talking about an ill-thought-out policy, and what was that stuff about the windows and taxing bits of glass?

Ms Nelson-Carr interjected.

Ms MALE: I take that interjection; he should know better than that. He should know how important it is that our Ambulance Service is funded properly and that the Medicare Gold issue which Mark Latham has raised is a very important policy which is going to have positive health benefits for older Australians.

The member for Moggill was talking about how unfair this system is. This is a very fair system. It is as fair as we can make it at the moment. If he is such a committed Liberal, why was he not talking at the time to his Liberal counterparts who would not allow us to apply it to the Medicare system, where all taxpayers would have to pay a proportion of their wage? That was the ideal, but it was not allowed by the Liberal Prime Minister, yet here we have a Liberal member criticising us for that. I was astounded to hear that. That is so hypocritical! Obviously the next choice would have been to put it on rates because, as we have said, we have a fire rate and we see a very well-funded fire service because of that.

Mr Mulherin: That was brought in by the coalition.

Ms MALE: I take that interjection. That is very important, and we could have applied it to that. As we have seen with electricity, it works in the same way: if someone has a property then that person pays the levy that goes along with it. I do not see this as being any different from that. It is not the ideal; the ideal would have been to have a slightly raised Medicare levy but we do not have that.

That is the basis of where we are coming from with this bill. There have been a few inequities that have been picked up which the Deputy Premier has addressed through this bill, where we are looking at providing exemption for stand-alone electricity accounts and power card arrangements for certain equipment. This legislation will make sure that the exemptions that were applied in November are utilised properly through the administrative system. Multiple electricity accounts for a building or part of a building used as a single self-contained place of residence, stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems and for public park facilities including barbecues and picnic shelters, and war and similar memorial sites are included in this bill. This is a commonsense amendment. It is very important that we get it right. These are the last little bits that we need to do, from what I can see, to make this work and to provide that guaranteed revenue stream, which the government then tops up through its budget to make sure that we have this world-class ambulance system.

I would like to thank all my ambulance officers and the paramedics throughout the electorate of Glass House and, as I have said, the ones at Caboolture station who are just outside my electorate but service my entire area. They do a fantastic job. Their professionalism and dedication are above reproach. I would like to put on record in the House my gratitude to them for the work that they do. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (5.32 p.m.): The Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004 is the Beattie government playing catch-up in relation to the unfair and much hated ambulance tax. If the Community Ambulance Cover Act 2003 had been properly thought out, if proper community consultation had been carried out and if the government was prepared to listen instead of going through the motions and ticking the box marked 'community consultation', then the Labor government would not have had to introduce this amendment bill. There are many interest groups that will benefit greatly from the exemptions listed in the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004. For that reason I support this amendment bill.

The exemptions outlined in this bill will go a small way to helping out struggling small businesses, rural operators, non-profit organisations and people with medical conditions. In his final summation, I would like the minister to clarify whether the ambulance tax applies to the flashing warning lights on the many cane train rail crossings of the Burnett and Bundaberg region. These warning lights, just like the Ambulance Service itself, save lives, and it would be unjust if those vital pieces of rail infrastructure attracted the ambulance tax.

The government claimed that the tax would, in fact, reduce the costs for many families but the opposite has occurred. On 26 March 2003 Lawrence Springborg MP moved—

That this parliament supports the principle that no individual or business should pay the proposed ambulance levy more than once.

Of course, we all know that the Labor Party opposed the motion. Because Labor defeated this motion many small business owners and rural operators have suffered. The majority of people I talk to say that they feel cheated because they have always paid the ambulance subscription fees right from the beginning, and now they are being bombarded with multiple charges just because they may have an additional business address, a holiday address and a residential address, all with separate electricity bills. Of course, these small business owners and rural operators have the opportunity to apply for an exemption, but I have heard time and time again that these people have lost faith in the current system and do not believe an exemption will be given out. Not surprisingly, many exemption applications have been unreasonably turned down. This has highlighted the need for additional exemptions to be included in the act.

Many of my constituents are upset and angry with the current Community Ambulance Cover Act. Earlier in the year I received correspondence from a local tennis club in my area, the Moore Park and

District Tennis Club. Along with many other non-profit sporting clubs, it has expressed its strong dissatisfaction on the imposition of this unfair ambulance tax. Despite being a small non-profit sporting organisation, it is being hit with excessive fees on numerous electricity bills. My attempts to seek an exemption for the club failed, and the club continues to pay these ambulance levies.

Another two constituents of mine with similar cases—who I would like to point out are self-funded retirees, Mr Reg Green and Mr Bernie Sainsbury—have also been refused exemptions after disputing having to pay the ambulance levy on their houses and a couple aircraft hangars they own. Mr Sainsbury has since had his electricity supply disconnected from his hangar because he could not afford to pay the levy twice. I also know of constituents who own holiday houses who refuse to pay multiple electricity bills. Instead, they have resorted to using generators as a main source of electricity to avoid paying excess ambulance taxes, which they already pay at their main residential addresses.

I am aware that this community ambulance cover tax has enabled the Queensland Ambulance Service to provide free emergency ambulance transport to all Queenslanders no matter where they are and that it guarantees the QAS a reliable source of funding. However, additional exemptions to the Community Ambulance Cover Act will assist not only my constituents such as those in the examples I have given but every member's constituents throughout our state and, for that matter, Australia-wide.

While this ambulance tax has been collected by the Peter Beattie Labor government's ambulance levy since 1 July, my research shows that this extra money has not improved greatly the Bundaberg Ambulance Service response times. Make no mistake, our ambulance officers deserve accolades for their invaluable services, but I need to point out that in Bundaberg the ambulance response times have actually risen. These increases in response times were confirmed in August when staff of the opposition obtained figures from a question on notice to the Minister for Emergency Services. This research shows that in Bundaberg only 77.89 per cent of emergency call-outs during June this year were answered within 10 minutes. That should be compared with September last year when 82.04 per cent of emergency calls were answered within 10 minutes. For the Burnett Coast the figures show that in June this year 60 per cent of call-outs were answered within 10 minutes while in September last year the figure stood at 68.29 per cent. I would like to point out that these were classified as category 1 call-outs or emergency cases.

In outlining these facts, in no way do I wish to give the impression that our ambulance officers in Bundaberg and the Burnett are not the best in the country, because I believe they are. They are working in an environment where more demands are being placed on their resources. The Burnett and Discovery Coast, including Agnes Water, are experiencing some of the highest growth rates in the nation. The Town of 1770 alone has a growth rate of around 30 per cent. I have personally witnessed the outstanding professionalism of Burnett Coast ambulance officers and I was amazed by their dedication to duty, their compassion, their coolness in a crisis and, of course, their valuable life-saving skills.

I take this opportunity to raise my concern about the removal of the Bundaberg communications centre from Bundaberg and its placement in Maroochydore. I have personally spoken with local ambulance officers, who have assured me that its removal will not cause a degradation of our service. I believe their words and guarantees, but I still have some reservations. I would like the ambulance communications staff moved from the Sunshine Coast to the Burnett and for the Burnett communications centre to be upgraded. The Burnett electorate has one of the highest unemployment rates in the nation, let alone in the state. Any talk of government jobs—or any job, for that matter—being lost to the region makes me very angry and upset. Senior ambulance officers have assured me that no jobs will be lost to the Bundaberg and Burnett region. I believe that they are telling me what they know to be the truth. They are honourable people. During the minister's summation, I would like to place on public record an undertaking that no ambulance jobs will be lost in the Burnett region.

Mr Mackenroth: The member has the wrong minister. This bill is to do with revenue; it is not to do with the running of the Ambulance Service.

Mr MESSENGER: In closing, I congratulate Melissa Bayntun, Bundaberg's communications officer, who was awarded the north coast region communications officer of the year. I also congratulate Desley Cunningham, chair of the local ambulance committee, who was awarded the LAC achiever of the year award. Enid Joy Cullen has written a wonderful book titled *Ready Always*, a history of the Bundaberg Ambulance Service, which I would like to table. The book documents the history of the Bundaberg Ambulance Service, which was formed at a public meeting held in the town council chambers at 8 p.m. on 19 July 1907, up until 1999, just before the turn of the century. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (5.41 p.m.) It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak on this bill. The Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill provides additional exemptions from the community ambulance cover levy, as we have heard this afternoon. Most of these exemptions were announced on 11 November last year and have been operating on an administrative basis since then. When it commenced in July 2003, there were initial conditional exemptions provided for a pensioner's principal place of residence, farming sheds, pumps, Commonwealth, state and local governments, and

certain religious and other institutions. Exemptions were also provided to ensure that the levy applied only once to a place of business in a building.

I would like to digress slightly and bring Townsville into this debate and speak about the community ambulance cover scheme in general. It has ensured that the Queensland Ambulance Service has a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history. Every cent that the Queensland Ambulance Service receives from the community ambulance cover levy is spent on Ambulance Service funding. This financial year's record budget for the QAS of \$300.8 million is tangible proof that the CAC is working for all Queenslanders. This latest funding increase means that since 1998 the Beattie Labor government's funding for ambulance services in Queensland has risen by about \$130 million. That is well ahead of the level of inflation.

Legislation such as this, which involves significant change, requires a settling in period and community feedback. That is what members are doing tonight. The fact is that all Queenslanders are now covered by QAS, including those who would never have been covered before, either because they did not take the time to subscribe or because they could not afford the cost. Our paramedics provide more than first aid. As part of their everyday job, they provide life-saving emergency care, prehospital care, and help and comfort to people who are at their most vulnerable and distressed. Further intakes of student paramedics have been undertaken and, currently, the largest student class of paramedics in QAS history is in training. More paramedics will be able to serve the needs of Australia's fast-growing population, maintain emergency response times and improve services to rural and remote communities. QAS is the fourth largest ambulance service in the world and the second busiest.

Because of the community ambulance cover, every Queenslanders, irrespective of where they live, receives world-class hospital care. Townsville has recently received two brand new, fully equipped ambulances at its Hugh Street station. This is where the community ambulance cover levy goes. It funds training, equipment and services for the Queensland community.

I place on record my congratulations to Tiarna Craigie, who won the communications officer of the year during the recent Ambulance Week celebrations. That award was for her efforts in giving life-saving CPR advice to 12-year-old Sean Gagelier in Hughenden when his father collapsed. Sean was named Queensland's young hero of the year.

QAS is more than ambulances and paramedics. It also provides services such as baby capsules and fitting them correctly so that our youngest Queenslanders are safe and sound. It provides first aid and CPR courses. It is important to know in an emergency situation that a trained professional can talk you through it while help is on the way.

Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics have been educated in the recognition and emergency management of marine stinger incidents since the late 1980s. Via the marine stinger program, paramedics undertake annual skills validation in the management of marine stinger victims, including the administration of box jelly antivenom, if required. The revised marine stinger education package released in 2003 represented a significant revision of the existing program. It ensures that knowledge and clinical practice of QAS paramedics remains up to date with contemporary medical management and that there is delivery of the program via progressive educational methods. The format and content of the training package has been well received by all staff.

The QAS has been fully involved with a number of Queensland agencies—including Queensland Health, universities and surf-lifesaving—in the recent review of management of marine stinger incidents. The 2003 training program contains a large amount of well-researched information. It will continue to be reviewed to ensure that any further developments in marine stinger knowledge are included in future paramedic practices. In conjunction with the Mission Beach Rotary Club and the Cardwell Shire Council, beach vinegar stations have been installed. They include a number of things such as signage for beach goers with more information on 000, first aid instructions, directions to the nearest surf-lifesaving hut and a location numbering system to assist paramedics with the exact location.

QAS has delivered a pilot program for marine stinger education to school students in far-north Queensland. There has been very positive feedback from both students and teachers. The aim of this program is to promote safe beach usage during the marine stinger season via community education. It is hoped to prevent encounters with potentially dangerous sea animals. This is very relevant to Townsville but also to Queensland in general.

I applaud the Beattie government for bringing this levy on board so that people who can afford to pay the levy—those who have many businesses, beach houses or several residences—will pay \$88 towards ensuring that all Queenslanders have a free ambulance service. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (5.47 p.m.) The Liberal Party supports the Community Ambulance Cover Amendment Bill 2004, which provides additional exemptions from the community ambulance cover levy which commenced on 1 July 2003.

Whilst the Liberal Party supports the principal behind this levy, it is a great pity that the unfairness of the initial legislation, forcing people into paying multiple times, was not addressed earlier. The

exemptions in this bill have been active for 10 months, yet only now is Labor putting these changes into the legislation. Why the government did not put these exemptions in the original bill is puzzling, to say the least—or perhaps this was just another money-grabbing exercise.

Is it not basic commonsense that stand-alone electricity accounts for hot water systems should be exempt, that stand-alone electricity accounts for public park facilities should be exempt, that multiple electricity accounts for a place of residence should be exempt? It is not exactly rocket science, is it? The ambulance levy was introduced without thorough planning or careful costing. It is another example of Labor acting like a bull in a china shop. It has rushed in without thinking fully about the consequences of this legislation. In its rush to fix the problem, more dilemmas have been created, with innocent parties being levied more than once. Now they are trying to fix this unreasonable situation.

This is evident in the amendments that Labor has put forward in the bill before parliament today. For months after the introduction of the ambulance levy, Labor realised that we in the Liberal Party knew that the exemptions in the current legislation were insufficient and, in some cases, downright punitive. But that did not stop the government using heavy-handed tactics to enforce the new levy. It threatened to cut off people's electricity if they did not comply. Funny about that. Some of us in my electorate have our power cut off regularly through blackouts even though we pay our levy.

The Deputy Premier mentioned in his second reading speech that the government is listening to the community about the community ambulance scheme. Maybe it should have listened to the community before it enacted the July 2003 legislation to ensure that the levy was charged in a fair and equitable manner. But in a pattern of behaviour typical of this government, the *modus operandi* is to act retrospectively and fix mistakes, only if and when a large number of people have complained about them.

One shortcoming of the community ambulance cover was an absence of effective community education and clear explanations as to the benefits that Queensland residents are entitled to. This created anger and confusion right across the state. Like many members in this House, my electorate office has received countless inquiries on the community ambulance cover levy. Questions asked include: whether the whole family is covered, whether they are covered if they travel interstate and why businesses should pay the levy when staff are already covered by their own home accounts. After all, one cannot be in two places at the one time.

With the Currumbin electorate nestled along the New South Wales border, many people who own Queensland businesses but reside in New South Wales expressed concerns about why they had to pay the levy on their business electricity account, yet if they fell ill they were not able to receive free ambulance service. The state Labor government has displayed no understanding of how border communities work and it has failed to recognise that some of these people have subscribed to the Queensland Ambulance Service for decades.

In June, the *Courier-Mail* reported on a town near Cairns called Ravenshoe whose community was so up in arms about the new levy they stopped paying their electricity bills. Disconnection notices were issued but townfolk were prepared to turn on their generators if Energex followed through with their threat. The local chamber of commerce conducted a study on 50 businesses who were required to pay a total of 175 power levies. Out of these 50 businesses, 48 were required to pay the levy more than once.

Most Queenslanders are prepared to pay the \$90.20 levy once, either on their home or business, as they recognise the invaluable assistance that the Ambulance Service provides. Paying the levy more than once is considered by many as just another government rort to tax the people to the hilt.

The response times on average for the Gold Coast are appalling. Mudgeeraba, for example, in September 2004 has only been able to meet the 10-minute response goal 52.73 per cent the time. Helensvale is not much better sitting on 55.38 per cent.

Queenslanders have a right to ask whether this levy has improved ambulance services now that everyone has to contribute. According to those who have worked in the Ambulance Service and do not wish to be named for fear of retribution, the service is being abused. A number of sources state that the initial motivation for the introduction of the ambulance levy was to pull the ailing service out of the red. It would seem since the amalgamation of the service across the state 14 years ago it had slowly been sinking, with frontline staff levels decreasing and management positions increasing. Interestingly enough, this coincides with Labor being in government for the majority of this time.

Dedicated, skilled paramedics are leaving or considering leaving the profession they love for a number of reasons. One such person commented that every single person who wears an ambulance uniform refers to it as a taxi service. 'Glorified taxi drivers' and 'rapid response taxis' are some of the commonly used phrases. If anyone speaks to the media they are at risk of losing their job.

Our Ambulance Service is responsible for patient transport and emergency use. Until four years ago patient transport, classified as non-emergency, and emergency call-outs used to be a combined service but it is now separate. The revised system does not work entirely. It is fine if a person books their patient transport in advance as this allows for planning. But if someone rings up with a non-emergency

transport—for example, going into hospital to get their plaster cast removed or a cataract appointment—on the actual day of their procedure the call goes to the emergency ambulance. When the paramedics receive the job they are not informed it is a patient transfer and it is treated as an emergency. The Liberal Party is concerned that this lack of differentiation means in some cases resources are taken away from emergency situations.

It has been noted by ambulance workers that some people who use this service are perfectly capable of making their own way to hospital, but because the service is now paid through the electricity bill, they feel as if they have already paid for this service and are entitled to utilise it. It is this type of abuse that has paramedics concerned. Transporting patients to and from hospital during post-operative or post-procedural recuperation time is perfectly legitimate ambulance use and not what is being highlighted here.

Before union interference the roster was two 10-hour days and two 14-hour nights and then off for four days. The union decided to try to reduce the incidence of paramedic fatigue by making it illegal to do extended shifts. Whilst this ruling may have come from good intentions workers were informed, not consulted, that they would now be working a series of 10- to 12-hour shifts, which, in reality, evolved into the very extended shifts that were stopped. This is happening primarily because of staff shortages due to stress, illness and discontentment with the service.

Paramedics who are brave enough to come forward are indicating that they rarely get meal breaks and are rushed off their feet from the moment the shift starts to the time it finishes. These skilled workers are in short supply and should be treated with respect and given meal breaks as outlined in their workplace agreements. It is no wonder some overworked paramedics are leaving the ambulance service with low morale and burn out. According to those working in the field, a midnight to midnight shift generates at least 150 calls on the Gold Coast. Therefore on average one crew would do eight to 12 jobs per shift, which leaves very little time for a short break let alone a meal break.

Paramedics who have been brave enough to speak out on the issue have indicated that the roster is not family friendly and child care costs have doubled. The majority of responses from a north coast regional consultative committee survey showed that the overwhelming majority of paramedics were unhappy with the changes. Paramedics regularly find themselves missing out on meals or not receiving a break resulting in payments of double time after the sixth hour. These changes have led to a decline in morale and, more importantly, safety. The union influence has, as has other state government controlled industries such as energy and education, produced poor working conditions and a culture of fear in regard to speaking out about problems.

Trained ambulance officers used to work in the communications room so they could provide some sort of diagnosis on the phone. This no longer happens as civilians are now evaluating the calls. The medical demand starts from the phone call. If one can supply medical information to the person on the phone one may well save a life. Additionally, medically qualified personnel can prioritise cases and look after the patients and the staff who are in the field dealing with the patients.

Another factor of concern to workers is the lack of beds available in the Gold Coast Hospital. This causes ambulances to, at times, be waiting with patients for over two hours.

Mr FENLON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I draw your attention to the relevance of the current speech.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Croft): Order! I ask the member to refer to the bill we are debating tonight.

Mrs STUCKEY: I am referring to the levy as perhaps not being supported properly through the Ambulance Service. It is exactly this levy that I am trying to discuss. I am pointing out why there are shortages in these areas. To stress my point, earlier this year one paramedic had a patient who actually began fitting on the stretcher. That paramedic had to go back out to the vehicle and get drugs to treat the patient because of the lengthy hospital emergency waiting time. Despite the pressure placed upon hospital staff on a regular basis, the commitment of our Ambulance Service officers to deliver appropriate patient care is to be commended.

While I recognise the government has indicated that it is making some improvements to the Ambulance Service, it is my hope that a larger percentage of the money that it is collecting from this levy goes towards improving basic service delivery, therefore boosting staff morale. This would see an increase in the number of ambulances staffed with paramedics operating from individual stations.

These amendments go some way towards making the levy fair for the people of Queensland while providing a reliable source of funding for the Ambulance Service. However, if the government was really listening to the people it would acknowledge that these exemptions only cover a fraction of what is really needed.

In a recent letter from the Minister for Emergency Services he states that he has personally visited the Gold Coast on a number of occasions to meet the staff. May I suggest that next time he visits one of the services on the Gold Coast he ride along for a day as an observer. The minister can then

experience first-hand an 11-hour shift with no breaks, being treated as a taxi service, waiting hours at a hospital caring for a patient until a bed becomes available and attending call-outs one after another for the whole period of the shift. I commend the bill to the House. The Liberal Party supports this legislation in principle.

Debate, on motion of Mr Fenlon, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E.A. CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (5.59 p.m.): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Jet Skis

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (5.59 p.m.): In November 2003 a discussion paper titled *Operation of jet skis* was issued. I note in the introduction the comment that there had been a growth in the number of jet skis used in Queensland and thus a review of their use was needed. The discussion paper dealt in detail with the need to regulate the use of jet skis taking into account the following—

Issues and interests of waterways and land users, environmental impacts, safety, general amenity as well as enforceability of regulations.

The paper goes on to detail current laws that apply to jet skis and raises a number of issues for concern and discussion including, firstly, the fact that marine incident statistics show that while jet skis make up only 3.5 per cent of the boating fleet in Queensland they account for a larger number of reported safety incidents and figures show that jet ski activity is a higher risk activity than any other type of recreational boating; secondly, the requirement to be aware of the environmental impact by the emissions of jet skis and physical damage to vegetation, foreshores and wildlife; and, thirdly, the question of noise remained a clear major source of community concern in respect of newer models not having as much engine noise as earlier versions. The public submissions were due to be lodged by 19 December 2003, and to my knowledge that date has not been extended. In addition, to my knowledge to date there has been no announcement by the government as to what has been the outcome of the discussion paper and submissions thereon.

The importance of this policy paper relates to Pumicestone Passage, a stretch of water that rests between Bribie Island and Caloundra. Pumicestone Passage is a quiet body of water not subject to surf conditions and is ideal for young children, families, day trips and boating exercises. It is also a stretch of water favoured by many jet skiers who use it as a raceway causing significant ecological damage, noise pollution and risk for families using the passage. The passage has been there for hundreds of years and residents in Golden Beach and Pelican Waters have also been there for a number of years, certainly well before jet skis became a recreational item. This is an issue that has upset hundreds of residents not just in Caloundra but Noosa and other areas of Queensland in which the use of jet skis has multiplied.

I have been told the noise is unbelievable and the disregard for regulations and noise restrictions is rampant by jet ski riders and their passengers. What we do not want to have is a young child seriously injured or killed by one of these devices. The areas in which they operate are predominantly used by families and it is a quiet area in which marine life and we humans live in harmony. What needs to happen is for the government to make a determination on the policy document and submissions it received thereon and to take a firm stand on this question. The Transport Minister must take the action required to protect those attractive waterways and areas for family get-togethers. There is no doubt that the issue is complicated. However, it has now been around for a number of years and no resolution has been reached.

Mobile Phone Tower, Toowong Electorate

Mr FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (6.03 p.m.): The residents of Toowong are speaking with a clear and loud voice about a proposed mobile phone tower in their community. On Saturday afternoon, along with my colleague the state member for Indooroopilly, Ronan Lee, I attended a forum hosted by the Toowong West Community Association which for two and a half hours provided residents and stakeholders with the opportunity to hear information about the proposal and express their views. Residents demanded the opportunity to have their say about the proposal to site a tower on the grounds of the Toowong West Bowls Club across the road from Toowong College and smack bang in the middle of a residential community. The meeting was advised that the federal Liberal member for Ryan, Michael Johnson, who was present during the afternoon, was opposed to the tower and would be making representations to Telstra about the issue. This was naturally well received by the meeting.

While Mr Johnson wrote to the community association and said that he opposed the tower, I do not know what he thinks about the sensible proposals put forward under federal Labor's stricter mobile towers policy contained within our telecommunications policy, a copy of which I table for the benefit of all

members of this House tonight. Our policy proposes empowering local councils to make planning decisions with respect to all facilities located within close range of schools, kindergartens and hospitals. This would involve a Labor government prescribing an exclusion zone to be determined after a thorough scientific analysis of electromagnetic radiation effects over certain distances. Our policy also includes ensuring community consultation by requiring that carriers consult with communities regarding mobile phone towers requiring local development approval.

Tonight I want to ask Mr Johnson a number of questions about the proposals under the stricter mobile towers policy which were displayed at Saturday's meeting. As we well know, when it comes to the federal Liberals, what you see is often not what you get. When it comes to the federal Liberals, you have to make sure that you ask exacting, almost forensic questions lest you encounter obfuscation, plausible denials, conflation, deflection and defiance. I need to ask, because I do not yet know what Mr Johnson thinks. But I do know what his federal Liberal colleague the federal Liberal Minister for Communications thinks about Labor's proposals. John Howard's Communications Minister, Senator Coonan, thinks Labor's policy, which would give communities a greater say and implement an exclusion zone around schools, kindergartens and hospitals, would—

... increase the red tape associated with installing mobile phone coverage.

So as an elected representative for the Toowong West community, I put the following questions to Mr Johnson before Saturday. Firstly, does Mr Johnson agree with his federal Liberal colleague Senator Coonan that giving communities a say is unnecessary red tape? Secondly, does he agree with his federal Liberal colleague that having an exclusion zone around schools such as Toowong College will be an unnecessary burden on the right of telecommunications companies to install mobile phone towers? Thirdly, if returned to Canberra, will he vote to support these proposals to give communities a say and ensure that towers are not located close to schools like Toowong College?

The federal Liberals have form. They will say and do anything just to retain power. They might talk about the national interest, but they are really only concerned with the interests of the federal Liberal Party. Mr Johnson, your public awaits your answers. Do you support them, or do you support your colleague Senator Coonan? Will you just say you oppose the tower, or will you vote to change the law? Time on, Mr Johnson.

Schools, Maroochydore Electorate

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.06 p.m.): I rise to speak about some of the great things happening in the state high school and primary schools in my local area. We have some truly dedicated teachers and great community involvement. Maroochydore High School has just taken on the Beacon project, the no dole pledge project. This means that its students are signing up to a no dole pledge so that they will look to their future and consider their options with regard to training, higher education—whether it is tertiary or vocational—or going into the work force. This is a very positive program which I wholeheartedly endorse. I hope that many good businesspeople get on board and take on trainees and apprentices—young people entering the work force as they leave school. Most of all, it is a program to encourage young people to see their opportunities beyond high school and to make that transition into the work force or into further education. I commend Maroochydore High School for taking on what I believe is an excellent project. It is something that has worked well down south, and I understand that Maroochydore High School is the first high school in south-east Queensland signed up to the no dole project.

When we introduce young people into training and into the work force after high school, it is more likely that they will not see welfare as a long-term option. While welfare is still a social network, obviously to have them fulfil their potential by being in the work force or going into training and then into the work force is the most desirable option, because it is about them being able to fulfil their destiny, being able to have greater financial freedom and pursuing the gifts that they have in their life by further training that enables them to reach their fullest potential. Full marks to Maroochydore High School for being involved in this project. I certainly commend the project to local businesses as they take on young people who are involved in this. Young people have said that they do not want to go on the dole but do want to be active members of the community by fulfilling their potential through the work force or through education.

There are other great things happening in our other schools as well, and I want to acknowledge some of the awards that have recently been won by Mooloolaba Primary School, which has certainly shown that with dedicated teachers and parents it can excel in so many arenas. What we have seen it do in the last couple of years has been quite extraordinary. It deserves to be commended for its literacy programs which have been some of the best in the state. I also acknowledge Mountain Creek High, which has only recently endeavoured to introduce the Bacalaureate which is going to be starting very soon to enable students to have international access to universities.

Taiwanese Independence Day

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (6.09 p.m.): Last Sunday night, 3 October, I joined my parliamentary colleagues Simon Finn and Karen Struthers to celebrate with and congratulate the Taiwanese community in commemorating their independence day at Sunnybank. I am constantly surprised at the tremendous network that pulls together to support these important and significant events. It seems that a single message goes out and the troops rally to get behind the cause.

Taiwan is an important trading partner for Australia. From an economic perspective, our relationship generates business and investment for Australian and Taiwanese companies and jobs for people in both economies. Australia and Taiwan also encourage people-to-people contacts in areas such as the arts, culture, education, science, tourism and sport.

One of the avenues through which Taiwan is represented in Australia is the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office. Its headquarters are in Canberra, with branches in Melbourne and Sydney. A second Taiwan based organisation, Far East Trade Services Inc., is based in Sydney and performs trade promotion work. Mrs Angela Lin, Director-General of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office, was present at the celebrations on Sunday night. Angela takes a great interest in all of those events that promote and recognise the history and culture of Taiwan.

Taiwanese-born Australians are very proud of their heritage and it is great to see that they continue to enthusiastically embrace their culture. They warmly welcome those from other cultures to celebrate with them. These ethnic Taiwanese speak passionately from the heart to lobby for a better deal for those living in their home country. For people born in Australia, it is hard to know the difficulties that people face when they are forced to leave their home country and, in some cases, their families due to civil unrest. To arrive in a new country where they know not the language or the laws can present major problems and issues requiring patience and understanding from all concerned.

The Queensland government's multicultural policy is aimed at promoting the best from all that our cultural diversity offers. This country of ours is rich in many cultures. It is great to see the friendships that occur across cultures, the way in which we work together for the good of our nation and the sense of national pride that is expressed at all of these activities. It is also important for Australians to learn about other cultures as it is for new immigrants to learn about and adapt to Australian society. Once again, I offer my congratulations to the Taiwanese community on their independence. I hope that they continue to remember and celebrate their freedom and democracy for future generations.

Endeavour Foundation; People with Disabilities

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (6.12 p.m.): Tonight, I rise to stand up for Queensland's most vulnerable citizens—people suffering from intellectual disabilities. I am led to believe that Disability Services Queensland has refused an application by the Endeavour Foundation to fund 14 residential and adult training and support services in south-east Queensland and on the Sunshine Coast. Without any government support, the Endeavour Foundation is unable to operate the unfunded services and these people now have the trauma of searching for other placements and services.

I call on the minister to urgently provide funding, accommodation and training to support these services in south-east Queensland that have been refused this funding. I call on the government to match the rhetoric and stop neglecting their responsibility to these people. My National Party colleagues will continue to do their utmost to ensure that people with disabilities receive the highest quality care and support. I call on the minister to provide funding, training and support for this service.

Mr Pitt: You'd better come and see me, mate. You're about five days too late. It's all been fixed up.

Mr KNUTH: We will see the minister.

Endeavour Foundation, Kingston

Mrs DESLEY SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (6.12 p.m.): Over the past 12 months, the Endeavour Foundation facility at Kingston, which I should acknowledge is in my colleague Tom Barton's electorate of Waterford, has been the object of huge activity. As I share the Kingston community renewal area with the member for Waterford, I take this opportunity to report on yet another magnificent community renewal project coming to fruition.

It is more than a backyard blitz; the entire outdoor area has been transformed into a wonderful place of community functions—with a stage area, or as it has been termed, outdoor learning amphitheatre, and beyond the transformed bushland. Here people will find a pathway leading down through natural bush where the prolific bird life play among the undergrowth. The facility now boasts a bush tucker garden, a herb garden, a vegie patch, a citrus orchard, a greenhouse, a chicken pen with chooks and ducks, a recycling and compost station, a wood-fired oven, seating and toilets and, in keeping with our Olympics in Athens, two magnificent olive trees. Indeed, the whole area gives a sense of peace and affinity with the environment.

It was my privilege to host the Minister for Housing, the Hon. Robert Swarten, to officially open this great addition to the community facilities—the culmination of a 12-month labour of love. Twelve months earlier, I was present at the community event, which saw up to 100 volunteers clear the first section of bushland for the development. Young people from Endeavour, with cocoordinator Debbie Kingston, joined volunteers from the Kingston and Loganlea community renewal reference group, BoysTown LinkUp, Youth and Family Services, the Logan City Council and many other groups. Cultural Solidarity, an indigenous organisation, played a pivotal role. As the first rough part of the bush was cleared and lantana removed, there was a festive picnic mood apparent—the expectation that this was going to be no ordinary project. FM 101, Logan's community radio station, did an outside broadcast; Ross Wilson of Mondo Rock fame turned up much to the excitement of many fans; and our indigenous community treated us to a Kap Murri feast.

Returning to the site, now totally transformed, was a great excitement for many who attended the opening. This project was made possible by a grant from the community renewal funds of \$96,882. In addition to that figure, an equivalent amount was contributed from Minister Barton's Department of Employment and Training for a Community Jobs Plan, which employed eight trainees for a period of 18 weeks along with one supervisor. These eight trainees now have gained great skills, which I am sure will greatly enhance their job prospects.

This garden will now be a significant community resource where the traditions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be passed on, where training in horticulture will be encouraged and where the young adults from the Endeavour Adult Training and Support Service and community members can forge new levels of understanding. A community garden management group has now been formed and the ongoing development—

Time expired.

Water Resources

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (6.16 p.m.): There is a major change on the way in how water is being viewed in Queensland, bringing Queensland on line with national competition policy. Water will no longer be considered free but something with a value—a commodity and something that we will all have to pay more to use. This is according to an NR&M discussion paper, because it says that water is being overused and wasted.

This change will impact mostly on farmers with an irrigation licence or water allocation. Anyone who thinks that farmers today are so prosperous that they can afford bigger than necessary pumps, deeper than necessary bores, or more than necessary megalitres and so on has no understanding at all about the conditions in north Queensland. The first people to feel the harsh reality of drought are rural producers. It is our irrigators who spend their own money meeting greater and greater environmental burdens. Believe me, they know how precious water is. This is, of course, separate from the common law principle that on freehold land the water belongs to the land-holder.

The discussion paper includes three factors in the new pricing of water. They are the cost of management, the cost of externalities, and the cost of scarcity. Last year, the cost of water management was apparently \$68 million. Irrigators and taxpayers in general are shocked at this price tag, leaving this overall cost open to question. So is the argument that water users alone should carry a special burden. There is no direct financial benefit to a water user that does not in turn benefit someone else. We are all aware of the concept of flow-on benefits.

Externalities have frightening implications. In essence, anything that happens elsewhere as a result of water use can become a cost imposed back onto the farmer. This is foolish. There is no such thing as a zero-impact consumptive use. Farmers, in the course of their activities, consume nutrients and so on from the soil. They can consume water inasmuch as they take it from a creek, a bore, a spring, a dam or a river and apply it to a crop or for watering livestock. They do this because we want to eat the food that they produce. To expect farmers to feed us without making an impact of any kind on the environment is infantile. There are already harsh existing laws for those who wilfully damage the environment.

The government, which controls water storage and distribution infrastructure, has also included the scarcity of accessible water in its calculations. New dams and infrastructure will be built only if there is a profit in it, which means that water users will have to pay. But if the dams are not built, the water will get scarcer and scarcer and water users will still have to pay.

Finally, I understand that the submission deadline on this water resource discussion paper has been extended for two weeks. I urge all Queenslanders who may be affected by it to get their submissions in by the close of the deadline. I thank the minister for allowing this extension.

Narangba Neighbourhood Centre

Hon. K.W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (6.19 p.m.): Recently I attended the annual general meeting of the Narangba Neighbourhood Centre. The centre operates as an information and referral centre to residents of the Narangba and Burpengary districts within the Caboolture shire. The reason I wish to speak about this organisation tonight is that it is completely run by local volunteers. The spirit of volunteerism is particularly strong within the Caboolture shire and of course within the electorate of Kallangur. In fact, at the most recent citizenship ceremony the mayor of Caboolture spoke about that spirit and commitment. As a local member, I completely concur with what she said.

The trained volunteer staff of the neighbourhood centre are able to assist with inquiries ranging from available child care services to where to go for housing, financial or personal issues and support. The neighbourhood centre is a not-for-profit organisation, and because it uses the knowledge and services of volunteers many services and referrals are able to be provided. This is an important service for our local community. Referrals are provided for child health clinics, immunisation clinics, play groups and, I think importantly, adult literacy.

The centre has expanded to Burpengary with the establishment of the Burpengary information centre, where information is provided about local organisations and community based and government agencies that service the local Burpengary area. I particularly want to highlight the new arrival information pack that is available at the neighbourhood centre. People who move into the Narangba or Burpengary areas are able to obtain this pack, which details many of the services being offered locally. I think this is important, because it means that new arrivals are more quickly able to become part of the local community.

One of the recent projects of the Narangba Neighbourhood Centre has been a safety audit, a partnership between local groups, police and community members. The Narangba Neighbourhood Centre followed up with statistics, identified by inquiries over the last two years, to prepare a comprehensive safety report of the Narangba-Burpengary area. The safety audit identified issues such as parks, lighting and public transport maintenance and improvements. The purpose, of course, is to assist with future town planning by showing access to available facilities and identifying improvements required to each area to make the community a safer and healthier place.

I offer my congratulations to all of the volunteers who have worked so hard to make the neighbourhood centre the success that it is. Their efforts stand as a beacon in the local area to the strong spirit of volunteerism.

Land Clearing

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.22 p.m.): I rise to speak about the plight of a constituent of mine, Mr Shane Smith, who has been a land clearing contractor for 20 years and who can no longer earn a living from his profession due to the actions of this government. His is not an isolated situation. Mr Smith wrote to me about his plight and indicated that when the government, through Mr Beattie, decided to stop clearing without permits or consultation he was given two weeks notice. As we all know, the penalty for illegal clearing for a contractor is a fine of \$90,000, with the chance of having the machines seized.

Mr Smith operated four machines and was a specialist clearer of land who operated practically all over Queensland. He was told that permits would take no longer than six weeks to issue, however in the next 12 months he did virtually no work. He made an application for access to the Commonwealth social security system and was told that he would have to sell all of his assets in order to get the dole. Obviously, if he sold his machinery he would no longer have a means of earning an income, which he indicated to the authorities. Their response was that that was not necessarily their problem. He ended up selling two of his machines just to try to survive and make payments on the other machines. When the permits finally came through he went straight back to work. Unfortunately, the permit system was very convoluted and he was working an average of only three days a week until the permits issue was finally cleared up. He then decided that he could no longer make a living from the machines. He blew a motor in one of the machines and could not afford to fix it. He was fortunate enough to finally get a job in the mines, but obviously he is still struggling to make payments on the machines he currently has. With a daughter at university and house payments, he is having a lot of trouble.

His plight is no different from that of a lot of others in rural Queensland. His situation needs to be addressed in terms of vegetation management. He needs to be able to access a low-interest loan so that he can actually move on and do other productive work with the experience that he has. Unfortunately, it seems that his application to the government basically got the same sort of response as he did when he applied for the dole. He was told that he needed to go away and think about his future and that there was very little hope for him. He was referred to QRAA but basically got no response from it. Mr Smith is in dire straits—

Time expired.

Medicare, Thuringowa

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (6.25 p.m.): On Saturday the people of Thuringowa have an important choice to make. They will have to decide whether to support the current Liberal federal member, who does not give a damn about their Medicare needs, or Labor's candidate, Anita Phillips, who will fight for locals' rights to Medicare.

A couple of months ago I mailed out some 18,000 fliers—one to every household in Thuringowa—asking people to support me in my fight for a local Medicare office. Even though Thuringowa city has a population of over 50,000 people—the city is growing very rapidly—we lack the services of a local Medicare office. These offices are not just there for people to claim money back after seeing a doctor; they are in place to help with family benefits and other inquiries. Following my mail-out I received over 3,000 responses, which illustrates the massive show of support for this vital service in our local area. Members can imagine my surprise, therefore, when the local Liberal federal member attacked me for having the audacity to stand up for the rights of my electors.

Ms Nelson-Carr: He's the one with audacity.

Mr WALLACE: That is exactly right. I take the interjection of the member for Mundingburra. He said that he would not support a local Medicare office and that it would be a waste of money as residents in need could transact their business by phone or over a computer. The people of Thuringowa do not want to speak to a recorded voice or tap some computer keys when they have business to do with Medicare. They want to speak to real people. The local Liberal federal member therefore must have felt like a real goose when his mate Tony Abbott announced several new Medicare offices across Australia but not in Thuringowa. Why is it okay for people in other cities to speak to real people but residents in Thuringowa have to speak to a machine?

Let us contrast this lack of interest for the people of Thuringowa on the part of the local Liberals to the proactive approach by Labor's Anita Phillips. Not only did she arrange for the shadow minister, Julia Gillard, to examine my proposal; she convinced the federal opposition to support a Medicare office in Thuringowa. The choice for Thuringowa residents on Saturday is simple: a vote for Labor is a vote for Medicare; a vote for the Liberals is a vote for someone who just does not give a damn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 6.27 p.m.