TUESDAY, 29 OCTOBER 1996

Mr SPEAKER (Hon. N. J. Turner, Nicklin) read prayers and took the chair at 9.30 a.m.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Honourable members, I have to inform the House that on Tuesday, 22 October 1996, I presented to Her Excellency the Governor Appropriation (Parliament) Bill (No. 2) 1996 and Appropriation Bill (No. 2) 1996 for royal assent and that Her Excellency was pleased in my presence to subscribe her assent thereto in the name and on behalf of Her Majesty.

I have to inform the House that I have also received from Her Excellency the Governor letters in respect of assent to certain Bills, the contents of which will be incorporated in the records of Parliament.

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
QUEENSLAND

15 October 1996

The Honourable N. J. Turner, MLA
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Speaker

I hereby acquaint the Legislative Assembly that, in the period in which Parliament has stood adjourned, the following Bill, having been passed by the Legislative Assembly and having been presented for the Royal Assent, was assented to by the Administrator in the name of Her Majesty on 15 October 1996.

"A Bill for an Act to amend the Criminal Justice Act 1989 and the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1950".

Yours sincerely

(Sgd) Leneen Forde

Governor

GOVERNMENT HOUSE
QUEENSLAND

23 October 1996

The Honourable N. J. Turner, MLA
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Speaker

I hereby acquaint the Legislative Assembly that the following Bills, having been passed by the Legislative Assembly and having been presented for the Royal Assent, were assented to in the name of Her Majesty The Queen on 22 October 1996:

"A Bill for an Act to appropriate certain amounts from the consolidated fund for services of the Parliament in the financial years starting 1 July 1995, 1 July 1996 and 1 July 1997.

"A Bill for an Act to appropriate certain amounts for services in the financial years starting 1 July 1995, 1 July 1996 and 1 July 1997.

"A Bill for an Act about the administration of the public service and the management and employment of public service employees, and for other purposes.

The Bills are hereby transmitted to the Legislative Assembly, to be numbered and forwarded to the proper Officer for enrolment, in the manner required by law.

Yours sincerely

(Sgd) Leneen Forde

Governor

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced the receipt of the following petitions—

Secondary School, Tamborine Mountain

From **Mr Lingard** (2,191 signatories) requesting the House to urgently begin planning and construction of a secondary school on Tamborine Mountain which could be also used as a facility for TAFE studies.

Colmslie Beach Land

From **Mr Purcell** (140 signatories) requesting the House to support and encourage the sale of 8.99 hectares of land - real property description 201432, Lot 2, Colmslie Road, Murarrie (also known as Colmslie Beach) to the Brisbane City Council without delay at open space prices for the purpose of parkland to be held in perpetuity for the people of Brisbane. The majority of prime river front land has been sold to industry and we, the undersigned, believe the State Government should sell this site to the

Brisbane City Council for the benefit of the people of Brisbane and future generations for recreational purposes.

Suncorp

From **Mr Welford** (1 signatory) requesting the House to reject any move to sell off Suncorp.

Gun Control Laws

From **Mr Wells** (1 signatory) requesting the House to explain why it considers that the nation's law-makers have a clear and urgent duty to legislate against the lawful owners of firearms in Queensland in order to fulfil an obligation to the Federal Government without informing its citizens that no provision has been made in the amendments to address persons who are not law abiding.

Gun Control Laws

From **Mr Wells** (1 signatory) requesting the House to explain why it considers that the nation's law-makers have a clear and urgent duty to legislate against the lawful owners of firearms in Queensland in order to fulfil an obligation to the Federal Government without informing its citizens that the changes to the current Weapons Act will only affect those persons who are law abiding.

Gun Control Laws

From **Mr Wells** (1 signatory) requesting the House to explain why it considers that the nation's law-makers have a clear and urgent duty to legislate against the lawful owners of firearms in Queensland in order to fulfil an obligation to the Federal Government without informing its citizens that the legitimate owners of firearms in Queensland have a sound reputation backed by honesty and fair play and that their plight is being ignored.

Gun Control Laws

From **Mr Wells** (1 signatory) requesting the House to explain why it considers that the nation's law-makers have a clear and urgent duty to legislate against the lawful owners of firearms in Queensland in order to fulfil an obligation to the Federal Government and how an "integrated license and firearms registration system" will suffice to record firearms in the possession of persons already outside the current legislation.

Gun Control Laws

From **Mr Wells** (1 signatory) requesting the House to explain why it considers that the nation's law-makers have a clear and urgent duty to legislate against the lawful owners of firearms in Queensland in order to fulfil an obligation to the Federal Government without recommending that only those persons in possession of illegal firearms be made to surrender ownership.

Petitions received.

PAPERS TABLED DURING RECESS

The Clerk announced that the following papers were tabled during the recess—

15 October 1996—

Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority—Annual Report 1995-96

16 October 1996—

Lay Observer to the Queensland Law Society—Annual Report 1995-96

Litigation Reform Commission—Annual Report 1995-96

Registrar of Retirement Villages—Annual Report 1995-96

18 October 1996—

Chicken Meat Industry Committee—Annual Report 1995-96

Grain Research Foundation—Annual Report 1995-96

Maritime Industry Consultative Council—Annual Report 1995-96

Surveyors Board of Queensland—Annual Report 1995-96

25 October 1996—

Board of Professional Engineers of Queensland—Annual Report 1995-96.

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

In accordance with the schedule circulated by the Clerk to members in the Chamber, the following documents were tabled—

Appeal Costs Fund Act 1973—

Department of Justice (Variation of Fees) Regulation 1996, No. 289

Art Unions and Public Amusements Act 1992—

Art Unions and Public Amusements Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 1996, No. 278

Proclamation—the provisions of the Act that are not in force commence 4 November 1996, No. 277

Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994—

Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 1996, No. 300

Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995—

Transport Operation (Road Use Management) Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 1996, No. 272

Vocational Education, Training and Employment Act 1991—

Vocational Education, Training and Employment Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 1996, No. 284 .

RESPONSE TO PETITION

The Clerk laid upon the table of the House the following response to petition received by the Clerk since the last sitting day of the Legislative Assembly, 11 October 1996—

State Government Land, Lytton

Response from the Minister for Natural Resources (Mr Hobbs)—

16 October 1996

I refer to your letter of 10 September 1996 (your reference RDD:ML) forwarded to me for my response, a copy of the wording of a petition received by the House in accordance with the requirement of Standing Order No 238A of the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The petition drew to the attention of the House that there is an urgent need for additional open space parkland in Pritchard Street Lytton to improve the amenity of life for residents in nearby homes who are otherwise surrounded by industrial development.

Planning officers of the Department of Natural Resources, Metropolitan District, Brisbane are presently finalising an Area Screening Study to include the Pritchard Street locality. The project leader of this study is Mr Paul Kirkman who may be contacted by telephone on (07) 322 78267.

In this study, land suitable and available for preservation as open space parkland will be identified and action taken in due course to have such land set apart for such purpose.

It is anticipated that the study will be completed by the end of October 1996. The concerns expressed in the petition will be considered in the study.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE REPORT

The Clerk laid upon the table of the House a response by the Minister for Health to a report by the Public Works Committee on the Redevelopment of the Cairns Base Hospital.

PAPERS

The following papers were laid on the table—

(a) Minister for Mines and Energy (Mr Gilmore)—

Annual Reports for 1995-96—

Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation

Powerlink Queensland

South East Queensland Electricity Corporation

Far North Queensland Electricity Corporation

Wide Bay-Burnett Electricity Corporation

Capricornia Electricity Corporation

South West Queensland Electricity Corporation

Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation—Statement of Corporate Intent

(b) Minister for Public Works and Housing (Mr Connor)—

Report on overseas trip to South Korea and Brunei.

OVERSEAS VISIT

Report

Hon. R. T. CONNOR (Nerang—Minister for Public Works and Housing) (9.35 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House a report of my recent ministerial trip to South Korea and Brunei.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Death of Mr B. Stacey

Hon. J. M. SHELDON (Caloundra—Deputy Premier, Treasurer and Minister for The Arts) (9.35 a.m.), by leave: It is with deep sorrow that I draw the attention of honourable members to the tragic death of Queensland musical director Mr Brian Stacey. Mr Stacey, 49, was one of Australia's leading conductors and died after he was hit by a car while riding his motorcycle in the Melbourne suburb of Carlton. He was musical director of the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical *Sunset Boulevard*. In true show business tradition, the opening night still went on and the performance was dedicated to his memory.

Brian Stacey began his professional career conducting for the State opera and ballet companies in Brisbane with both the Queensland Philharmonic and Symphony Orchestras. His career developed from there and he was in constant demand as a freelance conductor, vocal coach and musical director around Australia. He also studied with and assisted Sir Charles Mackerras in England and Europe. His most recent involvement in Brisbane was as musical director for the Queensland Theatre Company's production of *Sweeny Todd*. A memorial celebration for him will be held on Sunday, 3 November, with details of venue and time to be advised. I offer my and our Government's heartfelt condolences to his partner and to his family.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Incident at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Racing) (9.36 a.m.), by leave: I wish to advise the House of details of an incident that occurred at Lotus Glen Correctional Centre in the early hours of this morning.

Mr Hamill: Is it your shout?

Mr COOPER: I'll get to that.

Last Saturday, prisoners from the centre had been used to assist in setting up a country music festival for Rotary in Mareeba. Unfortunately, the Rotary organisers did not remove leftover alcohol and somehow—and obviously there are further questions about this to which I am currently seeking answers—the prisoners managed to smuggle that alcohol back into the correctional centre. I will give honourable members the sequence of events. At 12.30 a.m., that is, this morning, the night officer on the prison farm noted the prisoners behaving strangely. The officer called the security senior, the farm manager and other farm officers. They apprehended some intoxicated prisoners who were returned to the secure prison. The emergency response team was called and a search that was conducted of the accommodation unit retrieved eight full 40-ounce bottles of spirits and six empty 40-ounce bottles of spirits. All remaining prisoners at the farm were breath tested and a further seven tested positive. In total, 27 prisoners were involved and 26 were returned to the secure part of the prison and accommodated in the detention unit and the hospital block, H block.

Tear gas was used when one prisoner attempted to get out of a prison van. One prisoner was assaulted by another but returned to the farm after treatment at the hospital. Police were called when one prisoner absconded from the vehicle transporting him from the farm to the secure centre. He was located a short time later at the farm by Lotus Glen staff. Superficial damage was done to the farm and minor damage was done to H block and B10, the detention unit of the prison. Q-Build is currently making a detailed assessment of the damage. The prisoners did not resist the officers. All prisoners will be breached.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr COOPER: They were; wouldn't you be with 40 ounces of liquor inside you? There is no question about that.

The storage container at the Rotary field day site was found to be broken into. Prison management was apparently unaware that that container contained alcohol. The Rotary Country Music Festival was held at the Rotary field day site on Saturday, 26 October, with 7,000 in attendance. Prisoners had helped prepare the site but did not attend the concert. A repeat of the incident will be avoided by closer communication with Rotary or any other community group involved with the centre in the future. Security briefings will be given to such groups in order to ensure that they are aware of basic prison security arrangements such as ensuring that prisoners do not have access to alcohol. A stocktake is being conducted of the container to identify the missing stock. We want to ensure that no alcohol is left on the prison grounds. Of course, CSIU has been notified. Order has been restored, and everything on the farm is quiet.

The secure centre is managing a number of prisoners who are still intoxicated. I guess members would be as well if they had that much alcohol inside them. Obviously, these things happen.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr COOPER: Opposition members should look at their record. We are still in the process of trying to clean up their mess and, of course, the laxity that went with it. However, this Government will get there. It is all the fault of Opposition members. If they want to blame me, I will blame them.

This Government will be taking the necessary action to make sure that these things do not occur again. The Government will make sure that discipline will be returned.

The Government does not condone this sort of behaviour, which members opposite seemed to condone when they were in Government. Disciplinary action will be taken in relation to the prisoners in that centre, as it would in relation to prisoners at any other centre.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

District Health Councils

Hon. M. J. HORAN (Toowoomba South—Minister for Health) (9.41 a.m.), by leave: On 10 April 1996, Cabinet approved a new structure for Queensland Health. Central to the restructure is the establishment of 39 district health services to replace the previous 13 regions. A feature of the district health services is that each will have a district health council. In general, the purpose of the district health councils is to provide community input into the local planning, delivery, operation, monitoring and evaluation of hospital and community-based health services provided by the relevant district health service.

The district health councils will be established under legislation and will report directly to me.

The councils will have a number of specific functions which will be specified under the Act. It is intended that these will include—

oversight of compliance with service agreements and budgets;

establishment of priorities for minor capital works;

representation on selection panels for senior district executives; and

development of strategic and business plans in partnership with district service staff.

Councils will not be involved in day-to-day management but will have a monitoring role with respect to district health services. It is intended that councils will consist of not less than eight and not more than 10 members who will be appointed for up to four years.

Advertisements calling for expressions of interest for council membership were placed in the press Queensland-wide in the week beginning 23 September and were to have closed on 28 October. However, due to community demand, they have been extended for one week. The response to the advertisements has been impressive, with a very high calibre of applicants. Queensland Health set up a database and during the application period fielded many hundreds of inquiries—in fact, 242 on the first day that applications opened. Application forms and information packages were dispatched to all inquirers. These packages included an application form, councils' terms of reference, selection criteria, maps showing district health service boundaries and a list of health facilities in each district. Further, application forms and information packages have been sent to 250 health and community-based organisations, universities, unions, local government and health professional organisations.

As a result of this process, over 1,100 applications have been received for district health council positions across the State and, as I speak, more applications are still flowing in. A selection process will be established in November 1996. All applicants will be advised in writing of the result of that process.

The success of the district health councils will depend in part on their diversity of membership and their ability to meet the diverse needs of the varying districts throughout the State. These concerns are reflected well in the selection criteria that have been drawn up and in the mechanism of selection.

Legislation establishing the councils should be introduced into Parliament later this year. On this basis, councils will be operational by early 1997. An important aspect of the creation of the councils will be the training program provided for Chairs and members. Training will embrace topics such as—

background and orientation;

health management;

legislative framework and issues of confidentiality;

budgeting and financial systems;

building and capital works;

rights and responsibilities of users of health services;

roles and responsibilities of council members;

roles and responsibilities of the Manager, District Health Services; and

meeting procedures.

These areas are pertinent to modern health services management. It is important that council members undergo this training if they are to successfully carry out specified duties and responsibilities.

The Queensland Government has introduced this significant reform to enable communities to have input into local public sector health services and to ensure that the local planning, delivery, operation, monitoring

and evaluation of hospital and community-based health services fully reflect community needs and expectations. The district health councils will ensure that Queensland Health is totally focused on patient needs and are the proof of a coalition Government getting back to basics in Health by putting the patient first.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

School Cleaners

Hon. R. J. QUINN (Merrimac—Minister for Education) (9.45 a.m.), by leave: On 11 October, I informed the House that 2,152 State school cleaners had expressed interest in voluntary early retirement at the specified cut-off date. I can now advise the House that late responses swelled that number to 2,190. I can also advise honourable members that the process of offering VER packages is almost complete.

A total of 874 VERs were offered in the first round and, despite claims that many of those expressing interest "just wanted to find out how much they would get", 794—or 92 per cent—have accepted offers. A maximum of 80 have rejected their offer and I expect those 80 to be snapped up rapidly in the second round of VERs early next month. This will reduce the permanent cleaning work force by about 21 per cent. Further reductions in cleaning hours will be achieved in the casual cleaning force. This will bring staffing levels into line with those established under the enterprise bargain agreement struck between the previous Labor Government and the Miscellaneous Workers Union. The challenge now is to maintain the standards of school cleaning—a challenge which the Miscellaneous Workers Union has no doubt its members can achieve, and I hope it is right.

An unfortunate by-product of that process has been an excess of applicants over available VERs. As I said earlier, 2,190 cleaners expressed an interest in a VER package; 874 offers were made; and 794 cleaners have accepted. That will still leave 1,236 cleaners—or about 40 per cent of the permanent cleaning force—who expressed an interest in a VER but will not receive one.

Unfortunately, this Government's hands are tied. We are committed to implementing the compromise deal struck with the Miscellaneous Workers Union. However, should the union wish to consider partial privatisation—as suggested by a very large number of its members—I would be most willing and happy to speak with it.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Shenzhen Delegation; China Southern Air

Hon. D. J. SLACK (Burnett—Minister for Economic Development and Trade and Minister Assisting the Premier) (9.48 a.m.), by leave: The coalition Government is pursuing trade and investment links with China which will create new jobs for Queenslanders and further progress friendship between the people of China and Queensland.

A delegation of representatives from the Government of the City of Shenzhen in southern China will next month visit the Gold Coast to inspect that city's expertise in city design and town planning. Shenzhen, one of the wealthiest cities in China, has for over 16 years experienced one of the world's most rapid and sustained construction booms. Now that city is looking to Queensland to help build a new town centre. The project of some 15 square kilometres is valued in the billions of dollars. The two-day visit by the Shenzhen delegates has the potential for Queensland to export its expertise, services and products.

The inspection of the Gold Coast is an historic occasion as it will be the first time that Shenzhen—which, as members know, has a sister city agreement with the City of Brisbane—has mounted an international town planning inspection. The people of the Gold Coast can feel especially proud that the Gold Coast was chosen as a model for city design. I am personally pleased to report that this visit was only secured as a result of Government-to-Government meetings as part of the trade mission I led to China and Hong Kong last week.

I am also pleased to report that China/Queensland business and tourism links have been further enhanced following talks between myself and the Chinese airline, China Southern Air. That airline has secured rights to fly to Brisbane. China Southern Air says that plans are well advanced for the inaugural flight from Guangzhou to Brisbane in the first half of next year. The airline plans a twice-weekly service. This will further assist Queensland tourists and exporters to access one of the world's most ancient and rapidly developing nations. This is good news especially for Queensland horticulture and live seafood exporters who have had to suffer delays and long flights by sending their produce through Hong Kong.

China Southern Air is now in the process of getting appropriate Federal Government approvals, and I wish them all the best for the future.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Malanda Queensland Masters Games

Hon. B. W. DAVIDSON (Noosa—Minister for Tourism, Small Business and Industry) (9.50 a.m.), by leave: Today it is my pleasure to inform the House of a truly Queensland event that is seeing the State, yet again, lead Australia in the staging of international sporting events. At this very moment, 5,200 sports men and women are battling it out on the golf courses, tennis courts, bowling greens and rivers of the Gold Coast as competitors in the 1996 Malanda Queensland Masters Games. On Saturday the Honourable Minister for Emergency Services and Minister for Sport, Mick Veivers, and I had the pleasure of attending the spectacular opening ceremony and launching the event, which will continue until 3 November.

In its short history, the Queensland Masters Games has scored many achievements, not the least of which is that this year's event—only the second Queensland Masters Games—has attracted more than double the competitors of the inaugural event. However, the success story does not end there. This achievement has led to further record-making with the Queensland Masters Games now recognised as the largest State masters games in Australia. I think honourable members will agree that that is not a bad effort for an event that is only two years old.

This grand achievement is further enhanced by the fact that, of the 5,200 competitors at the Masters Games, more than 300 are international competitors who have travelled to the event from as far afield as South Africa, Greece, Indonesia, Malta, India, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea. In addition, the event has attracted more than 1,000 interstate competitors, representing all Australian States. The icing on the cake is that these competitors are expected to bring a $1.8m economic boost to Queensland.

The Queensland Masters Games is another clear example of Queensland's outstanding ability to host world-class events. It is the continued success of events such as the Queensland Masters Games and the pro-activity of the revitalised Queensland Events Corporation which I am confident is going to see Queensland aggressively regain its reputation as Australia's premier event tourism destination.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cooper Creek Cotton Proposal

Hon. H. W. T. HOBBS (Warrego—Minister for Natural Resources) (9.52 a.m.), by leave: Yesterday State Cabinet approved legislation that will have the effect of hastening decisions on water harvesting applications, such as the controversial Cooper Creek cotton proposal. A new system of establishing water management plans will replace the current lengthy, incremental approach which has seen problems arising on the Cooper Creek, the Condamine-Balonne River system and the Border River system. There is no process or power for managing a situation where further water allocations should not be made, or should be limited. This is especially so where further allocations would have adverse effects, such as on the existing entitlements of other licensed users, on provision of water for ecosystems, or on the beneficial flooding enjoyed by other land-holders.

The new Bill will provide better management of water resources in sensitive areas of the State and implement water management plans backed by legislative force. Water management plans will involve—

proper assessment of the resource;

quantification of existing demands on a water system in the plan area;

consideration of future needs;

evaluation of water needs for ecosystems;

consideration of the impact of beneficial flooding on land-holders; and

full consultation with the local community, industry and interest groups.

The preparation of a water management plan will involve consultation with the local community, industry and interest groups. It will be important that the plan reflect the community's views and interests. I propose that the Cooper Creek will be the first area of the State to have such a plan prepared, approved and applied.

Honourable members will also be aware that there has been extensive investigation into a proposal to grow irrigated cotton at Currareva on the Cooper. I have always said that the decision on that particular proposal would be based on scientific fact. Important considerations were the flow study to determine if a large quantity of water could be extracted from the system, and the ecological effects of such extraction. The computerised flow study is nearing completion and indications are that its results will be equivocal in not coming out strongly either for or against

extraction of water. The ecological evidence, however—particularly that delivered by scientists at the recent Windorah workshop—is overwhelmingly against the proposal.

Therefore, on balance, bearing in mind the comprehensive rejection of the proposal by Channel Country residents and the wider Queensland and Australian community, I am pleased to announce that the Currareva cotton proposal will not go ahead. The whole concept of catchment plans will complement existing investigations undertaken by my department in consultation with the community-based Cooper Catchment Advisory Committee. This work assesses the water resources of this sensitive stream which is part of the Lake Eyre basin.

Until the plan has been finalised, I will be maintaining the administrative hold on further dealings in relation to water licences. I believe the changes will allow the Government to provide far clearer and quicker directions in exercising its options on water rights. In short, the legislation will cap development for the time being, freeze water licence applications, and take in far wider community concerns rather than just issues affecting a particular applicant. I intend to introduce the legislation this week so that it can be passed in the next few weeks.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Building Industry

Hon. R. T. CONNOR (Nerang—Minister for Public Works and Housing) (9.56 a.m.), by leave: I take this opportunity to advise the House that a discussion paper proposing a landmark overhaul of the Queensland building industry has been released by State Cabinet for public comment. The discussion paper, which I will table in the House today, will have explanatory notes to assist the public consultation process. The document is open for public scrutiny for 60 days.

Today Queensland is further advanced than any other State in the area of security of payments. The discussion paper released today reflects bipartisan support between subcontractors and builders—the first time that industry organisations in Queensland have produced a unanimous position on a package of proposed building industry reforms. This is a major step forward.

The recommendations embody what are likely to be significant reforms in the national context. I feel confident that major elements of the recommendations will be picked up by other States, because national industry bodies have already expressed privately to me interest in adopting Queensland's policy, which will be in the public arena for comment over the next two months.

The discussion paper follows the six-month commission of inquiry into security of payments within the building and construction industry. The paper is the result of weeks of protracted discussions which followed the conclusion of the inquiry headed by Arthur Scurr. The recommendations in the discussion paper are those reached by agreement of all industry and consumer members of the inquiry. The Government is now seeking feedback from industry and the public with respect to the acceptability and implementation of these recommended reforms.

The proper management of the licensing system for the building industry, which would be strengthened to meet higher standards of quality and professionalism, is seen as the foundation for the industry reform proposed in the discussion paper. The discussion paper proposes sweeping changes to the way builders are assessed for holding licences in Queensland. Builders' track records and financial strengths would be key factors in determining their rights to gain or retain a licence. Annual licence reviews are recommended and there would be a phase-in period to enable builders to prepare for rigid Queensland Building Services Authority checks, in particular on past performance.

The recommendations have the potential to reduce, if not eliminate, "phoenix" companies which have produced some of Queensland's most spectacular building company failures. The paper recommends a broader range of licence fees, depending on the size of the builder, to reflect higher standards, the value of the licence and, also, the cost of assessment. A public information package including additional explanatory notes will be distributed to key industry stakeholder groups and will be available to the general public by the end of this week.

Key recommendations include raising standards of licensing administered by the QBSA, builders or contractors not measuring up to tougher QBSA financial requirements having to provide an additional insurance policy providing a minimum of 70 per cent cover for payments to subcontractors—the alternative would be equivalent levels of bank guarantee or some other form of security acceptable to the QBSA, and the abolition of the Queensland Building Tribunal which would

be replaced by an adjudication or mediation system drawing on a Statewide pool of technical experts in the building industry. The aim of this system would be to provide prompt, technically based expert resolution of disputes in the commercial and domestic building industries.

It is also recommended that legislation be introduced to place an obligation on parties in the contractual chain to set reasonable dates for payment. The aim is to promote the flow of money throughout the contractual chain. The implementation of fair and reasonable terms of contract to protect subcontractors and consumers is also recommended. These measures would include a plain-language, standard contract for domestic building with the reasonable allocation of responsibilities, as well as a consumer information handbook. The proposed adjudication system would apply to housing and commercial building in the public and private sectors.

Under the proposal, should mediation fail to resolve a dispute either party can call for or pay for an adjudicator to resolve the matter. The adjudicator would make an order which would be binding on all parties. The fee for adjudication would be $250 for each dispute. For housing construction disputes, the $250 would be a flat, fixed fee. For disputes arising in the commercial building sector, the $250 fee would be a deposit and the parties would pay for the actual costs of the adjudicator in line with the scale of fees. The parties would have the right to appeal the adjudicator's decision in the courts.

At all times I have adopted a neutral position throughout the discussions in recent weeks leading up to this discussion paper and I will continue to maintain that stance. It is now the turn of the industry, consumer groups, the subbies and the general community to have their say through a very public consultation process.

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Reports and Working Paper

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham) (10.01 a.m.): Firstly, I lay upon the table of the House Alert Digest No. 10 of 1996 and move that it be printed.

Ordered to be printed.

Mr ELLIOTT: Secondly, I lay upon the table of the House a report titled Scrutiny of National Schemes of Legislation Position Paper, which has been adopted by the committee. This report is the culmination of unprecedented cooperation between all scrutiny committees in all jurisdictions throughout Australia.

Several years ago, the problem posed to scrutiny committees by national scheme legislation was raised at a conference by the honourable member for Caboolture, who is now the deputy chairman of the committee. Subsequently, a working party of chairs of scrutiny committees was established, charged with the task of finding a way to effectively scrutinise national scheme legislation. The problem posed by national scheme legislation is that, although parliamentary scrutiny committees have the opportunity to scrutinise it according to their various individual terms of reference, any problems identified during the scrutiny process have usually not been addressed. Typically, scrutiny committees have received a response from the responsible Minister indicating that the legislation as presented to Parliament has already been settled by the relevant ministerial council, passed in other jurisdictions, is uniform in its application to all jurisdictions and, therefore, cannot be changed.

Whilst the need and value of national scheme legislation has been recognised by scrutiny committees nationally, the fact that it has been presented as a fait accompli to Parliaments merely to pass has been a matter of concern. This not only fails to have sufficient regard to the institution of Parliament as law-maker but also prevents scrutiny committees from effectively carrying out their responsibilities to Parliament, because any problem identified by such committees in national scheme legislation cannot be addressed.

The working party of chairs of all scrutiny committees has ultimately produced this position paper as a means of restoring the role of scrutiny committees. The paper proposes that national schemes of legislation be scrutinised according to agreed uniform scrutiny principles. The paper also suggests two options for implementation and seeks further suggestions for methods of implementing the uniform scrutiny principles. The working party resolved that each chair would attempt to stimulate debate on the proposals in the paper and would endeavour to discuss its contents with the Prime Minister, each Premier and Ministers in all jurisdictions. It has also been resolved that every effort will be made to have the position paper considered by COAG and SCAG, and it will be tabled, I believe, at the coming meeting.

The position paper is a bold and innovative approach produced by the united efforts of parliamentary representatives in all jurisdictions to tackle a problem which is clearly regarded as significant by all concerned. I would invite members to discuss this paper with me or with the committee's deputy chairman, who initiated this inquiry in 1993 and who has been one of the driving forces behind bringing it to its culmination. I commend the report to Parliament and move that it be printed.

Ordered to be printed.

PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE

Report

Mr STEPHAN (Gympie) (10.04 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House the Public Works Committee report into the construction of the new correctional centre at Woodford. This inquiry was a first for the committee. It was the first time the committee inquired into a large project where an in-house team won an open competition tender process. Consequently, the committee's report focuses on the issues involved with the in-house bids. The committee is keen to see a situation where there is fair and open competition between the public and private sectors. Also, the committee believes it is essential that there be only one source of information in the tendering process for Government agencies—the State Purchasing Policy. The committee's recommendations reflect these views.

I thank my committee members—Mr Bill D'Arcy, Mr Graham Healy, Mr Pat Purcell, Mr Ted Radke and Mr Geoff Smith—for their assistance during the inquiry. My thanks also go to the secretariat—Mr Les Dunn, Ms Belinda Noakes and Maureen Barnes—for their efforts. I commend the report to the House.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa) (10.06 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

> "That this Parliament condemns the savage rationalisation and privatisation proposed by the Borbidge Government for the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation.
>
> That the Parliament calls on the Government to—
>
> (a) abandon the planned increase in electricity prices for domestic users, as a cruel impost on ordinary Queensland families;
>
> (b) reject any moves to dismantle tariff equalisation which would be a massive attack on rural and remote Queenslanders;
>
> (c) recognize the continuing importance of regionally based boards;
>
> (d) stop the 'downsizing' of the QTSC workforce by 23%, or 1500 jobs, due to its severe impact on the employment base of regional Queensland;
>
> (e) reject the privatisation of the electricity industry as a senseless attack on essential State assets, which we cannot afford to let fall into private hands; and further
>
> That the House calls on the Borbidge Government to stop slugging Queenslanders with a growing list of unnecessary increases to State taxes and charges."

Multiculturalism; Federal Member for Oxley

Mr ROBERTSON (Sunnybank) (10.08 a.m.): I give notice that I will move—

> "That this House notes the denial of the right of free speech and expression by the organisers of the pro-Hanson rally on the Gold Coast last night by refusing entry to fellow Australians who hold contrary views to those espoused by the member for Oxley and her supporters; and that, given the ongoing increasingly irrational and damaging anti-immigration debate, this House calls on Prime Minister Howard to demonstrate leadership in defending a tolerant, cohesive and multicultural Australia, and take a strong stand against those who actively discriminate against Australians of Aboriginal and Asian descent."

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

State Heritage Laws; Minister for Environment

Mr BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—Leader of the Opposition) (10.08 a.m.): Last Wednesday, 23 October, we saw yet another two historic stone cottages in the Windsor historic precinct flattened by demolishers to make way for a block of units. Those losses

followed closely on the heels of the loss of another nearby stone cottage called Stoneleigh, this time to make way for a second-hand car yard.

The loss of all three cottages is a direct result of the refusal of this Government and the so-called Environment Minister to enforce the heritage laws of this State. The Minister would rather run a pathetic line that the Heritage Act is deficient, that the Heritage Act needs amendment, that nobody told him there was a problem, and that it is impractical to put stop orders on nominated buildings. What a load of rubbish! The Heritage Act is in no way deficient in its powers to protect the historic buildings of this State, and the Minister knows it, as does his department. The people of Queensland also know that.

This Government is about dragging us back to the days of Joh and the National Party of old. In those days, if it moved, it was shot; and if it did not move, it was mown down. Making the member for Western Downs the Minister for Environment is like putting Dracula in charge of the blood bank. The Minister does not care about the heritage of this State. The Minister has the power to do something about it. It is about time he stopped making excuses and did something about it. That is not good enough in the nineties; people are better informed than ever before. They are not prepared to sit by and see the Minister destroy the heritage of this State. The member for Western Downs is the Minister responsible for heritage; he should start behaving like the responsible Minister instead of making excuses. Finally, what do we have? We saw the sheer hypocrisy of the Minister's position. After doing nothing for weeks and claiming that he was powerless, what did he do?

Time expired.

Workplace Reforms

Mr CARROLL (Mansfield) (10.10 a.m.): There has been a heartening response from many Queenslanders who continue to voice their support for our proposed workplace reforms since the release of the information paper outlining the Government's Workplace Relations Bill and the Industrial Organisations Bill. One reform which has been particularly well received is the increased emphasis on union accountability. Before I explain what these changes mean, I stress that these laws are in no way anti-union. They represent an opportunity for unions to become more client focused and to provide services that represent the real interests of members, for a change.

These Bills will apply to all industrial organisations, both employer and employee. The intention of the laws is to make all industrial organisations more accountable and democratic. The issue of union accountability was exhaustively canvassed by the inquiry into particular trade unions in 1989 conducted by Mr Marshall Cooke, QC. His report exposed scandalous behaviour involving union funds and rorted elections and made significant recommendations to improve union accountability and democracy. Unfortunately, most of those recommendations were ignored by the previous Labor Government in order to make life easy for its mates. Our National/Liberal coalition Government has decided to strengthen accountability provisions ahead of the Commonwealth Government, which has indicated that it will review accountability provisions in the future.

These are some of the key features to be included in the Bill: members of industrial organisations will have free access to the organisation's complete accounts, not just the summary information that many members now receive, and industrial organisations will be required to have annual general meetings to present those accounts. This will place union members on the same footing as shareholders in companies. This should improve member involvement while increasing the accountability of union leaders. Commissioner Cooke said—

> "There is no reason in logic or principle why industrial organisations should not be subject to the same accounting standards which apply to corporations."

This Government agrees. As a result, more information will be contained in union accounts.

Time expired.

Electricity Industry

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa) (10.12 a.m.): Last weekend at Hervey Bay, the National Party was talking about going back to the bush. It accepted and admitted that it had let the people of regional and remote Queensland down. Yet before the caviar tins and the cigar packet wrapping had been swept up from the conference floor, we had the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation talking about getting rid of 23 per cent of the electricity supply industry work force, resulting in the loss of many thousands of jobs. Many of those jobs would come from remote and regional Queensland. At the same

time, they were talking about taking actions which would result in the abolition of tariff equalisation, which would mean massive hikes in the cost of electricity to people who live in the bush and, indeed, in the regional parts of this State.

As well as this, we heard of the plans to abolish the seven regional electricity boards which were constituted to allow regional Queenslanders to have a say in how the electricity industry would operate. In its place, we will have four senior bureaucrats based in Brisbane who would be running the show. So much for the National Party's claim of going back to the bush! What these plans mean is massive job losses right around Queensland, a hike in electricity prices for ordinary Queensland families, the abolition of the seven electricity boards and all power being concentrated in a small clique based in Brisbane, and, of course, the abolition of tariff equalisation.

The important question that this Parliament has to ask is: how much involvement did this Minister have in the plans which slipped out yesterday? How much involvement did this Minister have in the secret report which has been circulating around senior bureaucrats of the corporation for the past number of weeks? At a time when the people in the electricity industry are concerned about losing their jobs, at a time when this Government is discussing planned increases in tariffs for Queensland battlers, we have one section of the electricity industry——

Time expired.

Kuluin Primary School

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore) (10.15 a.m.): I wish to draw the attention of honourable members to the outstanding performance of students from Kuluin Primary School at Maroochydore in the national finals of the Tournament of Minds which was held in Melbourne on the weekend. Not only did these seven students do themselves and their school proud; they also did Queensland proud by doing their best and winning first place against some tough competition.

It has been a long, hard slog for these dedicated students, who have spent their Sunday afternoons training for up to three hours at a time. The Tournament of Minds is designed to encourage students to take part in creative activities to develop problem-solving skills as part of a team. The names of the seven students are Chris Moller, Denis Hamilton, Soren Molineux, Courtney Aspland, Stephanie Conroy, David Tanner and Lachlan Dews. They excelled in all areas of the competition. Their dedicated teachers who were there coaching and supporting them were Jan Buchanan Driver and Liz Stunden. I commend also the parents who were giving their loving and practical support behind the scenes.

The objects of the competition are: to provide the challenge of open-ended problems; to encourage creative problem finding and problem solving; to encourage experimentation; to reward divergent thinking; to encourage team cooperation; to stimulate curiosity, a sense of humour and to foster a love of learning; and to stress positive reinforcement. Together, the students and their teachers have demonstrated that the State school system in Queensland is providing quality education. I am very proud of the achievements of these young people and offer them my sincere congratulations.

Gold Coast Hospital

Mrs EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha) (10.16 a.m.): The health crisis engulfing the Gold Coast Hospital was evident again last weekend when a 66-year-old pensioner in unbearable pain was forced to sell her car to pay for private surgery after spending months on the waiting list at the Gold Coast Hospital. I table the media report relating to that case. The Health Minister is a complete ostrich on this issue, having promised to fix the Gold Coast health system when he became Minister. Against top medical advice, he is blindly going ahead with a new hospital at Robina, which will rob the Gold Coast of much-needed financial resources to tackle waiting lists.

The waiting lists at the Gold Coast are ballooning out of control, with a 24 per cent jump in the number of long-wait patients in Category 2 from July until October and a 5 per cent jump in long-wait patients in Category 3. They have simply been forgotten. That is 676 people in October having to wait excessively long periods for surgery, and all the Minister has done is recategorise people—shift them from one list to another. As Mrs Taylor's case shows, people in severe pain are losing out while the Minister operates on the waiting lists with a lead pencil instead of a scalpel.

Mr Horan is not up to the task of delivering better health care for Gold Coast residents and should be dumped. The Gold Coast Hospital is the Minister's own choice as a glowing example of his ministerial success, and doesn't that say it all! If there are funds to

throw around at the Gold Coast, how about directing some to the very real problems that he has created and fixing this year's budget in real terms at the Gold Coast.

Workplace Reforms

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands) (10.18 a.m.): The Government's proposed Workplace Relations Bill and the Industrial Organisations Bill will strike a balance between the rights of individuals to join an industrial organisation if they wish and the need to provide a system that promotes an equitable, workable industrial relations system for all stakeholders. These important pieces of legislation will provide reasonable access by unions to workplaces where they have members while protecting the rights of employers to conduct their business without undue disruption. The proposals are very similar to current laws in New South Wales where the Labor Government is in power.

The legislation will prohibit actions by both employers and industrial organisations which would amount to victimisation of or discrimination against employees on various grounds, including membership or non-membership of an organisation and involvement or non-involvement with an organisation. The employment advocate will have a role in investigating complaints in this area. The employment advocate will have access to the resources of the existing industrial inspectorate to investigate complaints or be able to use its resources to represent clients with complaints of victimisation or discrimination.

In addition, the Queensland legislation will stipulate that preference clauses—where union members are given preference over other employees—are void and unenforceable. These clauses will be removed as part of the award simplification process. For too long now, preference clauses have forced unwilling members to join certain industrial organisations to ensure that they are not disadvantaged by union members. Surely selection, promotion and access to training should be based on merit and not whether a person is in a union or not. Closed shops—where employees are required to join a particular union as part of their employment contract—are another more sinister way of guaranteeing union membership, and these too will be void and unenforceable. It is, and always should be, a basic democratic right whether an employee chooses to join a union or not. By providing that preference clauses and closed shops will be unlawful——

Time expired.

Gold Coast Hospital

Mrs ROSE (Currumbin) (10.20 a.m.): The Gold Coast Hospital is understaffed with the low numbers of registrars on duty. In fact, the Gold Coast is recognised as one of the most disadvantaged health areas in the State. Gold Coast health professionals have told the Minister for Health that the lack of staff and resources can be readily seen by the fact that the Gold Coast, which has 11 per cent of the Queensland population, attracts only approximately 5 per cent of the Health budget. This lack of funding puts more pressure on already stressed staff and patients. In fact, for about six months of the year there is only one registrar on duty after hours and for the rest of the year, two registrars work for about four days a week.

The accident and emergency unit is always busy, catering to many serious cases. The registrar on duty after hours is busy working in this unit and therefore cannot get to see acute patients in the hospital wards. In the accident and emergency unit, doctors are so busy that they have to do quick, short admissions rather than proper assessments and therefore rarely get to the ward problems. As a result, this forces young interns to do ward duty and take care of any problems themselves. If the registrar does go to the ward, then the accident and emergency unit can become clogged and they are forced to send patients to the wards without being seen by the medical registrar. Whilst in the wards, the registrar is forced to look after the coronary care and renal dialysis patients as well as the medical ward patients, who occupy up to 170 acute medical beds, up to 150 acute surgical beds and up to 50 sub-acute beds, all of which must be covered at any one time.

Health professionals on the Gold Coast are telling the Minister what should be done. He needs to embark on a recruitment campaign to attract enough doctors to service the existing Gold Coast Hospital. It is time that he started coming up with some answers because underresourced doctors cannot adequately treat the number of patients coming before them.

Time expired.

Workplace Reforms

Ms WARWICK (Barron River) (10.22 a.m.): Queensland's proposed industrial relations laws, the Workplace Relations Bill and the Industrial Organisations Bill, will ensure that meaningful enterprise bargaining can occur to the mutual benefit of

employers and employees without uninvited third party interference. Under the current legislation, employer/employee agreements are called enterprise flexibility agreements, but they have failed to provide a realistic alternative because employers were stopped from negotiating with their employees due to unwanted and often unwarranted union intervention. This explains the dismal number of enterprise flexibility agreements which progress to the approval stage—only 31 agreements reached in nearly three years, which is a poor effort in anyone's language.

Union intervention often protracted the approval of new agreements by the commission as one union after another made lengthy submissions as to why the wishes of the majority of employees at a workplace should not be listened to. Under the proposed legislation, employees will be free to choose whether to make an agreement collectively or individually and whether to make it with or without a union. This overturns the previous paternalistic view that unions need to be closely involved when drafting workplace agreements to guard against employee exploitation, which in most cases under the existing arrangements translates to mean union self-interest.

What this Government is saying through its legislation is that employees of today are far more able to negotiate their working conditions with their employers. The proposed legislation fosters this approach of cooperation as opposed to the old regime's fixation with conflict. Fortunately, the majority of employees and employers in Queensland realise that to have successful enterprises and satisfying jobs, they must work together.

Under the new legislation, certified agreements will be subject to majority employee approval and the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission will be——

Time expired.

Pensioner Housing, Bray Park

Mrs WOODGATE (Kurwongbah) (10.24 a.m.): I rise to advise the House of the frustration and disappointment being experienced by certain senior citizens in my electorate. Under the previous Labor Government, pensioner units were planned to be built in Sparkes Road, Bray Park. In my electorate, there is a great demand for pensioner units. The decision to build the units was welcomed by those senior citizens in the district who are keen to move into public housing yet to stay in the Pine Rivers area.

The construction of these units was scheduled for a May 1996 start. However, alarm bells—not division bells—had begun to ring before that time and pensioners who had placed their names on the waiting list and who were eagerly waiting to see the units started soon found out, to their dismay, that the units had been put on hold by this Government and by the incompetent Minister opposite, Minister Connor.

But it gets worse. We find not only that the units were not begun in May but also that the building of the pensioner units is not even included on the capital works list for 1996-97. My office has been contacted by pensioners, all with similar stories of hardship to tell. One lady who is in private rental accommodation is finding it extremely difficult to manage paying her rent as her husband has passed away and, naturally, she does not receive as much pension as she did when he was alive. This lady has written to the Minister, and as of yesterday she has not had the courtesy of a reply. Another woman rang me in tears, saying that her transfer had been approved in January and that she was promised a pensioner unit in the complex. Her daughter is also waiting for housing and they have to be housed together because the mother is an epileptic. Honourable members can imagine the distress that they are suffering.

I call on this Minister to take another look at his decision to defer building these pensioners units. It is no good telling the people on the list to ring their regional Chermside office; the decision is ultimately the Minister's. The pensioners know who to blame—the "bellboy" opposite! I would not be so unkind as to refer to him by his latest nickname, that is, "Ding-a-ling". However, to his credit, the Minister does have the distinction in this House of being the subject of a famous Ernest Hemingway phrase, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee."

Workplace Reforms

Mr HARPER (Mount Ommaney) (10.26 a.m.): The Queensland Government's proposed Workplace Relations Bill and Industrial Organisations Bill signal a new beginning for Queensland workplace reform. The legislation has been designed with all Queenslanders in mind and will encourage flexibility, increase productivity, support employment and, most importantly, reduce industrial conflict.

Under the new legislation, employees will still be able to strike in certain circumstances. For example, employees will have a legitimate

right to strike during the negotiation of a new agreement. This is consistent with long established industrial principles. In addition to this, employees will be protected against dismissal for taking part in protected industrial action. However, in the spirit of providing a fair go for all, there must be a genuine attempt to reach an agreement before industrial action can be taken and at least three working days' notice must be given before taking part in protected industrial action.

The independent umpire, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, can also intervene by terminating the protected bargaining period where genuine bargaining is not occurring or if there is a risk of serious harm being done to the economy or the community. To temper the right to strike of employees, strikes will be unlawful during the life of an agreement outside of the protected bargaining period. In an effort to stem the kind of mayhem seen in the nation's capital earlier this year, industrial action which involves personal injury, property damage or unlawfully taking or using property will be unlawful. The penalties for not complying with this legislation are meant to provide an adequate deterrent to breaking certified agreements where there is an accepted process for settling disputes or for infringing on a person's right to strike while negotiating an agreement.

The Government's intention is to ensure that, once certified agreements are made, they are adhered to in the spirit of any agreement; that is, once a deal has been struck, it must be abided by. The Bill does not allow multi-employer strikes during the protected bargaining period because the reforms are designed to ensure that enterprise bargaining focuses at the workplace level and, in particular, on the relationship between the employers and the employees.

Time expired.

Mr B. Stacey

Mr FOLEY (Yeronga) (10.28 a.m.): The Opposition joins with the Government in mourning the sad loss to Australia of a genius of musical theatre, Brian Stacey. He was tragically plucked from this life just prior to the opening of *Sunset Boulevard*. The sunset of this brilliant career brings a darkness to all those who love the muses. Fittingly, the show went on, buoyed by the spirit of one whose work had so often dispelled the darkness and taken audiences to the sunlit uplands of delight.

I well recall his precise, witty handling of a difficult musical score in the Queensland Theatre Company's production of *Sweeney Todd*. This triumph of grisly black comedy poked fun at the gentleman barber who dealt in death, but the Grim Reaper has now had his revenge. But death shall have no dominion, as the poet John Donne reminded us. Wherever Australian artists strive to relate music in its many moods to the emotional dynamics of theatre, Brian Stacey's legacy will be there.

Austrack Pty Ltd

Mr TANTI (Mundingburra) (10.29 a.m.): I rise to inform the House that this Government's policies of job creation and improving the economy are working in my electorate of Mundingburra and the Townsville region in general. Recently, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Vaughan Johnson, announced the awarding of a $22.1m contract to Austrack Pty Ltd, a Queensland company that manufactures concrete railway sleepers. The company will build a new factory at Stuart in Townsville, eventually employing 35 people. The value of the factory above that $22m is $7.5m. I know that members opposite may not think that 35 jobs is much, but to the 35 people who were previously unemployed and who will fill those positions it will provide an income and also, more importantly, self-respect and dignity.

Under Labor, north Queensland has suffered from a range of factors, including economic recession, lack of business confidence and poor government. While the company will employ 35 people, there are considerable flow-on effects for the local economy.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

State Health Tripartite Forum; Mundingburra By-election

Mr BEATTIE (10.30 a.m.): I refer the Minister for Health to recent revelations about his secret deal with the State Health Tripartite Forum in which taxpayers' funds were to be devoted to expanding this organisation in return for officers of the forum delivering the indigenous vote for the coalition in the Mundingburra by-election. I refer also to allegations that a cheque for $500 would be paid by National Party Vice-president George Price to help pay for transporting indigenous voters to polling booths in the Mundingburra

by-election. I ask: who paid for the air fares and accommodation when disgraced forum officers Mick Miller and Steve Hagan visited the Minister at his electorate office in Toowoomba to start plotting with him on 5 December 1995, and what does the Minister know of any payment made, by cheque or in cash, to help pay for transporting voters to polling booths on 3 February?

Mr HORAN: As I have told this Parliament on many other occasions when I have spoken about this particular matter, there was just a normal process of developing policy, which we publicly announced, about the Townsville General Hospital. The Leader of the Opposition is referring to the article in the *Courier-Mail* by Mr Tony Koch. I say to him that there are some great articles and follow-up stories that Mr Koch could also put in the *Courier-Mail*. For example, I met with doctors in Townsville during the Mundingburra by-election campaign. I had dinners and breakfast meetings with them. I developed policy initiatives, and we delivered those policy initiatives in the Budget. We made the hospital better. Another great story for Mr Koch would perhaps be all the meetings I had—another big plot, in his words—with the families of children who are disabled. I had lunches, breakfasts and all sorts of meetings with them over a period. We developed policy initiatives to deliver to the children of Townsville five occupational therapists and speech pathologists. We delivered that in the Budget.

The only reason that we did not deliver on the policy initiatives of the State Health Tripartite Forum was that serious allegations were made about that organisation when we came to Government. We correctly passed those on to the CJC and, on its advice, we correctly passed them on to the police. There were also other allegations that came from within the State Health Tripartite Forum itself. As a result of those allegations—and we have correctly followed legal advice from Queensland Health and Crown law right through the entire process—there have been court cases, and people have been sent to gaol. In fact, the magistrate at the Cairns court referred to the forum as a "nest of thieves" and accused Mr Hagan of blatantly and repeatedly helping himself to the public purse.

The Opposition Health spokesperson, Ms Wendy Edmond, in a comment in the media, said that, while the forum had raised many important health issues, concerns had been expressed about senior management practices during the Goss Government's term of office. We have undertaken a proper process of meeting with people—open meetings, public meetings—espousing policy, talking about initiatives and then promising to deliver the initiatives. In one case, because of the allegations and because of the resultant court actions, those initiatives were changed, and we are going to deliver them through the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Health Council.

Mr Beattie: Who paid the air fare?

Mr HORAN: With regard to the part of the honourable member's question about the air fares—members of that organisation requested a meeting with me on their way through Toowoomba to Toomelah, where they had to deal with business. When people say they want to come to my office for a meeting, I do not ask, "Who is paying for your cab fare? Are you driving your own car? Are you coming in a McCafferty's bus? How are you getting here?" People visit my electorate office all the time and ask for meetings. I do not quiz them as to who is paying their fare, whether they are walking or hitchhiking. Those people wanted to see me. I said, "You are welcome to call in." They asked could they call in on their way to Toomelah on one occasion. I think they paid me a visit on another occasion. They were always ringing me and asking, "Can we come and see you, Mike? We are having awful problems with the way that the Labor Government delivers health policies." They are quite welcome to visit my office and to get to my office by any means of transport they like. I do not ask people how they get there—whether they walk, catch the train, or whatever.

Mr Beattie: What about the cheque?

Mr HORAN: As to the other matter to which the member referred—I know nothing about it whatsoever.

State Health Tripartite Forum; Mundingburra By-election

Mr BEATTIE: I refer the Premier to recent revelations that he had a breakfast meeting with State Health Tripartite Forum official Steve Hagan, National Party supporter Victor Jose, and indigenous community leader Jim Akee at Lowths Hotel on 1 February this year, when it is alleged that the Premier gave his support to a secret deal between these men and his Health Minister, Mike Horan. I remind the Premier that the deal involved spending taxpayers' money on expanding the tripartite forum in exchange for the delivery of indigenous votes in the Mundingburra by-election. I point out that, since these allegations were raised on Saturday, the

Premier has had two full days in which to bring his mind to the events of that morning. I ask: what is the Premier's recollection of the conversation and secret deal that took place at that breakfast meeting?

Mr Horan: Who paid for your businessmen's lunch?

Mr BORBIDGE: As the Minister for Health suggests, perhaps we should be asking some questions about secret meetings that the Leader of the Opposition is having with captains of industry around Brisbane. Surely it is the right of any political leader to meet with various interest groups from time to time, as I have done on a regular basis. In fact, from memory, that particular meeting was held in the Townsville mall, so it was hardly a secret gathering behind closed doors. The people who attended that meeting raised issues of concern to them, and we had a general discussion.

Health Initiatives

Mr SPRINGBORG: I ask the Honourable the Premier: is he aware of any Opposition initiatives to improve Queensland's health system, and how do these compare with the coalition Government's record?

Mr BORBIDGE: It is very interesting to contrast the policy and the achievements of the coalition and the tactics of the Opposition in turning around six years of Labor mismanagement of the health system. I cannot believe that this particular document I have is accurate. However, as it is signed by the shadow Minister for Health and it is on her letterhead, I can only presume that it is accurate. This particular document is dated Wednesday, 16 October 1996. The letter, which is addressed "To: All Members of the ALP State Caucus", reads—

"Dear Comrades"—

one comrade to a few more—

> "Over the last few weeks we have scored some good direct hits on the Health Minister, Mike Horan. Please keep them coming. With your help we can prevent him escaping the perils of the Health Ministry."

But it gets better. The letter states—

> "Please search through your representations to the Minister to find letters—preferably on behalf of sad, needy constituents—that have not been satisfactorily answered after say 3 - 4 months."

The member shows her tactics up a bit more in the next paragraph, which states—

> "Please also keep those"——

Mr Mackenroth: Table it.

Mr BORBIDGE: I want to read it. The member for Mount Coot-tha says—

> "Please also keep those victims coming."

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Order on both sides of the House!

Mr BORBIDGE: The member finishes with this gem—

> "Remember—a victim a day keeps Horan at bay!
>
> Best wishes . . . Wendy."

Mr Mackenroth: Why don't you table the letter?

Mr BORBIDGE: If the honourable member really wants me to, I will table it.

The shadow Health Minister is a merchant of misery, going around all her comrades—to use her own words—saying, "Give me two or three sad, unhappy people so that we can keep concentrating on scoring a few cheap political points." It is worth summarising some of the key initiatives that have been put in place since the coalition came to power. As to waiting lists—elective surgery waiting times have been significantly reduced since the introduction of the coalition's Surgery on Time program. With the 10 main public hospitals across Queensland involved in the program, we are now well on track to reduce long-wait Category 1 patients to fewer than 5 per cent by the end of this year. We are now releasing waiting list figures each month; Labor produced only one set of figures in six years. So much for open and accountable Government! People are now waiting less time for their elective surgery. Time is the critical factor on which to measure waiting list effectiveness.

As to district health services and councils—we have disbanded Labor's failed and costly regional health authority system and replaced it with 39 district health councils, providing true community input. Advertisements seeking applications for positions on the new district health councils have recently been placed, and over 1,100 applications were received as at close of business on Monday, 28 October. The closing deadline has been extended due to the massive public response for council positions.

As to the Capital Works Program—we have cleaned up the mess that we inherited from Labor, that is, a $1.5 billion blow-out in the 10-year Capital Works Program. We have reorganised the Capital Works Program and have recently announced a new, 10-year, $1.2 billion Capital Works Program across the State.

In regard to mental health, we have recently released our 10-year mental health strategy, which aims to correct Labor's poor funding of mental health. Mental health funding increased by $10m this year. An additional 177 mental health positions were created in the Budget.

As to the recurrent funding overruns—the coalition has successfully delivered a record $3 billion Health budget, despite inheriting from Labor, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition a massive $70m recurrent budget overrun from 1994-95 and 1995-96.

As to health services in the bush—we have established the Office of Rural Health in Roma. We have moved the office from Brisbane. We have established the Rural Health Advisory Council, comprising representatives from regional, rural and remote areas of Queensland.

The major priority of the Government has been to get the hospitals right. The Budget has provided funding for an additional 540 nurses and 80 doctors this year.

The record of this Government in seven months compares more than favourably with the health crisis over which Labor presided for the six years that it was in Government. Where are the policies of the shadow Minister for Health? She is not presenting to this Parliament any policies; she is organising a catalogue of complaints. The merchant of misery is writing to her comrades saying, "Try to find two or three people in the system so that we can score a few cheap political points." The fact is that Labor's health policy is exactly the same as it was for the six years that it was in Government. That is more of the same from a time when it destroyed what was the finest public hospital system in Australia.

State Health Tripartite Forum; Mundingburra By-election

Mr ELDER: I ask the Health Minister: if, as he says, there was nothing improper in his dealings with State Health Tripartite Forum Chairman, Mick Miller, in the lead-up to the Mundingburra by-election, why will he not refer the whole sordid mess to the Connolly inquiry or request the CJC to reopen its inquiry to investigate fresh allegations about his secret deal?

Mr HORAN: The honourable member is well aware that that matter was referred to the CJC earlier by the then Leader of the Opposition and was totally cleared. What we are talking about is people who are members of Parliament going about the business of developing policies. As I said in my previous answer, I had dinners, breakfasts and meetings in Townsville with people associated with the medical field. I said that we would bring about certain policy initiatives for the improvement of health in Townsville. We delivered those in our Budget. When we came to Government, there were no allegations referring to those particular people.

We did the same for the families of kids with disabilities. We met with them on numerous occasions. I hoped that, by developing policy initiatives and demonstrating how we could improve the situation of those kids in Townsville, those families might consider voting for us. That is the normal way of politics. That is why the members opposite were espousing their policies in that area.

We delivered $245,000 for therapy services in Townsville. We delivered because no serious allegations were involved. When we came to Government and we had access to the records of the Health Department, we discovered that, under the three previous Health Ministers, Mr Hayward, Mr Elder and Mr Beattie, the State Health Tripartite Forum had been seriously mismanaged to the extent that each year funds had to be provided to top up its budget. In the first year, in addition to the $170,000 provided, Mr Hayward had to provide some $80,000 from his Aid In Grant Fund. In the second year, Mr Elder had to put in $138,000 to top up the budget. When we came to Government, we found that Mr Beattie had left a mess amounting to $141,000 in unpaid travel accounts and unpaid wages.

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. The Minister is misleading the House. I refused to provide the forum with any extra funds. I put the cleaners through them, including the accountants. I refused to pay them funds because they were rorting the money. The Minister paid them the money that I refused to pay them. The Minister was about bribing them.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Health.

Mr HORAN: When we came to Government, we had a mess amounting to

approximately $141,000. The Regional Health Authority pleaded with us to pay the unpaid accounts for travel and other expenses. It pleaded with us to pay the unpaid wages. That was the mess that we inherited. In addition to discovering the $138,000 that the former Health Minister, Mr Elder, paid from the Aid In Grant Fund and other special accounts to top up the forum's budget and the $80,000 Mr Hayward provided to top up the budget, we found that the forum's structure had not been properly established. The CJC could not agree as to whether the members of the forum were public servants or not. The Government had to seek Crown law advice to establish the status of those people. That is the sort of mess we inherited.

On inheriting that mess, we promptly placed all the allegations before the CJC. On its recommendation, we placed certain allegations before the Police Service. We undertook an audit. We did everything properly to ensure that we followed the correct processes. Those processes led to court action, to certain people being gaoled and to further court cases that are yet to be heard. We acted with complete propriety throughout the entire process.

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. If the Minister was acting with complete propriety, he should refer the fresh allegation.

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

Townsville Police Academy

Mr CARROLL: In directing a question to the Minister for Police, I refer to the historic opening of the $3.5m Police Academy in Townsville last week and the inaugural intake of 40 recruits at the new facility. Can the Minister advise the House of the support in north Queensland for that new initiative and the benefits of that investment for the Queensland Police Service?

Mr COOPER: I thank the honourable member for the question because I want to ensure that people in southern Queensland are aware that people in north Queensland support the opening of that academy in Townsville. People in Mackay, north to the tip of the cape and out west to the gulf will be afforded the opportunity of sending young recruits to that establishment, which is also a training centre for police officers and PLOs. It is an asset for all people in the State, not just those in the north.

I think something like three and a half million Queenslanders support it. Only one person does not support it, and that is the member for Waterford. He is the one who knocks it from daylight to dark. Every day when this character wakes up, he starts to whinge and whine about what he is going to have for breakfast and then he goes on from there throughout the day until dark. He even has to whine when he goes to bed. From dawn to dark, it is one constant whinge, one constant knock to see what he can be negative about today; he has nothing positive to say.

The Opposition labelled the new Police Academy a waste of cash, which indicates that it does not support it. That is a tragedy, because the Government believes that it is an asset. It is something that it promised for quite some time. The Government had to—and wanted to—get the thing up and running as soon as it possibly could to get more police through the academies.

Mr Barton: That's why you cancelled 40.

Mr COOPER: No, that intake was not cancelled at all. Those people were retreads who will be picked up in the ensuing months, so again the member is dead wrong. As always, that is negative talk.

This Government has a commitment to get more police recruits, and the opening of the academy in north Queensland is the start of that commitment. As the member knows, 40 recruits went into the academy. The member for Waterford was not even on the invitation list for the opening of that academy. Guess who put his name on that list? I wanted the member to come up and have a look at the academy, so we invited him to come up and have a look at it. At the opening, the member sat in the front row, he waited until he received his acknowledgment and then he snuck off down the back, skulked around the corner, and knocked the new academy with the media in Townsville. He gave it a good belt. After having stood up and said, on the one hand, "It is a good idea", on the other hand he said, "Isn't it terrible." The member should be consistent in what he says. He is just a knocker. He would never know if an idea is a good one or a bad one. One minute the member is saying that the academy cost too much; the next thing he is saying that it was rushed; the next thing he is saying that the Government did not assess the project well enough; the next thing he is saying that the Government should not have leased the building, it should have bought it—it does not matter what the Government does, it is wrong. However, this Government is proceeding in a positive way, and that is the way it is going to be.

The other furphy that the member is spreading—and I think his mate, the member for Maryborough, even said it—is that the Oxley academy was going to be closed, for heaven's sake. What rot! That is the sort of absolute rubbish that members opposite peddle. They know darned well that it is not going to be closed.

Mr Palaszczuk: When are you closing it?

Mr COOPER: The member opposite said that; not me. Why does the member think that the Government wants to close the academy? It is filling it up with recruits, and the member opposite knows that. I have no doubt that he will come along to the induction at the end of November. I am sure that he would like to come along because 120 recruits will graduate. No doubt, the member opposite will be there saying how great it is to see these young recruits come out of the academy. I have no doubt about that whatsoever. As the members opposite know, the new campus in Townsville is a terrific site. It represents the best value for money that one could possibly get. The production of recruits from north Queensland for the entire Police Service of Queensland will be very cost effective indeed. Of course, it is the start of what the Government has said will occur. Over the next three years, there will be $76m allocated for another 900 police and 400 civilian positions so that we can start getting police out there where people want them and need them.

Also, people have said that the recruits in Townsville will not get as good a deal as will the recruits at Oxley. The recruits in Townsville are going to receive all the basic elements of police training. Because of the number of staff, the 40 recruits will get plenty of attention, especially in the areas of law, police skills, communication, behavioural studies, sociology, autonomous learning and decision making.

The other point I want to make about that academy is that it is an asset. Not all the wisdom resides in the south-east corner. People have said, "You will get a north Queensland culture." Quite frankly, in relation to the geographical site of the academy, I do not care. Maybe we will get some benefit from training various people from diverse areas of the State. Not all the knowledge and wisdom resides in the south, and maybe those people in the north do know something. It is just a pity that, instead of that lot opposite constantly knocking initiatives such as a police academy in Townsville, which is of benefit to the entire State, it does not get behind them.

There is a constant call for more police. That is exactly what this Government is doing—getting more police out into the areas of need. Recently, in a newspaper article, the member for Bundamba called for more detectives. In that article, he stated—

> "In 1993/94 there were 1195 motor vehicles stolen and in 1994/95 there were 1309 vehicles stolen.
>
> . . .
>
> This averages out at roughly two to three cars being stolen every day in Ipswich.
>
> The increase in the number of car thefts is simply not acceptable in the community."

I agree with him; it is not acceptable. However, in that article the member made reference to the period when his party was in Government.

Mr Gibbs: You said you would stop it.

Mr COOPER: The member referred to figures relating to the time when his party was in Government and when his mate who he is sitting beside was the Police Minister. Yet in that article he is belly-aching about the numbers. The member said that it was not acceptable to the community. I agree with him wholeheartedly. That is why this coalition is putting together a plan to increase the numbers of police in order to put more detectives in areas such as those represented by the member for Bundamba so that it can deal with the mess left by the members opposite.

Correctional Facilities

Mr BARTON: I refer the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to last night's wild booze party at Mareeba's Lotus Glen prison where 26 inmates helped themselves to a shipping container full of alcohol and then ran amok damaging the prison hospital and bungalows. I also refer the Minister to the recent sex romp at the Rockhampton Correctional Centre, where a naked woman was found under an inmate's bed. As well, we have a corrective service in which there is an increase in the number of escapes, continued strikes in the prison service and, sadly, an increase in the number of deaths in custody. I ask the Minister: when will he ensure that Queensland's correctional facilities are run in a proper fashion, or has he surrendered all ministerial responsibility in preparation for handing over the portfolio to someone else?

Mr COOPER: The answer to the last part of the question is: no. However, in relation to the other issues raised in that question, quite obviously those matters were dealt with some time ago. It was 10 times worse when the member for Kedron was the Minister.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr COOPER: Oh, yes, it was. I say to the honourable member for Kedron that he should not forget the love bus. Does he remember the love bus? That was not just a tryst——

Mr Bredhauer: Instead of having a pub crawl, we'll have a prison crawl.

Mr COOPER: Yes, I know. I have seen it. Has the member forgotten about the love bus? It used to operate out of Stuart prison at Townsville. Yes, the member remembers it well. I remember so many similar things that used to occur on so many occasions during the term of the previous Government. Was that not tremendous!

Mr Elder interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: I warn the member for Capalaba under Standing Order 123A.

Mr COOPER: I would like to deal with the serious part of the member's question, which is deaths in custody. I want to take it up because that is a much more serious issue. Right from the start when I became Minister for Police, I met with the overview committee.

Mr Gibbs interjected.

Mr COOPER: The member should not interrupt; I am trying to speak. I cannot understand him; I cannot hear him.

Mr Gibbs: Is it true the woman came in in a cake?

Mr COOPER: Did she? I am not sure, old son. That is the sort of thing that he would organise. He is very good at organising that sort of thing. I can even think of a couple of names, which I will whisper in his ear later, which relate to a couple of things that the member has been involved in. I think all of us on the Government side of the House know plenty about that.

However, I would like to concentrate on the issue of deaths in custody, because it is a much more serious issue than the sordid stuff that the member would like to get involved in. When I became the Minister for Police, very early in the piece I met with the Deaths in Custody Overview Committee. I do not think the member opposite ever met that committee because he used to treat it like dirt.

Mr Barton: That's offensive.

Mr COOPER: Yes, he did. I was the first Minister that those people had seen in six years, bar one when one of the former Ministers opposite met with them very briefly and then walked out on them. We have met on a number of occasions. I commend them for the work that they have done. They have done a tremendous job in terms of reducing the number of deaths in custody. Figures indicate that there has been a tremendous improvement, although we can always do better—and I make that point very clearly.

In 1995-96, there were three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicides and five non-Aboriginal suicides. To date this year, there have been two Aboriginal suicides and one non-Aboriginal suicide. Those figures show a marked decrease. The other day I spoke to people from Murri Watch, which is doing a fantastic job in looking after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are encouraging that program, just as we are encouraging the Deaths in Custody Overview Committee. Sadly, honourable members will know that the other day the acting chairman of that committee died from a heart attack. The Government is encouraging the members of the overview committee to continue with their work, and we want to work with them. I take on board the comments of Mr Terry O'Gorman, Vice-president of the Council for Civil Liberties. Mr O'Gorman has requested that Mr Lew Wyvill look at those recommendations, and we will be having further discussions about that point.

A tremendous amount of work has already been done. Of the 339 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Black Deaths in Custody, the Queensland Corrective Services Commission has either led or shared the responsibility for 92 recommendations. Of those 92 recommendations, 80 have been implemented, 10 have been partly implemented and two have not been implemented. Of the two that have not been implemented, one deals with the referral of Aboriginal prisoners to qualified Aboriginal psychiatrists. We cannot do that because none are available. It was also recommended that we include the national standard guidelines for corrections in legislation. We will include a statement of principles to be included in its stead. As far as we are concerned, we have moved very positively on the issue of Aboriginal deaths in custody and we will continue to do so. Opposition members should start getting a bit positive and recognise the need to do something similar.

Rural Health Initiatives

Mr BAUMANN: I ask the Minister for Health: will he inform the House of the main rural health initiatives introduced by the coalition State Government since coming to power?

Mr HORAN: I thank the honourable member for his question. It is important to tell the House about the massive improvements, changes and steps forward that have been made by the coalition Government for health services in rural and remote areas. Not only have we fixed the financial mess and the administrative chaos that we inherited and we had everything back on track by July, but also we brought about significant improvements for health services in rural Queensland.

One of the first things that the Government did was to shift the Rural Health Unit out of Brisbane—I do not know why there was a Rural Health Unit in Brisbane—and locate it at Roma, in the bush, where health workers can actually rub shoulders with the people they serve. Staff of the Rural Health Unit can now talk to the people who come from rural and remote areas and find out what the real problems are—something which they could not do when they were living in Toowong or Kangaroo Point. By living in Roma, they will have first-hand knowledge of the problems experienced in the bush. I compliment the staff in Roma for their good work. We are recruiting additional staff, which will certainly be a boost to Roma. Most importantly, staff will know what they are talking about because they live in the bush.

As soon as it came into Government, the coalition got rid of Labor's failed and costly regional health authority system, which was an entirely unnecessary level of bureaucracy that was achieving absolutely nothing. In its place, we have set up 39 district health councils which will give genuine community input into rural health. The response we have received has been overwhelming. Only halfway through the month we had received approximately 1,500 expressions of interest. At this stage, we have received well over 1,000 applications, most of which have come from rural areas. That overwhelming response shows that this is just what the doctor ordered for the bush, and it is what the people want. They want to have a say in the sorts of services they receive in hospitals and community health centres, rather than have them run by bureaucrats. They want some say in strategic plans and minor capital works. They want positions on selection panels as senior executives. The Government has given them the opportunity to have that genuine community input.

The area of capital was totally neglected by the previous Government. Under the Capital Works Program, no provision was made for country hospitals, to which the Government has allocated $50m. Already this financial year it has been decided that a community health centre will be built at Stanthorpe, some accommodation will be provided at Aramac, and a feasibility study has been done on Bamaga Hospital. Even in the electorate of the honourable member for Cook, poor little Bamaga Hospital was not given any consideration by the former Government. This Government is giving it some consideration, and that is the difference between the present and former Governments. Over 10 years, the coalition Government will provide an additional $50m for capital works. In this year's Budget, the Government has allocated $1m for outreach allied health services to rural areas. We have already provided a flying dentist for Longreach, which will service 18 areas, and we have funded a speech pathologist for St George and Dirranbandi. That is tangible evidence of what the Government is doing in rural areas.

One of the most serious problems for rural areas is the availability of health professionals. The Government has doubled the scholarship scheme by providing an extra $1.3m so that young Queenslanders can study medicine, nursing and allied health and be bonded in schemes which will see them working in the bush, where hopefully they will remain after the period of their bond has expired. Another important initiative in this year's Budget was the provision of $470,000 for a special incentive program to encourage dentists to go into rural and remote areas of Queensland. The sum of $470,000 will provide additional incentives to dentists' salaries on a graduated scale to encourage dentists to practice in rural and remote areas. That will back up schemes such as the provision of a flying dentist for Longreach and 18 other areas.

Finally, the Government is establishing the Centre for Remote and Public Health at Mount Isa, in the north west of the State. The Government will inject $1.5m a year into Mount Isa for the provision of a centre to train postgraduate and undergraduate students in medicine, nursing, allied health and Aboriginal health. A board is currently being established and local people are getting involved, as are the University of Queensland, the Royal Flying Doctor Service and the James Cook University. I am sure that health professionals throughout the State will be most appreciative of this new

service in Mount Isa, as it will help them retain their positions.

These are just a few examples—in addition to all the funding that has gone into regional hospitals that service remote areas—of how the coalition is not only getting back to basics but is also getting back to the bush. The Government is repairing all the damage and destruction that was done by the previous Government. I know as I have travelled throughout the State to places such as Charters Towers and Mount Isa that there is a great resurgence of confidence in the bush. Rural people are confident that the Government knows what it is doing, that it is acting for them and that it is bringing them real benefits.

Queensland Electricity Industry

Mr McGRADY: I refer the Minister for Mines and Energy to yesterday's announcement by the Chairman of the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation of planned changes for the Queensland electricity industry, which included cutting the supply industry work force by at least 23 per cent, or 1,500 jobs, abolishing the seven regional electricity boards, the removal of cross-subsidisation and higher electricity prices for Queensland families. I ask: was the Minister aware of the details of these proposed changes prior to his chairman's announcement, and does he support them? What is in this for Queensland consumers? Does not the end of cross-subsidisation show that the Government has really abandoned the bush?

Mr GILMORE: I thank the honourable member for the question. The electricity industry is a matter of grave importance to the people of Queensland. I believe that it is an industry that will ultimately provide the engine room for the future industrial development of this State.

I am rather pleased to answer the question because it gives me an opportunity to outline some of the initiatives that the Government is taking in the electricity industry. Unfortunately, the premise behind the question is one of ignorance. Obviously the question comes from the Opposition. The member who asked it was the previous Minister who sat in the Cabinet at the time that his Premier—who now sits in the backbench of the Opposition—signed off his Government and the people of Queensland on the COAG arrangements which were agreed by all Governments in this country in respect of the future of the electricity industry.

When the honourable member for Mount Isa and the honourable member for Logan signed that document, did they genuinely believe that, upon giving their commitment to the COAG arrangements and signing off into this brave new world in respect of competition and other changes, they could then turn their backs and expect there to be no change? Of course, it is possible to see a situation in which there are no changes.

From these changes we expect enormous generational change in the electricity industry. What we are expecting, and what we will get because of the way we will drive the changes in the electricity industry, are greater efficiency, productivity and, for the first time, competition in the electricity industry. We are going to drive it. We will see a reduction in prices in the electricity industry right across-the-board. We are going to see that outcome, because we are going into a competitive market.

Mr McGrady: And a reduction in the work force.

Mr GILMORE: The interjection from the other side of the House, once again, was made in ignorance, because after all it was the former Cabinet which set us on this inevitable road to change. We are now going down this road and we will do it well.

In his question, the honourable member raised the matter of the QTSC's view which it offered to the world yesterday. That is indeed the view of the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation, but it is not necessarily the view of this Government. The Opposition knows—and the honourable member for Mount Isa ought to know, unless he has been asleep in this House—that we have commissioned Professor Peter Anderson, Dr Morley and Peter Garlick to come up with a set of rules for changes to the electricity industry. I am driving the changes; the QTSC is not driving those changes, and nor will it.

As a Government, we will get the report from Professor Anderson in the next few days. I have already received the executive summary of that report. I believe it is a good report. It will be considered in due course not only by me but also by my Cabinet colleagues and my party room. We will then make a decision on whether we will adopt it. Once that decision to go ahead is made, once again we will set about the business of establishing Queensland as the pre-eminent generator and supplier of electricity services in this country.

Importantly, one of the things which has come out of this report is that, over the past six years, the electricity supply industry in this State has slipped from pre-eminence—from

first position—to currently third position, and it is slipping by the day to the point——

Mr McGrady: Who told you that?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I warn the honourable member for Mount Isa under Standing Order 123A for persistent interjections.

Mr GILMORE: By the end of this year, on a total factor productivity basis, we will be in fourth position, behind South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. We are comparing apples with apples. The former Minister presided over the slipping of the Queensland electricity supply industry from being the finest in this country and from being world competitive to third position currently in this country—and we are falling to fourth position as quickly as we speak. It is falling behind. I am now charged with the responsibility of driving change in that industry, and I will do so, as will this Government.

We will not resile for one minute from our responsibility. Our responsibility is to the future of this State and its householders, our domestic consumers, and to our industries in this State who employ our domestic consumers. I will not back off. The changes will be soundly based. They will be consistent with our responsibilities under COAG in the national energy market. This State will once again be the pre-eminent electricity supplier in this country and the industry will once again be world competitive by the time I am through with it.

Visit by Premier to Hervey Bay Electorate

Mr ELLIOTT: In directing a question to the Premier, I refer to claims by the Leader of the Opposition that the Premier had neglected the people of rural Queensland by visiting Hervey Bay over the weekend, and I ask: can he advise the House whether the people of Hervey Bay deserve to be visited by the Premier and Government Ministers?

Mr BORBIDGE: In another of the Leader of the Opposition's Hollywood media gems, last Friday he again accused me of neglecting the bush. This was in the wake of his infamous T. J. Ryan memorial speech, which no doubt could win him an academy award for political chicanery. We are seeing the new soft and cuddly version of the Leader of the Opposition—"Bush Friendly" Beattie. I say to the people of country Queensland: do not listen to what he says but look at what they did for six long years in Government. However, that is another story.

Incredibly, on Friday, the Leader of the Opposition criticised me for daring to visit Hervey Bay. He said—

> "At a time when the people of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs need the National Party to hold a meeting here to explain their actions, the city-based Premier has taken his party off to Hervey Bay for the weekend. He has abandoned the bush for the coastal cities."

Do the people of Hervey Bay think that the Premier and his Ministers should not visit that very important part of Queensland?

My attention was drawn to the *Fraser Coast Chronicle*, in particular to an editorial headed "Fraser Coast deserves a hearing" which responded to Mr Beattie by stating, "Sometimes politicians go too far." It said that Mr Beattie criticised the Premier for spending a long weekend in Hervey Bay, and so on. Then it stated—

> "Does that mean that tour operators of Hervey Bay do not deserve a hearing with Queensland's top politician? Why do their concerns, including those about the issuing of further whale watching permits elsewhere in Queensland, not measure up to the worries of the bush? In setting out to criticise Mr Borbidge, the Opposition Leader has done himself no favours. He has appeared not clever but as though he is clutching at political straws.
>
> Friday's press release showed the wounds of Labor's shock electoral loss in Queensland have far from healed. Unfortunately for Labor, which has shown a refreshing desire to listen to the people since the election, the release also hinted that a tinge of desperation might be filtering into the camp now that the heels have been cooled on the Opposition benches.
>
> It showed that maybe instead of listening to the people, Labor members were concentrating too hard on picking holes in their political rivals. There was no need for Mr Beattie to even acknowledge that the Premier was in Hervey Bay. There was no need for criticism or suggestions of where he should be instead.
>
> . . .
>
> Mr Borbidge was in Hervey Bay at the request of veteran tourism campaigner Ken Bennett. Mr Bennett, as anyone in the region can attest, will never pass up the chance for some added publicity or exposure for the district nor of

> having a word in the ear of the people who matter. Mr Bennett did just that just some time ago when talking to the Premier at a function, inviting him to Hervey Bay to speak to tourism operators and to see new projects like Ebenezer's Lamplight Bazaar in Maryborough. Mr Borbidge agreed, opting to arrive in the region a few hours early before the weekend's National Party Central Council meeting in the Bay. Mr Bennett, of course, was ecstatic and district tourism operators glad for the chance to speak to the man at the helm of Queensland politics. And that was that—until Mr Beattie's critical press release.
>
> It is a shame that politicians spend so much time and energy criticising each other instead of looking at the real problems in the community.
>
> . . .
>
> Mr Borbidge's visit could not in fact have proved better for Hervey Bay. The Premier promised an immediate review of the issuing of extra whale watching permits, a matter that has justifiably concerned local operators and business people. If the Opposition Leader wants to talk to the people of the bush, so be it, but Fraser Coast residents deserve a hearing just as much as the next people. The outcome of Friday's visit only served to prove that."

We have the whingeing, perennial Opposition Leader. I wonder what the member for Hervey Bay thinks about Hervey Bay not being important enough for the Premier and Government Ministers to visit it! According to the Leader of the Opposition, we should be somewhere else.

Mr ELDER: I rise to a point of order. The Premier is saying that he was there listening and he was going to take their concerns on board. That is what he is saying and that is what he is reporting. The fact of the matter is that on *State Line* the Minister for Environment was saying that they would not review it. I table the document.

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

Mr BORBIDGE: It would be great if one of these days the honourable member could manage to be coherent!

The simple fact is that the Labor Party has been caught out. It has to criticise anything. If we go to Hervey Bay, the Leader of the Opposition puts out a statement criticising that. If we go somewhere else, the Opposition has to criticise that. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, this Government happens to believe that Hervey Bay is important, it happens to believe that the Fraser Coast is important, it happens to believe that Maryborough is important, and we are going to be visiting there a lot more in the future, whether the Leader of the Opposition likes it or not.

Shun Tak Holdings; Overseas Visit by Minister for Economic Development and Trade

Mr WELLS: I refer the Honourable the Minister for Economic Development and Trade to his press release of 20 October, a copy of which I table for the convenience of members. It claims that Queensland has beaten rivals Sydney, Singapore and the USA to win an allegedly lucrative and employment-generating information technology contract to manage the finances and investments of Shun Tak Holdings, which the Minister said was one of the wealthiest companies in Asia. I ask the Minister: did the Government offer the company any incentives to do business in Queensland, or was his overseas trip to seal the contract just another junket?

Mr SLACK: I am disappointed that the member would imply that any of my overseas trips were junkets.

Mr Borbidge: Do you want to tell the member about the Leader of the Opposition requesting that we have an overseas trade mission to India next week?

Mr SLACK: That is right. The Leader of the Opposition is on record as saying that he is prepared to take a bipartisan approach to trade initiatives. He has actually written to the Premier and me requesting that we visit India.

No member of this House can with any seriousness question the overseas trade delegations in which I have been involved. The honourable member should ask any business person who has been involved in any of those visits whether they were worth while. If he has any idea of what is involved in trade delegations, the honourable member should appreciate that it is extremely important for Government officials—Government Ministers—to be associated with trade delegations to ensure a good reception within various countries. Earlier this morning I outlined the benefits of my recent trip to China.

As to incentives that may be paid to companies which invest in Queensland—we have basically followed the same policy that was initiated and adhered to by the Labor

Government when it was in office. They relate to some tax concessions and some other incentives which may be commercially sensitive but which have been arranged by my department—the very officers who were involved when Labor was in Government.

Shared Family Care

Mrs GAMIN: I direct a question to the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care. In June this year, the Minister announced a review of the current model of Shared Family Care service delivery to clients with a view to transferring the responsibility for the provision of these services to the non-Government sector. I ask: what is currently happening with this reform proposal?

Mr LINGARD: The Department of Families has continued to place great emphasis on the role of families and the support that we can give to families. As well as that, we have placed extra emphasis on early intervention with young people to see whether we can improve their family situation and support their family wherever possible. However, there is no doubt that there is an irretrievable breakdown with some families, and that is why we have also placed emphasis—emphasis to the tune of $12.4m—on the Shared Family Care Program, that is, the Foster Care Program. We have expanded and increased the amount of money that is paid to people who participate in the Foster Care Program.

However, I have also said that I will emphasise the Shared Family Care Program, that is, the program that is conducted by the community. I will now start four pilot programs—one in Cairns, one in Maryborough, one in Logan and one in Roma—which will assist in bringing community groups into supporting the Foster Care Program or the Shared Family Care Program. One of the most significant problems encountered is when police have to place young children in crisis care at night. I am asking that we have a special assessment program so that when these young people are brought into care we can ascertain whether they are high-support people, whether they have a disability, in order to try to place them as correctly as possible. That is what we will be doing with these special assessment programs. There will be four pilot programs and two special people. I will continue to emphasise the role of the family. However, where a breakdown occurs, I believe that we should support the Foster Care Program, which is now called Shared Family Care.

Scurr Report

Ms BLIGH: I direct a question to the Minister for Public Works and Housing. Now that the principal recommendations of his $400,000 Scurr inquiry have been rejected by his Cabinet colleagues, industry, the Commonwealth and every other State and Territory in this country, why doesn't the Minister just admit that he has bungled it again and shred his Government discussion paper—just like he shredded the original Scurr report—as a useless and expensive waste of time and taxpayers' money, or does the prospect of going down in history as Scurr's cur make the Minister go weak at the knees?

Mr CONNOR: I thank the member for the question. All I can suggest is that the member opposite talk to those in the industry. She may have listened to the Patrick Condren program this morning, on which the subcontractors' federation expressed in glowing terms how progressive and wonderful these proposals would be. The member may also like to talk to Allan Risk who, as she may recall, was the secretary of BISCOQ, the Building Industry Specialist Contractors Organisation, Queensland. There are 14 different subcontractor groups within that portfolio area, each of which signed off on the document that I tabled today. The member might also like to talk to Sid Marr from the Subcontractors Association, who also signed off on that document and who also supported all 99 recommendations. The member might also talk to Warwick Temby from the Housing Industry Association, who also signed off on that document and who worked through some of the more contentious parts of the subcontractors' inquiry, including insurance and the dispute resolution process. The member might also like to talk to Greg Quinn from the Master Builders Association, who also signed off on the document.

For the first time, the whole industry has united as one and has finally agreed on a position. That irks members opposite—it gets right up their noses—because they are irrelevant to the whole discussion and they are irrelevant to the whole dispute. We solved in eight months what they could not solve in six years.

Parliamentary Representation in Rural Queensland

Mr MITCHELL: I ask the Premier: can he confirm that if, by any chance, the Labor Party were elected in Queensland at some future State election—particularly under its current leadership—it would move to reduce

the level of parliamentary representation for rural Queenslanders?

Mr BORBIDGE: The people of country Queensland should be reminded that the policy of the Leader of the Opposition and the policy of the Labor Party opposite remains one vote, one value—not the recommendations arising out of the Fitzgerald commission of inquiry but a straight Labor Party policy that will disenfranchise the people of rural Queensland.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The time for questions has expired. I wish to remind all honourable members that the annual general meeting of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association will be held in this Chamber at 1 p.m. sharp today.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Minister for Public Works and Housing

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth) (11.30 a.m.): Today, I would like to talk about ministerial responsibility, ministerial credibility and ministerial accountability. For a Minister to do his or her job properly, he or she needs to act responsibly, be credible and be accountable for his or her actions. If a member cannot fulfil those criteria as a Minister, then that member should be sacked from the Cabinet.

One Minister who falls a long way short of meeting any of those criteria is the Minister for Public Works and Housing, Ray Connor. During recent weeks, we have seen the Minister stumble and bumble his way through three attempts at delivering his much-promised Scurr report; he misled the Parliament over the massive development plan for Roma Street; he embarrassed the Premier by missing a division on the Public Service Bill; and he cancelled, with only one day's notice, six major meetings that he had arranged with public housing tenants around Queensland so that many of the tenants still turned up for the meetings.

Mr Connor has also presided over the worst budget ever delivered to the public housing sector in Queensland. He agreed to $114m of Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement funds being returned to the Commonwealth. He cut land acquisition funds from $50m to $7.8m. He reduced maintenance and upgrading funds from $83.4m to $66m. He reduced the number of public housing starts from 2,200 to 1,175, with the funding for 874 of these homes coming from the previous year's budget.

This Minister has shown a lack of credibility, responsibility and accountability in the public housing arena. Today, I am going to highlight his inability to do his job in another area of his portfolio, that is, the information technology and telecommunications industry. Within three months of being sworn in, the Minister went on a world trip. To quote his words, "We were travelling around trying to look at the world's best practice in IT." While the Minister travelled the world, the Government sector of the industry back in Queensland fell apart.

The 4 October edition of *Computer World* states in relation to the Queensland Government—

> "Concerns about the I.T. policy vacuum and the sluggish pace at which a number of policy projects are proceeding, is providing a rising chorus of criticism both inside and outside Government."

The article goes on to quote Queensland information technology entrepreneur, Paul Phillips, who says—

> "We've been passed by Victoria, we're about to be passed by South Australia and if we don't get our act together, we'll be passed by Tasmania."

Confidential minutes dated 7 September 1996 from ATUG, a major industry group in the information technology and telecommunications industry, which I will table, show their concerns. The minutes state—

> "Three years ago, Queensland was the leading State for I.T and T in Australia. That is no longer the case."

The minutes also state that representations would be sought with the Premier of Queensland concerning the difficulty of telecommunications doing business with the Government.

A further memo from ATUG dated 1 October 1996 states that the Premier was unavailable and that the Premier's Department's choice to meet with them, Russell Cooper, was unacceptable, so they are now trying to arrange a meeting with Doug Slack. Honourable members will note that at no time did the Premier's office suggest that they meet with the responsible Minister, Mr Connor.

Supporting documents with these minutes show that Mr Bill Cowper of AAPT states—

> "It is difficult to know who to speak to within Government—you waste time and money speaking to departments, D.G.'s, Ministers etc who do not make decisions."

He also states that the inactivity of the Queensland Government is affecting their business. Steve Greenwood from Optus states—

> "The I.T and T industry lacks a political leader—no one knows enough or takes responsibility."

He also states that his company—

> ". . . have been investing time and energy addressing, presenting and talking to numerous people within Government—none of whom will take responsibility to pursue opportunities presented."

It is not only the industry that is concerned with the lack of action by Mr Connor, but also the Queensland Treasury. A letter dated 13 September 1996 from the Under Treasurer, Dr McTaggart, to the Director-General of the Department of Public Works and Housing states—

> "I am advised that, in June 1995, a request for proposals (RFP) was issued by the then Department of Administrative Services for a managed telephone service, including the sale of Government-owned PABXs.
>
> I now understand that, following a lengthy, exhaustive and rigorous assessment process, in which a preferred supplier was clearly identified, your department has decided not to proceed with the awarding of a contract.
>
> Treasury has a particular interest in this initiative, due to the expense incurred to date in the assessment process, the projected budget savings of approximately $200,000 from the sale of the equipment and the expected significant reduction in ongoing operating costs that a managed telephone service should be able to deliver."

The savings in ongoing operating costs amount to $500,000 per year. So the Minister's indecision has already cost the taxpayers $200,000, with the threat of a loss of ongoing savings of half a million dollars each year.

The last matter I wish to raise is a deliberate attempt by the Minister to mislead this Parliament by providing incorrect information to the Estimates committee. At the committee hearing, I asked a number of questions in relation to a contract for electronic trading. I asked Mr Col Clapper, the Acting Executive Director, Information and Procurement Services, the cost of the initial phase of the project. Mr Clapper stated that, in terms of the pilot project, around about $250,000 had been expended. Mr Connor interjected and said that it was entered into in January under the previous Government.

I will table the conclusion of my speech and the proposal by ISSC and Dialog which states that the cost of the implementation and planning exercise will be $430,000. At a briefing to the industry on the State Budget, the Minister announced to industry that this amount had already been committed and would be followed by a further $500,000. So, obviously, the answer to the question at the Estimates committee was misleading, and deliberately so. The answer by Mr Clapper in fact referred to a different contract with Dialog for a pilot project. The attempt to bring this contract into the answer was an attempt to cover up the inappropriateness of the Minister being involved in the tender process, a matter that I raised at the Estimates committee hearing. The information I have provided today quite clearly shows that the Minister for Public Works and Housing fails every test of accountability, credibility and responsibility and he should be sacked from the Cabinet.

In the time remaining, I would like to quote briefly from the Minister's report on his overseas trip, which he tabled today. Members may have seen in last Thursday's *Courier-Mail* a story about a public housing forum that was held at the City Hall where the public housing tenants in fact booed the Minister because he would not tell them anything. He said that he was unable to tell them anything in relation to the new agreement for the Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement because he did not know any of the information. In his report on his overseas trip, the Minister states that, on 18 September 1996, he took the opportunity to discuss the purpose of the Housing Minister's conference in Darwin, in particular the rationale behind the proposed new Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement, with the Housing Minister of Brunei. I am sure the Housing Minister of Brunei would be really interested in that! The Minister took the opportunity to tell the Housing Minister of Brunei, but last Thursday he was unable to tell the public housing tenants of Queensland what is in fact going on in relation to these changes. As I have said, the Minister is totally incompetent; he is unable to do his job. If the Premier had any guts, he would sack Mr Connor from the Ministry.

Rural Producers

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham) (11.40 a.m.): I take this opportunity to bring to

the notice of this House and the people of Queensland and Australia the plight of grain growers in Australia today. I ask members to consider a comparison between the cropping years of 1978 and 1996. With some exceptions—and there are always exceptions, because some farmers face frost and some face other problems—both years will prove to be good years in terms of yields of wheat. In 1978, many farmers made substantial money and reduced their debts. They purchased plant to upgrade worn equipment and generally pumped much-needed cash flow into rural areas.

As to the average price of wheat sold in 1978 across all grades—I refer to my electorate, because that is the easiest comparison for me to make. On average, across all grades, the price for wheat during 1978 was $123 a tonne. To put that in perspective—the most common tool for just about any farm is a Toyota LandCruiser ute. The cost of a LandCruiser ute in 1978 was $15,000. In other words, it took 122.95 tonnes of wheat to purchase that Toyota LandCruiser.

Mr Pearce: That is tax exempt.

Mr ELLIOTT: Yes, that is tax exempt. The average price of wheat today, calculated on the same basis, is $136.68 per tonne. That means that today it takes 292.65 tonnes of wheat to purchase a LandCruiser, which now costs $40,000. In other words, since 1978, the purchasing power of wheat farmers in Australia, including those in my electorate, has slipped in real terms by 138.02 per cent. Of course, the situation is worse for those farmers who live further west, because their freight charges are higher. I ask the public: is this fair? Is this what the public desires for that section of the community who probably work the longest hours and receive the least help from the Government? If so, then I suggest that they should hang their heads in shame.

I take this opportunity to commend the Speaker of this House for organising a conference in Brisbane about the future and the plight of rural Queensland. I note with great interest that one of the speakers at that conference will be the Anglican Archbishop of Queensland, the Reverend Peter Hollingworth. The Archbishop is one of those rare people who, over a long period, has been drawing to the attention of the public, through the press, the plight of rural people. They are the new poor and the not-so-new poor, unfortunately, because this situation has existed for a long time. During the wool boom in the 1950s, people on the land were given all the wrong connotations and all the wrong images by the press. A few people who made a lot of money were able to spend that money, but some of them spent it foolishly.

Mr Pearce: The smaller family-type operations are the ones that really suffer.

Mr ELLIOTT: Yes, the smaller family operations are certainly suffering. However, by the same token, the smaller operations that do not employ people will survive longer than those operations that are perhaps slightly bigger and have to employ labour. This has the most impact on those people who have the highest cost structure.

Quite frankly, it is a national disgrace to us all that we have treated our farmers in this way. Other countries of the world treat their farmers as though they were gold. They realise that they need their farmers to produce food for them. In Europe, where people have suffered starvation, there was the most horrendous rationing of food in World War II. Now they realise that farmers are a very necessary part of day-to-day life, regardless of where people live. It is absolutely essential that we ensure the future stability of the rural sector.

Most of the young people in rural areas are intelligent. Many of them have been very well educated. Because of disastrous prices and farmers' eroded purchasing power, those young people are sitting back and saying, "Hang on. Why should we sit out here? What is the point in all of this?" That is why the number of suicides in rural areas is so high. This point has been accentuated by the Archbishop. Quite frankly, it is just not good enough. We as a nation have to look at what other countries are doing. Because of our smaller population base, it is more difficult to put subsidies in place. As a farmer, the last thing I want is someone to subsidise me. I do not want to walk down the street and have people tell me, "We are subsidising you. The only reason you are in business is because we subsidise you." All that farmers want is a fair go. I ask members to consider the cost of fertiliser and how it has risen over the past five or six years.

Mr Fouras: Who do you blame for that?

Mr ELLIOTT: I blame the whole system. In America, the cost of fertiliser has not risen anything like it has here. The American system is much better served in terms of cost. Yet, despite the greater subsidies and the greater support that they receive, American farmers are not very successful. As many members would know, I spent five weeks on an environmental exchange program through the Fullbright scholarship scheme. During that

time, the nine Australians who were taken on that tour came to realise that, by and large, the farmers of America are not doing well, either. So we have to put our collective minds together to solve this problem. If not, young people in rural areas—regardless of what industry they are in—will continually say to themselves, "To hell with this. Why should we sit on a horse, covered in dust from a mob of sheep and covered in flies, and put in these long hours to receive no reward?" Would honourable members here do it?

Mr Fouras: What did you think of *Four Corners* the other day? That started it off.

Mr ELLIOTT: Indeed. We have to come to grips with the cost structures that are involved in rural pursuits today.

I could not believe that any Government—particularly a Government of our own persuasion—would even remotely consider dropping the diesel rebate scheme. The trouble with that scheme is that one has to pay the whole amount first, including the tax. I ask members to remember that that tax was instituted to pay for roads. It should never have been applied to railways or public authorities. That tax was supposed to go towards building roads. As such, we should revert to the scheme where one has a diesel certificate and one buys diesel for the price that it costs—not the tax-plus price that is supposed to pay for roads. It is a disgrace. It makes it look as if people are going cap in hand and receiving some sort of subsidy. It is not a subsidy, it is a tax supposedly to pay for roads.

Time expired.

Scurr Inquiry

Ms BLIGH (South Brisbane) (11.50 p.m.): I rise today to bring public attention to the bizarre and circuitous route that has brought the Government discussion paper on security of payment for subcontractors into the Parliament and to raise important questions about the value of that discussion paper to the people of Queensland. Firstly, it is important to understand that security of payment in the construction industry is a serious issue and one that warrants careful and intelligent consideration.

Unfortunately, no such consideration was given to it by some of the players in this latest bungle. The Scurr inquiry has been a bungle from start to finish. It was established by a Minister with dubious motives. It was conducted with scant regard for any of the normal standards associated with public inquiries funded at public expense. It was based on little or nothing by way of hard data, completed in a veil of secrecy and has finally resulted in woefully little by way of remedy for subcontractors.

As to the establishment of that inquiry—I understand that Mr Connor announced the inquiry before he was even sworn in as a Minister and without consultation with either the Premier or the Deputy Premier. This did little to get the show off to a good start and may well explain the lack of enthusiasm that these players had for the final product. I will return to the Minister's motives in a moment. Having announced the inquiry, the Minister then appointed Mr Arthur Scurr as chair. Mr Scurr, of course, is one of the good old boys, of whom this Government seems to have an endless supply. He has no experience or expertise to qualify him for the serious task of chairing a public inquiry, but he has had membership of that great institution, the Queensland Liberal Party, since 1955. While that should by no means disqualify him as a suitable candidate, the calibre of his final report and its humiliating fate demonstrates that it in no way qualified him for the challenge, either.

The selection process was allegedly left to Mr Scurr, but the Minister proudly announced to the Queensland Master Builders Association dinner that there were "no bureaucrats, no academics and no lawyers", indicating that he thought that that was a positive outcome. The comprehensive failure of the report and its amateur handling of the complex issues involved may have given the Minister some second thoughts about that brave boast.

It will come as no surprise to many that the sorry story of this whole misadventure starts in the same place as so many of this Government's sorry stories: the Mundingburra by-election campaign. As others involved will recall, an active force during that campaign was a group of subcontractors seeking improved remedies when faced with the bankruptcies of head contractors. One group active about this issue was a group called "The House That Goss Built Committee", which claimed to be a grassroots group of consumers, builders and subcontractors with no political affiliations formed to fight the existence and decisions of the Queensland Building Tribunal. I table for the information of the House a pamphlet advertising a public meeting of that group in Townsville. Honourable members will note that one of the members of that group is a Mr Sid Marr of

Yeppoon. The very same Mr Marr was appointed as a member of the Scurr inquiry committee by the Minister for Public Works. As we will see later, the only substantial recommendation of the original committee that has remained intact is a recommendation to abolish the Queensland Building Tribunal. Given that Mr Marr was paid $360 a day of taxpayers' money for every day the Scurr inquiry met, the public is entitled to ask a number of legitimate questions, including: what is the Minister's relationship with Mr Marr? On what basis was Mr Marr appointed to the committee? What commitments, if any, were made by the Minister to Mr Marr? Were any of those commitments made in return for his involvement in organising anti-Goss Government activities in Mundingburra during January 1996? It is interesting, as always, to note that pre-Mundingburra deals of this Government seem to be delivered on time and time again while other commitments wait in the wings for attention.

I turn now to the conduct of the inquiry. In many respects, the conduct of the inquiry reflects the fact that the chair was clearly not up to the task. There are many unusual, even bizarre, features of the Scurr inquiry, but chief among them are these: neither the report nor its recommendations in their original form make even the slightest pretence of analysis of data or facts about the industry or the size, cost or nature of the problems that it sought to redress. If any research was undertaken by the research officer attached to the inquiry or information provided in submissions from industry and other stakeholders, Mr Scurr did not let either get in the way of homespun truth and good old fireside advice. The tone and calibre of Scurr's original report as released by the shadow Minister for Public Works and Housing, Mr Mackenroth, are an absolute disgrace. It lacks professionalism; it lacks substance; it lacks purpose; and it is completely bereft of any guiding principles. It stands in stark contrast to the NSW Government's recently released Green Paper on Security of Payments and the Price Waterhouse report compiled for the National Public Works Council in 1996. Both of those documents are clear, concise and professional and serve as timely reminders of the importance of merit in the selection process.

Submissions to the inquiry were not placed on the public record as is normal for most public inquiries, especially those which purport to be striving for a consensus. Some submissions were even kept from other commissioners. In particular, Mr Scurr kept the submission from the Department of Public Works and Housing secret from the other commissioners. It is still not a public document, although I understand it bears a remarkable similarity to Mr Scurr's report. After four months of hearings and one week of discussions, the terms of the seven commissioners expired on 31 July 1996. Mr Scurr spent two months writing the report with no consultation with other commissioners. I understand that Mr Scurr actually refused to give other members a copy of the draft report and had to be ordered by the Minister to provide it. Other commissioners received a copy on 23 September 1996 and realised that Mr Scurr had included significant proposals, some of which had been canvassed and rejected or, in some cases, had not even been canvassed by the committee. It is reasonable to question the role of the seven other commissioners if Mr Scurr was intent on paying little or no attention to their views.

Three of the major players, the Housing Industry Association, the Master Builders Association and the Property Council of Australia, were so alarmed by this version of the report that they went straight to the Premier seeking his intervention to stop the madness. Cabinet, concerned by the obvious lack of consensus, refused to endorse the report when it was submitted to Cabinet on 30 September 1996. However, hundreds of copies of that report had already been printed so the Minister, humiliated again, has had to have them pulped.

Now we move into the truly surreal: the Minister was asked by Cabinet to return in two weeks with a report which represents a consensus. Unbelievable as it seems, Cabinet sent the member for Nerang away for two weeks to personally achieve what the Scurr inquiry had failed to do, despite all the time and resources at its disposal. Although he was earning $1,000 a day and had six months, a budget of $300,000, the assistance of seven commissioners—many of whom had significant industry knowledge and experience—one administrative officer and one research officer, Mr Scurr struggled with the task. I understand that he requested that further consultants be engaged to assist him write the report and that he be given an extension of time. The Minister must have had at least one moment of blinding good sense because those requests were, thankfully, denied.

Meanwhile, while all those high jinks were being played out in Queensland, the National Public Works Council was working towards a uniform, national response to the security of payments problem. At a ministerial council

meeting in Adelaide on Friday 18 October, a sensible, well-researched and professional approach was drafted for consideration and endorsement of all States and the Commonwealth. But could the ministerial council go ahead with that laudable intention? No! It was stopped in its tracks by none other than the Queensland Minister, Mr Connor, who cancelled his attendance at the last minute because he had to have a knee operation. In spite of all the problems he has faced on this issue and in spite of his clear ministerial responsibility to represent Queensland in national forums, he scheduled elective surgery in an absolutely transparent attempt to back up his implausible excuse for missing a division in this Parliament. Not content with bungling this issue in Queensland, the Minister has now made sure that a national response has been delayed for at least another six weeks. However, he will not be able to meet that deadline because he has allowed 60 days for consultation on his document.

Now, at the end of this high farce or, more appropriately, this tragic comedy, what do the taxpayers of this State have to show for the $400,000 or more taken from the Housing Trust Fund to pay for this disaster? They have that sorry and pathetic little report. The final report of the Scurr inquiry will never be released. Instead, we have the "Connor report" which predictably contains nothing new or innovative. It is a report which is a pale imitation of the national proposals and brings no solutions to the debate. Contrary to the Minister's claims in this House this morning about that report bringing Queensland to the forefront of dealing with this problem, it contains not a single recommendation that is not part of the national proposals designed by the national ministerial council, not a single proposal that is not currently in place in the New South Wales construction industry, and not a single proposal that was not part of the Price Waterhouse report prepared earlier this year. In the "Connor report", the only surviving recommendation of any significance from the ill-fated considerations of Arthur Scurr is the recommendation to abolish the Queensland Building Tribunal and to replace it with a mickey mouse dispute resolution body. While I do not have the time here to comment thoroughly on those mechanisms, I predict that even those proposals will not survive. They will engender more controversy for this accident-prone Minister. As currently drafted, they appear to restrict existing legal entitlements, lack adequate appeal mechanisms and are likely to prove unworkable.

I remind the House that, when the Opposition first exposed the cost of that inquiry, Mr Scurr feigned horror at receiving $1,000 a day for his services. He should be ashamed of his involvement in this whole sorry affair. He should return the money to the taxpayers of Queensland.

Time expired.

Queensland Police Service North Queensland Campus

Mr TANTI (Mundingburra) (12 noon): On Tuesday, 22 October, a great event took place in the Townsville region: the north Queensland campus of the Queensland Police Service was opened. The Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister for Racing, the Honourable Russell Cooper, had the very great pleasure to do the honours that day.

As one policeman put it, there were more pips at the ceremony than in any glass of freshly squeezed orange juice that he had seen in his lifetime. He was referring to the large number of Police Service management who attended the opening. Also attending the opening were a large number of local politicians and invited guests, including Police Commissioner O'Sullivan, Federal parliamentarians De-Anne Kelly and Peter Lindsay, State Government members Mark Stoneman, Rob Mitchell and I, Councillor Ann Bunnell, who represented Townsville Mayor Mr Mooney, and the honourable Bill Carter, the Chair of the Police Education Advisory Committee. Yes, the knockers were there as well—the shadow Minister for Police, Tom Barton, the member for Thuringowa, Ken McElligott, and the member for Townsville, Geoff Smith.

Police Minister Russell Cooper said that the most important people at the opening were the recruits. I would now like to outline to members what a young female recruit had to say in relation to her selection to this new academy. That recruit, Jacki Zohn, said—

> "For the past six years I have wanted to become a police officer. Last week I moved a step closer to realising my dream when I began training at the Queensland Police Service Academy North Queensland Campus.
>
> I've been here a week, but I think it's a wonderful opportunity. I'm glad to be part of history for Queensland and the Queensland Police Service. As a wife of a

police officer, I had some idea of what to expect from the service."

The former Credit Union manager said that her people skills would prove to be of most benefit in her new career. She stated further—

"I was dealing with the public in the banking industry and I see the communications process as being similar in the Police Service."

That statement shows why this academy will succeed.

Another statement came from Mr Mal Missingham, President of the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, who said—

"Police Minister Russell Cooper has been applauded for 'sticking his neck out' to establish a Townsville campus of the police academy."

Mr Missingham went on to state—

"I want to acknowledge Mr Cooper's efforts to champion the cause of north Queensland against strong opposition from his own bureaucrats. There was considerable opposition to the concept, particularly within the established bureaucracy and the Police Service. The main argument against its establishment was that it was going to create a split in the training credentials of Queensland police and that a north-versus-south attitude would develop.

I am not greatly concerned to hear the Townsville campus was a three-year trial. Any Government activity such as this should be reviewed to ensure that it is the right decision and that it is working."

Mr Missingham concluded by saying that he had received very positive feedback on the move and hoped that it proved to be a successful concept.

However, I will now tell members how the negative shadow Minister, Tom Barton, saw the academy. He accused the Minister of fudging his election promise and stated—

"My understanding of the election promise was that it was for a permanent academy in Townsville. This makes for a very expensive trial."

I will now outline some of the very important details of the Minister's speech. The Minister stated—

"Specifically, I am delighted that today we deliver on a very particular coalition policy promise. For all those who treat with cynicism the promises made by politicians in the run-up to elections, let me say that delivering on the promise to put a police academy in the north has been an interesting exercise to say the least. No longer, it seems, does it count for much that Oppositions have policies or that they should feel duty bound to act on those policies.

I say this because what seemed a simple, straightforward promise to open this academy became the source of strong representations from a number of quarters that I should not deliver on this promise. It was put to me that training recruits in Townsville could create a north Queensland culture in the Queensland Police Service; that I was risking a scenario of setting north against south; that there were misgivings in the Service itself about our establishment of this facility.

It was further put to me that there might not be sufficient interest from potential recruits in the north; that it would strain resources unnecessarily."

I point out to members that some 1,140 people applied for the first 40 places at the academy. Police Minister Cooper stated further—

"The fact that it was a promise that I made in Opposition and that it was a crucial component in our central policing promise—to increase the numbers of police serving a rapidly rising population—did not seem to matter to critics of this proposed facility. I know that in this audience here today, I don't need to convince you that I was somewhat unimpressed with the underlying conviction that seemed to be driving all these concerns, namely that all wisdom in Queensland resides in the south-east corner of the State. The coalition Government promised to turn that situation around, and while it takes time to implement all your policy, we are already able to point to significant improvement in service delivery to the bush and to regional centres such as Townsville.

There is a serious flaw, in my opinion, in the thinking that drove many of the arguments put to me about this academy, including from my learned friends at the Criminal Justice Commission. That flaw is to assume that centralising everything in Brisbane inevitably delivers not just the economic rationalism that seems to senselessly dictate far too much of recent public policy but also the best outcomes in terms of service delivery.

> Not only do I not share conventional wisdom that cost cutting by centralising everything is absolutely necessary I also question the quality of the end product, that is the delivery of service, when we have all decision making or, in this case, all training, emanating from one tiny part of a big, decentralised State such as ours."

Police Minister Cooper stated further—

> "We can only deliver sensible policy and sensible Government when we are in touch with the grassroots community and in touch with their needs. With all due respect to those critics of this establishment, I am convinced that not only will this facility add significantly to the overall police presence in our north Queensland communities but if it does bring geographically specific influences to bear then, in my opinion, that is a damned good thing. We are a disparate group, we Queenslanders, and all have qualities that can contribute as well as often quite different needs.
>
> The Queensland Police Service should and does and will continue to aspire to a central ideal of serving the community. But it can only strengthen the service to have a significant input of the ethos of regions other than the south-east. We have set aside $3.5m to establish and run this facility in this financial year with an allocation of $2m for the following two years. The three years will essentially be a trial period while we establish definitively the need and interest in the facility as a recruit training establishment and we will make a final decision as to whether to continue with that program at the end of the trial period. Whatever the outcome, we will retain the facility for advanced training for serving police who are currently missing out because of the centralised nature of current programs. It has long been argued that it would be a better use of resources—and less discriminatory against police serving outside the south-east corner—to have a permanent in-service training facility located in the north."

Police Minister Cooper stated further—

> "This venue will answer that call and will continue to serve that purpose on a permanent basis. But last week, we opened the doors to the 40 young recruits you see here today. They are embarking on a six-and-a-half months' course which will provide identical content to that offered by the Oxley academy in Brisbane. It will cover all the basic elements of police training—law, police skills, communication, behavioural studies, sociology, autonomous learning and decision making. Next May, another 40 recruits will come through the doors. They will join 380 recruits, including 60 ex-police, fondly known as retreads, entering the Queensland Police Service by the end of next May.
>
> The total intake will provide the foundation for the coalition's Police Staffing Plan, for which we have set aside an additional $76m over the next three years. Under that plan, we will provide an extra 800 police and more than 400 extra civilian staff by August 1999 as we advance towards our promise of providing more than 2,700 more police by the year 2005, which will give Queensland 1,360 police more than the Opposition promised to deal with the dramatic explosion in our population."

Police Minister Cooper stated further—

> "I would like to take a little time addressing our new recruits directly. I do so as representative of the community which you have chosen to serve in one of the most demanding, challenging and difficult areas of public service. I take it as a sign of particular calibre that you as the next generation have elected to be part of the process of re-establishing policing to the position of public respect it should and must have if we are to deal effectively with the problems of crime in our modern communities."

Reclaim the Night

Mrs ROSE: (Currumbin) (12.10 p.m.): This morning I presented to the Premier a list of demands which were handed to me at the Reclaim the Night rally, held at Cavill Mall last Friday night, 25 October.

Mr J. H. Sullivan: Why wasn't he there?

Mrs ROSE: Yes. I was the only State member of Parliament at that rally. That list of demands states—

> "1. We demand that all political parties adopt pro-active policies to ensure women are pre-selected as political candidates. We believe that when women have achieved full representation in parliament, that is, 51%, the following demands will be met.

2. We demand the right to live our lives without the fear of sexual violence, at home, on the streets, in our schools, in our community, and at work.

3. We demand that the Queensland government review the penalties for sexual offences making the penalty the same regardless of the gender of the victim and that survivors of sexual and domestic violence be awarded just criminal compensation.

4. We demand that the government commence a Queensland wide consultative process with women so as to appropriately write us into the *Queensland Criminal Code*.

5. We demand that rape and incest crisis services remain community-based run by women for women and children.

6. We demand increased funding for existing services, and new funding for rural women's access and a 24 hour Statewide women's crisis line.

7. We demand that funding be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds who are survivors of gender based violence to access support which is culturally sensitive and appropriate.

8. We demand that the Queensland abortion laws be repealed and that free safe abortion on demand be made available to all Queensland women.

9. We demand that the 1992 Prostitution Law Amendment Bill which has directly contributed to the increase of violence against sex workers be scrapped and that government adopt the relevant CJC recommendations of September 1991.

10. We demand that the Queensland government fund a drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation centre for women and their children which takes into account the impact of sexual violence on substance use."

Reclaim the Night is an annual event consisting of marches and rallies around our State, our nation and our world, at which women, children and men gather to protest against the level of sexual violence perpetuated on women. I am pleased to report to this House that in the years that I have been attending this march an ever-increasing number of people attend to voice opposition to sexual violence.

Reclaim the Night began in Birmingham in 1977 after a series of violent attacks on women by men. The police warned women to stay off the streets in order to keep safe. The women were outraged that the only way that they could be protected was to be locked in their homes, so they gathered in the streets in defiance of and protest against male violence and that style of male protection. The next year a public demonstration was held in San Francisco to commemorate the Birmingham events, and it has gradually become an international event known globally as Reclaim the Night.

The event is named Reclaim the Night to express the symbolic act of walking, talking and gathering together to celebrate a collective strength and safety which women do not feel when walking alone on any other night. It also symbolises a rejection of existing beliefs that women should not walk alone at night and that women should be careful of what they wear and of whom they speak to. It is a time when women can publicly demonstrate, celebrate and demand their right to be free from men's violence.

The main theme of this year's march and rally was sexual violence against women and that every act of rape is an act of violence. It is not only a violent but also a humiliating experience for women. Studies have shown that one in 10 women will be raped at some time in their lives. This is a damning figure which should indicate the problem which is facing our community.

There are many myths about rape and these myths are used to disguise how widespread rape is and to shift responsibility away from the rapist. Some of the myths include: women ask for, enjoy or deserve to be raped; only certain types of women get raped; rapists are not normal men—they are sick or cannot control their sexual urges; women who act or dress in certain ways are asking to be raped; rape is acceptable in some cultures; and most women are raped by strangers at night and in dark, deserted public places.

Women do not enjoy being raped, nor do they deserve to be raped. Most rapists are not psychopaths but are generally men who simply have a low regard for women. Rape is not an impulsive sexual act by a man who cannot help himself, it is an act of aggression and power-seeking. No woman ever asked to be raped and does not provoke a man by the way she dresses. To be raped is not a sexual experience. The myth that women are raped at night and in deserted public places is way off the mark. Around 75 per cent of victims

know their rapist and most rapes occur within the home where women are raped by their husbands, lovers, fathers and friends.

The Sexual Assault Support Service has been operating on the Gold Coast since 1990. It provides counselling, support and information to women who have been raped and/or sexually assaulted at any time in their lives, as well as raises community awareness about rape and sexual abuse. The figures for the number of people who have contacted the service are deeply disturbing. Some 7,169 contacts were made with the service during the 1995-96 year, which is a 19 per cent increase on the previous year. Funding and resources are stretched to the limit and yet the demands on the service continue to grow. Of the 741 new clients who accessed the service for the first time for counselling and/or support, 20 per cent were in the 15 to 20 age group, 35 per cent were in the 20 to 30 age group, 26 per cent were in the 30 to 40 age group, 12 per cent were in the 40 to 50 age group and 7 per cent were in the 50 plus group.

The trauma of rape or sexual assault can affect a person for the rest of their life, and this is reflected in the Sexual Assault Support Service's data, which has revealed that 32 per cent of victims who contacted the service for counselling were assaulted between 10 and 20 years ago, 10 per cent were assaulted between 20 to 30 years ago and 7 per cent were assaulted over 30 years ago. The social stigma attached to rape is therefore still strong. Experts believe that many thousands of rapes are committed without ever being reported. As a community, we must initiate action to ensure that this sorry fact does not continue.

Many raped women are the victims of incest and the Sexual Assault Support Service has initiated a number of rape and incest survivors therapeutic groups which have proved to be very successful, with positive feedback from participants. Domestic violence is the most common form of assault in our society, with one in three women experiencing some kind of domestic violence at some time in their life. Domestic violence does not always involve physical abuse and can take the form of emotional, sexual, financial and/or social abuse.

Whilst there is a greater awareness and understanding in the community about domestic violence, there is still a long way to go in educating people that all levels of violence against women will not be tolerated. Members on this side of the House recognised that more needed to be done to protect people from violence initiated by their spouses. In its first term in Government, the Labor Party moved to strengthen protection orders legislation, dramatically increasing funding for rape and other domestic violence counselling. The success of protection orders in keeping women and their children safe is mirrored in the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care figures which show that from May 1992 to June this year over 23,000 applications were made for protection orders in this State. That represents 23,000 Queenslanders who fear for their own or someone else's safety. It is 23,000 reasons why, as a Parliament, we must look at further measures to make sure that violence against women is reduced. The sheer weight of numbers suggests that this is a major problem that will take bipartisan action to overcome.

When one looks at these figures, the violence which has forced these people to seek protection orders becomes evident. For instance, of the 23,000 people who applied for protection orders, 15 per cent have been threatened or have had a weapon used against them, while 42 per cent of aggrieved spouses asked for their children to be protected on an order. However, even with the issuing of domestic violence orders, some women have not escaped domestic violence. Breaches of orders have seen sometimes tragic results and further heartache. More needs to be done to ensure that domestic violence orders are adhered to.

Women from all sections of the community, from every age group, every income and educational level, and every religious and cultural background have been the target of abuse where a partner has used violent and intimidating behaviour to control and dominate them. The demands on the Gold Coast domestic violence service continue to grow. Over the last 12 years, 4,001 crisis contacts have provided counselling and support to 1,575 people. With the Gold Coast recording one of the fastest growing populations in the nation, further consideration must be given by the Government to increasing domestic violence service delivery to keep pace with the expected increase in clients. No-one has the right to use violence to control another person.

Time expired.

Forestry Management; Port Hinchinbrook Development

Mr STONEMAN (Burdekin) (12.20 p.m.): Today I wish to raise a couple of

issues in the debate on Matters of Public Interest. Firstly, I wish to refer to a luncheon I hosted in Cairns yesterday which was attended by His Excellency Minister Djamaludin, the Indonesian Minister for Forestry. In attendance with the Minister and his wife was the Indonesian Consul General for Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia, the Honourable Widjaja Sugarda. Along with 30 people involved in the timber industry, the group was in Cairns as part of a four city, five day Australian trip looking at a number of timber-related issues. Some of the contacts made and comments raised at the luncheon and subsequent inspections are worth raising in this House, because they concern the way in which we should focus trade and contacts at the commercial and cultural levels in Queensland particularly.

The investigatory delegation recognises Queensland's attributes, particularly in respect of timber management, and those areas for which we have something of a reputation. There have been moments in our history when we have gone overboard, particularly in some of the World Heritage areas, resulting in tragedies in commercial and personal terms. The delegation came to learn about our initiatives in environmental management, our quite extensive research and the way in which conservation is being approached in Queensland. Queensland can be extremely proud of the way in which conservation has seen the sustainable use of many of our natural forests over the years.

I draw to the attention of members the fact that incorporated into the World Heritage declared area was a part of the Ravenshoe district that I had inspected on a couple of occasions and which had been logged four times this century. For that area to be seen as worthy of inclusion in a World Heritage area either makes a mockery of the process or is an enormous plus for the management techniques that have been in place in this State over many decades.

The delegation was extremely interested also in education and looking at joint ventures in high value, sustainable yield timber projects—something in which we are going to become increasingly involved as a State. The delegation was also looking at commercial planning techniques and management—which, of course, is becoming more and more of a focus in the Wet Tropics area of north Queensland. Over the next couple of weeks, I will be looking at some of those initiatives in the Daintree area.

Also attending the luncheon yesterday, and sitting at the table at which I was sitting, was the Director of the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Management, Professor Nigel Stork, who has a lot of international experience. He works at the Cairns campus of the James Cook University. Again, it was interesting to note the two-way exchange of experiences. The Indonesian Minister has a particular interest in Indonesia's Kutai National Park and in the way in which that protected area is being managed. The Government, as the managing agency, and private enterprise, which is a supporter of management and utilises the resource in a sustainable way, are being brought together. It was very worth while to hear of the way in which that exchange is taking place.

As a part of the delegation's experiences in far-north Queensland, they undertook a trip on the Skyrail. Before travelling to Brisbane, I was fortunate enough to have the time to join them and the owner/operator, Mr George Chapman. Skyrail is a family-owned operation. Mr Chapman and his son, Ken, are switched on not only with respect to the enormous project that they have instituted but also to the need for constant management of such fragile areas. The Skyrail is a prime example of combining technology, sensitive development and ecotourism in a way which benefits the whole community. Skyrail provides opportunities for education, tourism and conservation.

I do not know how many honourable members have had the opportunity to travel on the Skyrail. On that ride, I sat alongside the Indonesian Minister and Mr Chapman, and I had the benefit of their enormous knowledge of forests and the flora and fauna to be found within them. In travelling above the treetops and looking down into areas at which no-one has been able to look before, one comes to appreciate how new technology allows people to gain a greater understanding of forests. This understanding is able to be achieved not only by observing the forests but also by visiting the interpretive centres that are located at the stops along the way. The interpretive centres were developed in very close consultation between the Chapman family and the CSIRO. The centres are a tribute to both groups, as they provide information very clearly and in concise and relatively simple terms using technologically advanced methods of interpretation. It was very interesting to watch the reactions of people from another land to those centres. That

experience emphasises the potential benefits of other ecotourism projects and highlights the commercial, tourism, educative and ecotourism benefits that I believe the Port Hinchinbrook development has the capacity to bring to north Queensland and far-north Queensland. This is an issue of great controversy. The area has been accessed by only a few people. I often drive up and down the coast of that part of Queensland. Greater access, interpretation and understanding of the area by the general public is needed. This is important so that in future people can make balanced judgments in respect of sustainable development and ecotourism. Through such developments, greater numbers of people are able to experience areas that would otherwise have been locked away. I believe that development has the capacity to become a jewel in an area which has a capacity to provide multiple benefits.

In the first instance, the neighbours of the project, the people of the Shire of Cardwell, will benefit, as will the region generally. Tourists who travel the coast of Queensland by car will benefit enormously. In addition, the development will provide another stepping stone for those people travelling to the area via international or interstate flights. The emotional debate which has surrounded that project and other projects has had a negative impact. From time to time, people have even attempted to place a negative spin on the development of the Korea Zinc project near Townsville. Suggestions that it is being built in sensitive wetlands and that all sorts of acids will permeate the bay area—all of those sorts of things—are based on emotion and have nothing to do with the reality that benefits will flow not only to the commercial operators but also to the community as a whole. Such developments not only provide jobs and economic stability but also allow access into sensitive areas that would otherwise have been inaccessible.

By their opposition, the opponents of such developments are denying the educational process that leads to understanding. They are denying people the capacity to make a balanced and better judgment in their deliberations as members of a caring community when trying to provide for future generations in an economic sense while at the same time trying to sustain that which we all hold near and dear.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Laming): Order! The time allotted to the debate on Matters of Public Interest has expired.

WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY ACT

Disallowance of Statutory Instrument

Hon. P. J. BRADDY (Kedron) (12.30 p.m.): I move—

> "That the Workplace Health and Safety Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 1996 made under the Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995, tabled in this House on 9 July 1996, to the extent that it inserts the following provisions in the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 1995, be disallowed—
>
> part 15, division 2, heading, 'other than construction work'
>
> section 74, 'other than construction work'
>
> section 75(1)
>
> section 75(2)(a), 'or'."

This is a serious matter in that it involves the health and safety—indeed, the lives—of people involved in this industry, who work in situations which are dangerous and who use technology which is dangerous. It is therefore a matter which all parties, both in the Parliament and in the department, should take very seriously.

I believe that the seriousness of the problem is well outlined in a letter of 21 August 1996 to Mr Hodges, the Director of the Division of Workplace Health and Safety, from Mr Henricks, the secretary of the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union, Electrical Division, Queensland and Northern Territory Branch. Amongst other things, Mr Henricks says the following—

> "I wish to advise that we are extremely concerned about changes that have been made to the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations in relation to the testing and tagging of portable and semi-portable electrical equipment (including extension leads). Complaints regarding the new Standard have been received by us from our members and our State Council believes that the new Standards will lead to an increase in electrocutions.
>
> The new Regulations pertaining to electrical testing and tagging have been changed so that testing and tagging of portable and semi-portable electrical equipment is no longer required if the equipment is connected to earth leakage protection.
>
> It is my understanding that it has been suggested by representatives from your Division that earth leakage protection

offers better protection against electrocution than testing and tagging because electrical equipment can be damaged shortly after testing and tagging. We do not believe that this is a realistic comparison. We believe that the changes to the Regulation that have been introduced regarding the testing and tagging will in fact result in testing and tagging no longer being carried out. Whilst the Standard may say otherwise, we can not depend on your Division to enforce the Standard because you do not have the resources to do this.

The real question that we are faced with is whether portable and semi-portable electrical equipment that is from time to time used in conjunction with earth leakage circuit breakers is safer than regularly tested and tagged equipment. We believe that this is not the case.

We are extremely concerned about these changes because we are dealing with a hazard that has the potential to lead to the death of workers. In relation to earth leakage circuit breakers I wish to advise:

- earth leakage circuit breakers are mechanical switches which can fail;
- earth leakage circuit breakers do not prevent shock; they prevent death in most instances, provided the equipment is functioning correctly. Electric shock can lead to other injuries, e.g. it may cause a worker to fall from a ladder or scaffold etc.

In addition to this it is our understanding that:

- electricians who specialise in testing and tagging repair numerous dangerous electrical appliances and leads. If testing and tagging ceases these appliances and leads will remain in use;
- installation and maintenance workers often go from job to job. Some workplaces will have earth leakage protection, others will not.

The QLD Standard prior to the alterations that were introduced was in line with the National Standard. The new provisions are inferior to the National Standard.

We believe that earth leakage circuit breakers should be used as an additional control measure to gain a reduction in the rate of electrocutions, not as a substitute for other control measures. There are many employers who at present do both. These employers are likely to stop testing and tagging and become entirely reliant on earth leakage circuit breakers."

The secretary of the relevant union makes some very pertinent points. It is in line with those pertinent points that we in the Opposition, out of concern for the workers and the citizens of Queensland, have moved this motion, which in effect says, "Let's do both." That is what the department and the Minister's office and others have been saying: "Well, a lot of people will continue to do both, and you can basically rely on that." The Minister has allowed these regulations to be changed. The changes do not have the full support of the industry—and I will deal with that further later on—or the union.

The best result would be this: we are aware that a full review of workplace health and safety is to be undertaken. I believe that it should have started earlier than this. However, as often occurs with this Government, reviews are undertaken too late, they take too long and they do not get on with the job, and we await results. Nevertheless, we have been promised this review, and I am sure that at some stage the review will get under way properly and we will see a result. What we have in the meantime in the industry is a situation in which the best people will do both: they will continue to inspect regularly—and testing and tagging is only appropriate if the inspection is undertaken; it is the inspection which is of primary importance—and they will install safety switches. But as the union says in its letter, one does not get a perfect result from safety switches alone, because the danger is shown only if a shock occurs. It is not a major shock—it will not cause death by electrocution—but it may well be that a person on a ladder will be thrown from the ladder. That is what has to be understood: the safety switches, even those which do not fail—even those which work—can bring about a situation in which a person is injured. Pending the full review of workplace health and safety, we believe the best course would be to have inspections continue as a mandatory measure—and obviously tagging is appropriate after a test—and also to require safety switches. There should be a combination of the two.

It is interesting to note that on 11 September 1996 Mr Hodges replied to a

similar letter as that which the union wrote to him, but this time it was from the Electrical Contractors Association of Queensland. In that letter, Mr Hodges said the following, amongst other things—

> "Prior to the Division supporting this change expert advice that was provided to us, including that of SEQEB, indicated that these devices offer a considerably higher standard of safety than testing and tagging. In addition, they provide ongoing protection irrespective of otherwise unsafe equipment which may be used on the circuit.
>
> The objective of the change is to ensure that all workplaces have earth leakage protection, but the removal of mandatory testing and tagging does not prevent employers or electricians from maintaining and repairing portable electrical equipment as required by the Advisory Standard for Plant."

Of course it does not prevent employers or electricians from doing so, but it does not require them to do so prior to the full review of workplace health and safety.

The union has given an example of how events can lead to injury despite the switches being in place. Until the whole industry has come together and held a full review, I do not believe it is good enough just to hold out a pious hope and say, "It doesn't prevent employers or electricians from behaving in this safe manner." Until the full review is conducted, I believe it is appropriate that we have both conditions in place. Indeed, the Minister's departmental officer virtually says the same thing in that he believes that it would be good business—a sensible method of operation—to maintain the testing and tagging, but he departs on the question of whether it should be mandatory or not.

In that same letter, Mr Hodges goes on to say—

> "But if such additional measures are identified in the forthcoming review it will be necessary to determine whether they should be mandatory and included in subordinate legislation."

I believe that they should be mandatory. In the absence of an explanation to defeat what I have said about the injuries that may occur, they certainly should continue for the time being.

On 18 October, the electrical contractors also wrote to the Minister, stating that they are still not satisfied with what they are hearing from the department's Division of Workplace Health and Safety, and they sent him a copy of the letter by facsimile. In that letter, amongst other things, they state—

> "While the Electrical Contractors Association is welcoming the announcement that these provisions will be placed as a priority for reviewing. The Association is of the view that immediate changes introducing mandatory maintenance of portable electrical equipment are urgently required. The current provisions we believe are unsafe, and promote the opportunity for electrical accidents to occur and to delay changes would be negligent."

The letter continues—

> "The Association would seek a meeting with you as a matter of urgency, to discuss our concerns in greater detail and provide a complete brief on the issues and safety hazards the current provisions provide. At this time, I have had the opportunity to discuss this subject and the possibility of a meeting, with a number of the key parties."

The general manager, Richard Cox, wrote this letter, and he goes on to say—

> "It is important to highlight that the changes that occurred are significant, and that the opportunity to comment on the current provisions was not afforded to the parties, which I believe is somewhat contradictory to the advice you may have received on this matter."

The general manager of the Electrical Contractors Association of Queensland is saying that the Minister may not have been properly advised and that there has not been sufficient discussion and consideration, and he has asked the Minister for an urgent meeting. I am advised that, as of yesterday, the Minister had not arranged such a meeting and that no such meeting has occurred. I again point out that this regulation deals not only with the health of people but also people's lives. This is a very important matter and for the Minister to not meet with these people is a serious matter. I call on the Minister to explain in his reply why he has not met with the electrical contractors to discuss their concerns. On 20 August, the secretary of the ACTU wrote a letter expressing similar concerns to the letter from the secretary of the Communications Electrical Plumbing Union, Mr Henricks.

This is a matter of serious concern. I believe that what the Opposition proposes is more appropriate than the Government's

proposal. We should not rely on people to do the right thing automatically. Presently, inspections should continue, that is, the testing and tagging, and circuit breakers, that is, safety switches, should be introduced. That would be a more appropriate way to proceed, particularly in the absence of confidence of the industry and its workers that they will be safe under the regime that the Minister and his department are proposing.

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee) (12.45 p.m.): I second the motion moved by the member for Kedron. The Electrical Equipment and Installations Regulation was recently amended to provide as follows: with respect to workplaces other than construction sites, electrical equipment can either be protected by an approved electrical safety switch or subject to regular testing and tagging in accordance with the Australian Standard; with respect to portable electrical equipment, it must either be protected by an approved electrical safety switch or be double insulated; and with respect to construction sites, the only requirement is that all electrical subcircuits be protected by an approved electrical safety switch.

Prior to this, all electrical equipment in all workplaces was required to be regularly tested and tagged by an appropriately qualified electrical worker. If one was to choose the best outcome for workers, the choice would be to provide both forms of protection, that is, electrical safety switches and the testing and tagging regime that existed under the old regulation. That is what the Opposition's disallowance motion would achieve, if it is supported by the Parliament.

It should not be too difficult for the Parliament to support this approach, as the Minister's own Department, through the Division of Workplace Health and Safety, has clearly indicated in correspondence that—

> "The objective of the change is to ensure that all workplaces have earth leakage protection . . ."

The most desirous outcome to the issue before the House, however, would have been for the Minister to withdraw the current regulation and allow the current review of the regulation to take its course and come up with appropriate recommendations. This would allow for a proper assessment of the impact of any changes, something which so far has not been undertaken.

The principal motivation behind the Opposition's position on this matter revolves around the issue of electrical safety. However, we also have significant concerns about the lack of consultation on the proposed regulation and also the Government's apparent intransigence in the light of major concerns expressed by some major players in the electrical industry. In that regard, I wish to quote some comments from organisations that made submissions during the consultation process. Firstly, in a letter to the Minister, the Electrical Contractors Association of Queensland states—

> "The Association cannot express its concern too strongly at the potential safety hazards this legislation poses to workers. Of greater concern to the Association is the absolute lack of consultation adopted by the Division of Workplace Health and Safety with regards the redrafted regulations."

Secondly, I quote from a letter from the ACTU to the Director of the Division of Workplace Health and Safety—

> "I wish to advise that we are extremely concerned about changes that have been made to the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations in relation to the testing and tagging of portable and semi-portable electrical equipment (including extension leads). Complaints regarding the new Standard have been received by us from both unions and employers."

Similar concerns were expressed in other correspondence which has been outlined by the member for Kedron. On 18 October, the Electrical Contractors Association also wrote to the Minister seeking an urgent meeting with representatives from both employers and unions to outline their concerns about the changed regulation. Unfortunately, the Minister did not find the time to listen to their concerns.

The concerns, as expressed by both employers and unions, are justified. One has to look only to the Government's own regulatory impact statement to find support for these concerns. The RIS document states—

> "Most fatalities and injuries from contact with electricity occur because of lack of maintenance of electrical plant and equipment, unsafe electrical repairs carried out by unauthorised persons, contact with overhead wires or unsafe work practices."

The document states further—

> "The identification of risks to health and safety are not always evident to the user of electrical equipment due to the non-visible nature of electricity. Therefore responsibility for health and safety must

> fall on those who create the risk. The proposed compliance standard attempts to ensure that the employer . . . establishes systems which will result in the control of the risks associated with electrical equipment; this will be achieved through a regime of maintenance and installation requirements."

Why then has the Government chosen to ignore its own advice by removing the requirement for regular testing of electrical equipment and make it only an option?

This new regulation compromises the safety of workers who use electrical equipment. It does so by changing the focus of electrical safety from regular testing and maintenance to a reliance on an electrical/mechanical safety switch as the primary form of defence. This is a bad policy and I will state some of the reasons why it is a bad policy. Electrical safety switches are not foolproof and work in only a limited range of hazardous circumstances. For example, if a worker happens to get connected between the active and neutral conductors in a live circuit, an electrical safety switch will not protect him or her. This is because the safety switches operate only when there is a leakage of current to earth. The safety switch treats a person who is being electrocuted across live conductors as no different from a light bulb or a refrigerator. There is no leakage to earth and consequently the safety switch will not turn off the power. Fault situations such as this can occur, for example, in an extension lead or a portable electric drill that may have damaged wires or damaged internal components and can lead to death if the worker is not disconnected from the power supply in sufficient time.

There are also technical problems with electrical safety switches. Being electrical/mechanical devices, they are prone to failure in certain circumstances—one being a lack of maintenance. Another factor is that there is an acknowledged design problem with some types of safety switches. Iron core type safety switches may not operate if direct current is present on the circuit in which they are installed. It is not uncommon in a workshop situation to have motor starting and control devices which operate on direct current. Direct current in such circuits can saturate the iron core of the safety switch and, as a consequence, it may not operate if a fault situation develops. This matter has been addressed by the New Zealand Standards Association and will soon be addressed by the Australian Standards. However, as yet, Australian safety switches are not required to have a design feature which eliminates the problem to which I have referred.

To illustrate the fallibility of electrical safety switches—in March this year, a worker was killed in north Queensland after coming into contact with live wires in a circuit that was protected by an electrical safety switch. Electrical safety devices do provide a good level of protection for certain types of electrical fault situations. They do not protect against many of the faults that can develop in electrical equipment as a result of poor maintenance. As a consequence, an over-reliance on them as the primary form of defence against electrocution is, in my view and the Opposition's view, a bad policy decision.

One of the best forms of protection for workers is to isolate and repair potentially dangerous situations before they can cause injury. Regular testing and tagging was a key element in this process, as many faults were often discovered and repaired before they became potentially lethal to workers. The experience of one company involved in this field provides a salutary lesson in electrical safety procedures. Over the past four years, the company tested 22,941 portable electrical items, and 16.1 per cent failed to comply with the requirements of the Australian Standard and had faults that could have led to electrocution of workers. In March this year, copies of the regulatory impact statement, which outlined proposals for changes to this regulation, were circulated to major stakeholders. The RIS said to stakeholders that—

> ". . . the proposed compliance standard will not alter existing rights, obligations or circumstances for workplace health and safety."

It went further and said that—

> ". . . the regulatory impact statement shows that the proposed compliance standard is in the best interest of Government, Business and the Community."

The compliance standard being referred to was for all intents and purposes a simple remake of the pre-existing regulation which required testing and tagging of all electrical equipment.

On the basis of the information in the regulatory impact statement, all parties that made submissions essentially indicated that they did not have difficulties with the proposed remake. However, to their dismay and horror, the regulation was changed significantly

without the preparation of a replacement regulatory impact statement or, more importantly, without further consultation. I have a statutory declaration to that effect from the ACTU and have received verbal assurances in that regard from the Electrical Contractors Association.

One of the more curious and worrying aspects of this matter is the willingness of the Government to adopt an electrical safety standard that is inferior to the recommended Australian Standard. Even more curious is the fact that the Government, through the previous Department of Employment, Vocational Education and Training, was represented on the body which developed the standard to which it now pays little regard. The regulatory impact statement clearly envisaged the remaking of the existing regulation. The RIS said that there was no intention to alter existing rights and obligations for workplace health and safety.

It is crucial that the major focus of our electrical safety strategy be returned to one of regular maintenance and testing of electrical equipment. This was the focus under the pre-existing regulation. It is the focus outlined as the most desirable in the regulatory impact statement, and it is the focus supported by most, if not all, of the major players in the electrical industry. The current regulation will compromise the safety of workers who are required to use electrical equipment in their employment. As such, it is a bad regulation and should be overturned.

Time expired.

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers) (12.53 p.m.): It is perhaps a cliche to say that electricity is powerful stuff. We use electricity every day in our private lives and in our work. Indeed, our modern lifestyle could not survive without electricity. Yet, sadly, every year workers do not survive electrical accidents. Accident data actually shows that one in 10 workplace deaths are related to electricity.

Electricity is different from other workplace health and safety hazards. Generally, there are few second chances with electricity. I have witnessed this myself. A high percentage of electrical injuries are fatal when compared to other injuries such as back strains and sprains, cuts or bruises. Noise-induced hearing loss or occupationally related cancer may take years to show up, but electrocution happens in a matter of seconds. Electrical hazards are also quite unlike many mechanical hazards to health and safety. While mechanical hazards such as a missing guard or a wet floor are fairly obvious, electrical hazards can be much more difficult to detect. For example, a live conductor does not look any different from a dead conductor. A worker drilling through a wall can contact live wires without any warning at all. These are more than mere academic examples. Queensland workers have lost their lives in incidents such as these.

The results of electrical accidents can vary. Aside from fatal electrocution, other injuries include electric shock and body burns. We must not forget that there are also secondary risks from an electric shock, such as falls from heights, or fire and explosions. Safety switches provide ongoing safety. If a power tool, a circular saw or a toaster is somehow faulty, regardless of recent testing or tagging, a safety switch can be a very powerful tool to save any lives. A properly maintained safety switch will detect current leakage to earth within milliseconds and isolate all power to the electrical equipment. The person working the appliance will be saved from the full force of an electric shock and, consequently, dramatically reduce the chance of serious injury.

Because of the hazards generated by electricity, Queensland has comprehensive regulations mandating minimum standards for electrical safety. The current regulations were put in place after consultation with industry. Generally, the standard now required is a safety switch on construction workplaces and workplaces where assembly, fabrication, maintenance, manufacturing or repair takes place. All other workplaces, such as offices and shops, may choose either to test and tag electrical equipment or install a safety switch or use double insulated equipment or isolating transformers.

Electricity is something that we take for granted. We sometimes forget that electricity is a hidden hazard which can have fatal consequences, which I have mentioned previously. Unlike other hazards in the workplace, such as a wet floor in a workshop or working at heights, it is not always easy to see where the next electrical hazard could be. Examples of electrical hazards include, as I said, hitting a concealed wire while drilling a hole in a wall just to hang a picture, or hitting an electrical cable while excavating to lay plumbing pipes, or doing maintenance work on a crane, or something like that.

There is a strong need to reinforce to employers, employees and the general public the real hazards of electricity. Electricity is a silent hazard that does not often give one a second chance. I shall give honourable members an example of this. This is a story

about a man working with electricity who did not get a second chance. A maintenance man was doing some refurbishment work up north. He was working from a ladder with an electric drill trying to find a hidden pipe. The electrical plug connection between two extension cords became loose and parted slightly. The plugs actually touched the ladder, made it into a conductor, and caused the man to be electrocuted. This sort of thing happens. As I said, there is rarely a second chance. That was a tragedy for that worker and his family.

This example illustrates the need for built-in safety. It is one example of how a safety switch would have saved that man's life, but testing and tagging would not have made any difference at all. If the member opposite had drafted his disallowance motion as a proper and correct disallowance motion, then only testing and tagging would be the standard required on construction workplaces. We believe that is a lower and ineffective standard. The amended regulation as it now stands requires a safety switch for construction work. A safety switch would be needed for the sort of work outlined.

Sitting suspended from 1 to 2.30 p.m.

Mr MITCHELL: Before the luncheon adjournment I said that I was a little concerned that if only testing and tagging is required, people may not consider other safety angles. The amended regulation as it now stands requires a safety switch for construction work. A safety switch would be needed for the sort of work outlined in the example that I gave earlier of the person who was electrocuted and killed. For other workplaces, such as pet shops, milk bars, cafes, doctors' rooms and hairdressers, there is a choice——

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Laming): Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Mr MITCHELL: People in those locations may choose between the testing and tagging of electrical equipment or installation of a safety switch. We need to accept that electrical hazards vary between workplaces. In construction workplaces, where the level of hazard could be assessed as high in most cases, the Government has mandated safety switches and set requirements for their maintenance. In workplaces with lower risk, the Government has recognised that a reasonable, safe alternative to safety switches exists, that is, testing and tagging. In those low-risk environments, there is no excuse for the Government to overregulate and to impose unnecessary standards where reasonable alternatives exist.

The changes that this motion would bring if it were successful are unnecessary and unproductive. This motion would force every Queensland workplace to install a safety switch and pay for the continued testing and tagging of electrical equipment. I, for one, think that the day we compel every employer to spend money on both testing and tagging and installing safety switches will be a very sad day for Queensland. We need to give employers support so that they can invest money appropriately in improving safety and efficiency. The amended regulation as it stands gives most employers that option. The motion to disallow the regulation removes it entirely.

It may be of interest to members to hear that the Queensland standards are higher than those of New South Wales. In Queensland, we have regulated for electrical safety standards. We have established standards that must be followed. New South Wales has only the Code of Practice, which is advisory and which relates only to construction work. No specific standard on the requirements for other types of workplaces exists.

This disallowance motion is a duplication. It is double whammy for employers. I wonder whether the honourable member for Kedron has considered carefully the effects of this motion. In a State dominated by small business, Government must be vigilant against standards that cause valuable resources to be wasted on unproductive checking. I support the amended regulation as it stands. I support the review as planned by the Minister. I urge honourable members to reject this disallowance motion.

Mr J. H. SULLIVAN (Caboolture) (2.34 p.m.): I rise to support the disallowance motion on the Workplace Health and Safety Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 1966. In doing so, I will convey to the House the story of a small firm in my electorate. That particular firm was set up with the assistance of the SEVS and NEIS schemes—excellent State and Federal Government schemes—specifically to undertake testing and tagging as a consequence of the earlier provisions. With the advent of this regulation, that firm collapsed. The principal, who had earned a reasonable living and one from which he had been able to support himself and his family, now finds his sustenance by way of a cheque from the Department of Social Security.

That gentleman came to see me and indicated that, in the course of the time that he had been conducting his business, 17 per

cent of all equipment that was tested was faulty. When he contacted his roster of clients to advise them of the provisions of the new regulation, which any honest businessman with any integrity would do, he had the difficulty presented to him that every one of those clients cancelled his next scheduled visit. I wonder whether it is possible that every one of those clients who cancelled already had in place the types of switches that are to replace testing and tagging, or whether those clients were a little less than honest and were prepared not only not to have testing and tagging but also not to have the switches that the Minister would have us believe will do the job. If they did have the switches, the argument that requiring them to have both switches and testing and tagging would impose an extra cost is a fallacious argument and should not be regarded. The question I ask is: are employers and the Government prepared to risk the lives of Queenslanders in this way?

I believe that two issues are associated with the motion to disallow a part of this regulation. The first of those issues is process and the second is safety. I will deal first with process. In preparing this regulation, the department prepared a regulatory impact statement. No draft standard or draft regulation was available for reading in conjunction with the regulatory impact statement. That is not required under the legislation governing regulatory impact statements; it is desirable but not required. In this instance, it was not available. Seventy-one individuals or entities applied for and received a copy of the regulatory impact statement. Foremost in that regulatory impact statement was, as my colleague the member for Nudgee said, an understanding that the standard to be brought down would simply retain the status quo. Only five submissions were received as a consequence of that regulatory impact statement. The Division of Workplace Health and Safety—which, I am sorry to say, accrues no credit for its part in this process—then felt that it was necessary to make some changes, which it described to the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee—which members will see if they take a moment to read the report—as not significant. That is what officers of the Division of Workplace Health and Safety told a Parliament of this committee—sorry, a committee of this Parliament——

Mr Stephan: Nearly got it right.

Mr J. H. SULLIVAN: I nearly got it right, as the member for Gympie said. However, the member for Gympie has not come even close to getting it right in all the time that he has been in Parliament.

Mr Harper: Back in the gutter.

Mr J. H. SULLIVAN: "Back in the gutter"; isn't it entertaining to have Mr Harper with us today!

In their speeches earlier in this debate, my colleagues the member for Kedron and the member for Nudgee showed quite clearly that industry sentiment not only does not regard this particular change as maintaining the status quo but also it regards it as most significant. In his reply, I would like the Minister to tell the House how the Division of Workplace Health and Safety could get it so wrong as to regard this issue as not significant when every section of the industry regards it as significant. Officers in the Division of Workplace Health and Safety tell us that, as a consequence of deciding to make those changes that they regarded as not significant, they engaged in a second round of consultation. That second round involved faxing copies of their new intention to only two places: the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry——

Mr Robertson: Allegedly.

Mr J. H. SULLIVAN: Allegedly—this is their allegation—to the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the ACTU Queensland Branch. The division advises this Parliament that it cannot find the fax cover sheets; however, it has a note of a verbal message from the QCCI stating that it received the fax. My colleague the member for Nudgee has indicated that he has possession of a statutory declaration from the ACTU stating that it never received the advice. So at least one of the two bodies which were considered worthy of being consulted about this change, which the industry regards as significant but which the Government regards as not significant, says that it was not consulted. As I said earlier, no credit accrues to the Division of Workplace Health and Safety or its Minister for the process that has led us to this position today.

In closing, I want to refer briefly to some of the comments made by the Government speaker in this debate, Mr Mitchell. He indicated that one in 10 deaths in the building industry were caused by electricity. I do not know whether Mr Mitchell has been electrocuted himself—I have—but he indicated that he had some involvement in a situation in which another person was electrocuted.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr J. H. SULLIVAN: That is for others to say, not for me in this place. However, let me say that I agree with Mr Mitchell, the member for Charters Towers. Electricity is something that we should treat specially. As people have said in this debate and in interjections, we cannot see electricity; we cannot see what is going on. It is so insidious and it is so dangerous that we should not decide to use one safety measure or the other; we should be quite properly protecting the citizens of this State who come in contact with electrical power during their working lives or in their domestic lives. We should be quite properly providing them with both protections.

Mr Mitchell referred to the unfairness of the employer having to pay for both switches—which my colleague the member for Nudgee has pointed out are not failsafe—and testing and tagging. There is a principle involved, which I think is important: the problems occur not at the switchbox but at the end of the line; they occur where the appliance or the piece of equipment is being used. Testing and tagging will find fault with those pieces of equipment and then they can be repaired. To rely on a switch at the end of the line to protect us in all instances is nothing short of lunacy.

To push through this regulation in the context of a review of the legislation being undertaken as of 14 October last is nothing short of criminal. I call on the Minister, if he has any interest in saving lives in industry in this State and if he does not want to be seen as the Minister who brought in regulations that kill people, to accede to this disallowance motion and fix it after the review.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone) (2.44 p.m.): This is indeed a very complex issue. The last thing that any of us want is to allow by action or omission the safety of workers or workplaces to be put at risk. There is a duty of care required of employers under the Workplace Health and Safety Act. I refer to a letter from the MTIA, which states—

> "Employers unquestionably must bear the major responsibility for the safety within the workplace, indeed there is a legislative requirement that an employer must ensure that the workplace is 'safe and without risks'."

Irrespective of the regulation being debated today, this primary responsibility must be accepted by employers. However, I am also aware that the proposed disallowance of the regulation, which is more of an amendment to the legislation in its impact, will impose yet another layer of costs on many employers.

The new regulations require a change from mandatory test and tag to the choice of mandatory installation of earth leakage units or safety switches or testing and tagging. This has incurred and will incur a cost in compliance. The proposed disallowance of the regulation will mean that workplaces will have no choice but to do both. The cost of test and tag for some workplaces is high. For example, for the company Coca Cola the cost just to test and tag vending machines, which I would expect are relatively low-risk pieces of equipment, is projected to be $1.2m. That projection has come from the QCCI.

Had there been a mechanism to simply return to the position prior to the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation (No. 1) 1996, given the valid concerns raised by the member for Nudgee and the issues raised regarding the regulatory impact study, consideration of the disallowance motion might have been easier. To double the impost on businesses at this time, given their responsibilities under the Workplace Health and Safety Act, is difficult to sustain. I have spoken to Mr Richard Cox, who outlined his concerns and his perspective on the review. I have taken his comments into account. There are many issues to balance in the debate—the imposts proposed by the amendment, the level of safety afforded by the ELUs, the additional effort required by the regulations for building sites, the requirements under the Workplace Health and Safety Act, and the fact that a review is proposed to be carried out within the next two years.

It is on this last point that I would like to finish. I seek an undertaking from the Minister that this new regulation be extracted from the total review package and given not just priority but critical priority to ensure that it is assessed within the next couple of months at the outside, that the RIS discrepancies be scrutinised and that an appropriate level of protection be assessed and required for the various types of workplaces—that is, construction sites, maintenance sites and office sites—to ensure that optimum levels of safety are afforded workers that are practical in their enforcement. I ask the Minister to indicate his support or otherwise for this urgent review prior to the motion being put to the vote.

In conclusion, and predicated on the Minister instituting that urgent review, I would not support the disallowance motion. However, I reinforce the grave need for safety of all who work with electricity and the need for clarity of those requirements to be made by that urgent review.

Hon. S. SANTORO (Clayfield—Minister for Training and Industrial Relations) (2.48 p.m.), in reply: Firstly, I thank all honourable members for their contributions to this debate. I must admit that before participating in the debate I learned a lot about electrical safety, and from listening to honourable members, including honourable members opposite, I have learned even more.

My first problem with the honourable member's motion is that it really does not appear to be what it seems. In effect, it is not a motion to disallow at all. In fact, it would seem to me to be an attempt to amend the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation which is the subject of the motion. Quite simply, this motion would not recreate the situation that existed prior to the amendment regulation coming into effect from 2 July 1996. In that regard, I think that the honourable member for Gladstone made a very pertinent point. In fact, it would change and expand the requirements significantly. It would impose significant additional cost on all Queensland workplaces and a level of regulation for electrical safety never before seen in Queensland. To save the time of the House, I will not refer to the voluminous amount of information that I have received from employer organisations and other employer interests which back up what the honourable member for Gladstone has just said about the cost.

If this motion is successful, it would require testing and tagging of electrical equipment and also require safety switches for electrical equipment in all workplaces. That was certainly not the case prior to July 1996.

Mr Purcell: It was in the construction industry.

Mr SANTORO: For the information of honourable members, including the honourable member for Bulimba, I point out that the requirements before July 1996 stipulated testing and tagging across all industries, plus safety switches for only those workplaces involved in assembly, fabrication, maintenance, manufacturing or repair. To that extent, the honourable member for Bulimba is correct.

Essentially, prior to the amendment regulation the old standard involved testing and tagging, plus limited requirements for safety switches. The existing requirement call for safety switches will save lives and money. Through this motion, Mr Braddy is calling for both safety switches and testing and tagging. That substantially does not do very much more than increase the cost.

This amendment was the outcome of an RIS. I acknowledge the concerns of the honourable member for Caboolture when he said that there were some deficiencies within the process undertaken by the Division of Workplace Health and Safety. However, I do not believe that the division deserves the vitriol thrown at it by the honourable member. I acknowledge the concerns of the honourable member for Gladstone and the concerns of the committee. In fact, the committee acknowledged in its report that when its members made contact with me as the Minister they were extended every courtesy and consideration, and I was pleased to do that. I take on board the concerns expressed in the committee's report.

In relation to the substantive regulation that we are considering, the Government consulted widely with industry prior to putting these changes in place from July 1996. Prior to this change, consultation included discussions with both employer and employee groups. The QCCI endorsed the amendment before its enactment. Also, the part of the amendment that applies specifically to electrical equipment on construction workplaces was developed and agreed to by a working party which included representatives from both employer and employee organisations. This amendment regulation, along with seven others, was created with a maximum lifespan of two years and will expire before June 1998. I stress the fact that the intention has always been to review the regulations in a full, consultative process.

Mr Fouras: Why not do it the other way around—the proper way?

Mr SANTORO: I will answer the interjection of the honourable member for Ashgrove shortly. The regulations were established as part of the major changes associated with the 1995 Workplace Health and Safety Act and its new standards. While I firmly believe that the work on consultation during these changes is a model that other States would do well to follow, I also understand that the sheer volume of legislation being generated and rolled over made it difficult for some stakeholders to keep themselves fully informed of the changes. For this reason, the rolled-over regulations will have a two-year limit.

In fact, the electrical regulation that we are debating is the first regulation which is to be reviewed. I assure honourable members from both sides of the House that it has first priority. I am advised that the review of this regulation had already started, but it has been

temporarily suspended until it is clear what the regulation contains as a result of this so-called motion to disallow. With due respect to all honourable members, including those opposite, the motion is effectively stopping the review from going ahead. The review of the regulation will recommence as soon as Parliament deals with the motion before it, and I am hopeful that it can be completed by early 1997.

In relation to a request by the honourable member for Gladstone, I assure her that, immediately upon the consideration of this disallowance motion by the House, I will instruct the Division of Workplace Health and Safety to extract the contentious part of this regulation and review it urgently. I am advised by my officers—and I accept their advice—that the review will be able to be conducted within a period of four to five weeks. If the conclusions of the review of the section are substantially different, under the rules that govern this place we will require another four weeks for the RIS study to be undertaken. I hope that by early January of next year a full review of this specific section will have been completed.

The people who form part of the full review body—and I hope that they will also be able to participate in the specific review that is taking place—are: Mr Alan Ashman, a State organiser of the CEPU from the Electrical, Electronic Division of that union; Mr David Dawes, the organiser of the Electrical Trades Union of Australia; Mr Peter Jensen, a consultant for the building industry in the area of workplace health and safety; Ms Rachel Quilty, industrial officer with the Electrical Contractors Association; Mr Alan Doodney, who is also from the Electrical, Electronic Division of the CEPU; and Mr Des Duckworth, the district inspector of the Southport office of the Division of Workplace Health and Safety. Two employer representatives will also join the review committee and will in fact be involved in the overall review. Hopefully, most, if not all, of the members of the group will participate in the swift review of the regulation that is of concern to honourable members. I hope that that assurance is of satisfaction to the honourable member for Gladstone. It is given freely in recognition of the contentious nature of the issue that we are considering.

The Government recognises that some sectors of the electrical industry have expressed concerns about the amended regulation. We have acted on those concerns by making the overall review of the electrical regulation a priority. I again assure the House that our response will be a considered and careful one.

Earlier in my speech I promised to summarise the deficiencies of this motion. I see two main problems with the motion. Firstly, the motion does not provide for a substantial improvement in safety, but, as other members in this place have said, it imposes unreasonable costs on the vast majority of businesses. Secondly, the motion fails to recognise that workplaces involved in assembly, construction, fabrication, maintenance, manufacturing and repair are different from offices or shops.

In recent years, technological improvements have led to safety switches being a safe and inexpensive form of protection. They offer significant financial savings over testing and tagging every six months. In fact, an office with as few as 20 electrical appliances would recover the cost of installing a safety switch with the savings made from one year's testing and tagging. In practice, all electrical circuits were installed with safety switches during the construction of modern buildings. During the lunch break, I asked officers of my division how many safety switches had failed since the beginning of this year. I was informed that, to the best of their recollection at such short notice, only one switch had failed without adverse effect on any individual.

Safety switches have the added advantage of providing protection in situations where extension leads or appliances fail. This point addresses the concerns of the honourable member for Caboolture. Taking the example of a worker drilling into a wall and hitting a concealed electrical cable, a safety switch will provide a level of protection against electrocution that testing and tagging could never achieve. I am advised that safety switches and all other allowable electrical safety devices are more than enough, and that testing and tagging is no more than overkill.

I respectfully suggest to honourable members that this motion, if it were passed, would impose additional expenses on businesses, large and small, across the State. These costs would flow on to the community, but there would be no real benefit. The honourable member for Gladstone has already mentioned that Coca Cola would need to test and tag every vending machine at a cost of $1.2m per year, yet the machines are already fully protected by safety switches. Arnott's Biscuits would spend $10,000 each year on testing and tagging at its Virginia plant

alone, when the equipment there is already fully protected by safety switches. Country Bake would have to spend $10,000 to $15,000 each year on testing and tagging. That would be the cost if the work was done by its own electricians; honourable members can imagine the cost if that work was contracted out. The Housing Industry Association estimates that the cost of compliance with this motion within the housing industry would be approximately $1m annually. The electorate offices of honourable members may already be protected by safety switches, but this amendment means that extra money would have to be spent on additional testing and tagging, and for what? Certainly not for any great improvement in safety.

Workplaces in Queensland receive the protection afforded by safety switches, yet this amendment sets out to duplicate safety requirements at a great cost to the businesses in this State. I am aware of the concerns voiced by electrical contractors over existing requirements. Some operators believe that they will be put out of business by these changes, yet all workplaces may continue to test and tag electrical equipment as part of their maintenance activities. As the executive director of the MTIA has said, the bulk of employers take their responsibilities in relation to those extra testing activities very seriously indeed.

I respectfully suggest to honourable members and to concerned parties who have voiced those concerns that electrical contractors will have to market the benefits of their services and no longer rely on the mandatory regulations we have at the moment to generate business for testing and tagging. In 1995, honourable members may be interested to know that the Division of Workplace Health and Safety registered more than 110,000 workplaces and over 19,000 construction workplaces. As a responsible Government, we must seek to make decisions for the broader community and not just for a sectional interest. We should not be forcing employers to waste money on unnecessary testing. We need employers' health and safety funds spent wisely and where they will do the most good.

I ask honourable members to consider the example of a rented shopfront. The effect of this motion will mean that the operator will be required to purchase and install a safety switch as well as test and tag equipment—an unnecessary expense. In industries such as these, the existing regulation gives businesses an option: either continue to test and tag or, if a safety switch is used, there is no requirement to continue testing and tagging. Workplaces will have the option of saving money without compromising safety.

Of course, as the honourable member for Gladstone said, workplaces still have an obligation under the Workplace Health and Safety Act to maintain the safety of their equipment. For example, electrical equipment is covered by the Plant Advisory Standard, which calls for routine maintenance to be performed. Additionally, the general obligation under the Act requires employers to ensure the health and safety of employees at risk, and that includes not exposing employees to the risk of using damaged or faulty equipment.

Secondly, this motion fails to appreciate that workplaces involved in assembly, construction, fabrication, maintenance, manufacturing and repair are very different—and I stress "very different"—when it comes to electrical safety. This is a point of which I ask the honourable member for Caboolture to take particular note. At these workplaces, electrical equipment faces a much tougher life. Such equipment is regularly moved around and often in the weather. Between each test and tag check, the equipment could easily become damaged and a potential risk. These tests are typically between 6 to 12 months apart, during which time the employer already has an obligation to remove any dangerous equipment. A safety switch also has the added advantage of providing continuous protection. Testing and tagging can only assess the safety of a piece of equipment at the time of testing. The equipment could be damaged within hours of testing, but the safety switch will provide ongoing protection.

Employers not only have an obligation to maintain the safety switch but, as honourable members, particularly those opposite who have made contributions, should be aware, the regulation also contains specific provisions for the maintenance of these switches. For example, honourable members should compare the life of a circular saw and an extension lead on a construction site with the cushier life of a kettle in an office. This motion means that both would be treated the same. This motion is not looking to return the regulation to its previous state; instead, it is looking to impose additional requirements on Queensland business.

For the purposes of comparison, I point out that the Queensland standard is already much higher than that set in New South Wales. In Queensland, we have regulated for electrical safety standards. We have

established standards that must be followed—and I stress "must be followed". New South Wales—incidentally, a State run by a Labor Government—has a code of practice which is purely advisory and which relates only to construction sites, not to all workplaces as this standard does. The code is silent on the requirements for other types of workplaces.

On the surface, it may seem reasonable to ask for what appears to be a double security of test and tag and safety switches. However, this perception ignores several important factors. Firstly, the regulation sets a minimum standard. Secondly, workplaces should have the freedom to determine whether they need the protection of both safety switches and test and tag. Thirdly, in the vast majority of workplaces, it is an unreasonable impost for little or no safety gain.

I wish also to mention one final matter in connection with the relevant Australian standard. Australian Standard 3190—Current Operated Earth Leakage Devices—is referenced in the Workplace Health and Safety Regulation. That standard details performance requirements for safety switches. Because of the mandatory safety switch testing regime imposed by section 82 in the regulation, combined with the inherent safety features required by Australian Standard 3109, there is every reason to have confidence in the current regulation. Therefore, I ask honourable members not to proceed with support for this motion. In doing so, I say genuinely that we undertake to extract from the regulation the section which is of concern to the honourable member for Kedron and other members who have spoken.

Next week, we will initiate an urgent review of that section with a view, if necessary, if the recommendations are different from those contained in the current regulation, to initiating a properly conducted RIS study. I assure the honourable member for Caboolture, other members of the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee and the honourable member for Gladstone that the correct procedures will be followed so that the concerns expressed in the committee's report will not need to be raised again. At that time, if this matter needs to be brought back into the Parliament in an expeditious way, this Government will do so. I again urge honourable members not to proceed with supporting the amendment to this regulation.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 44—Ardill, Barton, Beattie, Bird, Bligh, Braddy, Bredhauer, Briskey, Campbell, D'Arcy, De Lacy, Dollin, Edmond, Elder, Foley, Fouras, Gibbs, Goss W. K., Hamill, Hayward, Hollis, Lucas, McElligott, McGrady, Mackenroth, Milliner, Mulherin, Nunn, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Purcell, Roberts, Robertson, Rose, Schwarten, Smith, Spence, Sullivan J. H., Welford, Wells, Woodgate *Tellers:* Livingstone, Sullivan T. B.

NOES, 44—Baumann, Beanland, Borbidge, Connor, Cooper, Cunningham, Davidson, Elliott, FitzGerald, Gamin, Gilmore, Goss J. N., Grice, Harper, Healy, Hegarty, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Laming, Lester, Lingard, Littleproud, McCauley, Malone, Mitchell, Perrett, Quinn, Radke, Rowell, Santoro, Sheldon, Simpson, Slack, Stephan, Stoneman, Tanti, Veivers, Warwick, Watson, Wilson, Woolmer *Tellers:* Springborg, Carroll

The numbers being equal, Mr Speaker cast his vote with the Noes.

Resolved in the **negative**.

WEAPONS AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 11 October (see p. 3426).

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick) (3.12 p.m.): This is arguably one of the most controversial and emotional Bills to be debated in this Parliament for quite some time. Nobody will ever forget the tragedy of Port Arthur in Tasmania, and nor should they. Nobody will forget the indecent haste with which the Federal Government forged ahead, capitalising on the fragile emotions of a community still reeling from the shock and horror of this massacre.

The controversy surrounding today's Weapons Amendment Bill is borne out by the number of letters, phone calls, petitions and protests that members—on all sides, I am sure—have had to deal with. Passionate arguments from all sides, each as strong and emotional as the other, have ensured that nobody's viewpoint has gone unheard by either side of politics since the 10 May Canberra resolutions were adopted. There is no doubt that this Bill will pass through Parliament, but I am sure that all members of this Chamber hold some reservations about just how effective and properly considered the Federal Government requirements really are. Nobody professes that this legislation will end the abuse of firearms, that it will reduce crime or domestic violence, or that it will put a complete halt to repeats of the Tasmanian tragedy. Anybody who claims that is naive; they are preaching fairytales of enormous proportions.

I think most people realise that this legislation had to be accepted by the Queensland Government or else we could have faced a nationwide referendum. If that referendum had been successful for the Federal Government, then we all would have been facing far tougher gun laws than those that are being proposed here today. Moreover, the ability for States to continue to implement and be responsible for their own gun laws would have been halted, and those rights would have transferred to Canberra. The issue became one of not whether a referendum would have succeeded but, rather, whether it was worth gambling with these basic State rights. By adopting this legislation—with all its faults—the State of Queensland keeps control. The other option is to leave our fate in the hands of Canberra, and I know for sure which option the people in my electorate would support.

Having said that, there is little doubt that the greater majority of the community agree with the need for tougher gun laws. Many polls would seem to indicate this. However, that does not necessarily translate into support for the specific resolutions driven by the Federal Government on 10 May. One only has to consider the issue of Category D access for primary producers or Category C access for trap shooters or the national register of firearms. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister in particular has seen fit to simplistically, opportunistically and wrongly interpret the message of polls to mean almost total support for whatever changes in firearm laws he proposes. The Prime Minister ruled out magazine remanufacturing for semiautomatic shotguns despite the support of all the States and Territories and his Federal Attorney-General. The Prime Minister set a standard that face saving was more important than ensuring practical, workable gun laws that display credibility and maximise compliance.

Much of the process in formulating these firearm laws has been more concerned with perception and egos than commonsense, practical requirements. Of particular regret in this debate has been the broad categorisation of any person or group expressing concern about aspects of these gun laws. These people have been categorised as some sort of ratbag redneck collective. Canberra politicians, the media and many people in the city should realise that the vast majority of firearm owners do not fit this stereotype—the type we have unfortunately seen at rallies in Gympie. I think many people who are strong proponents of gun law reform would be surprised to know how mainstream the majority of gun owners in Australia really are.

About 90 per cent of the people who have contacted me on this issue have been opposed to some or all of the proposed laws. While this does not mean that 90 per cent of my electorate is opposed to the laws, it does indicate that there is a substantial body of concern in my part of the world. I have not had another issue which has even come close to occupying such enormous time and effort in the electorate as this matter has. The people with serious reservations about this Bill who have been talking to me are reasoned and respected members of our community—small-business people, teachers, farmers, retired bankers, blue-collar workers and many others. Far from popular belief, about 30 per cent of the people who have contacted me on this issue have been women, and the majority have expressed reservations about the proposed laws.

I fail to understand what, if any, practical benefits are to be achieved by the establishment of a national firearms register. A far more sensible and workable approach would have been for the Commonwealth to pursue a register of licensed shooters. This would have ensured that police would be aware of who were licensed to possess or use a firearm to assist them in their day-to-day operations. Instead, a national firearms register is being introduced, and there are great concerns in the community as to what such a register could ultimately lead to. Like it or not, many people believe that this is the first step towards the confiscation of firearms. It is a pity that people are so cynical about this issue, but politicians have only themselves to blame. The former Premier, Wayne Goss, signed a deal with the Shooters Party. He put his signature to paper, yet he was all too quick to tell an inquiry that he would have broken that signed agreement. But we as politicians ask them to believe us this time.

Firearms registers have proven to be a failure in New Zealand, where I understand that the registration of firearms has been abandoned. It is also my understanding that the licensing and registration of firearms has been required in the UK since early in the century. Some official estimates indicate that less than half of that nation's firearms owners are licensed and that certainly less than half of that nation's firearms are registered. The most consistent thing about firearms registers is that they are ultimately proven to be failures. When was the last time one heard of a registered concealable firearm being used to commit an

offence? I personally cannot recall one. Yet concealable firearms are most commonly used to commit various offences, despite being strictly regulated in Queensland since early in this century. Criminals are not the people who register weapons. Any laws we pass must have an eye to workability, practicability and compliance. The Queensland Government and the Police Minister, Russell Cooper, could not have done more to ensure recognition of the reasonable and justifiable concerns of shooters. But at the end of the day, on many issues reason was thrown out the door and the Queensland Government was told to cop it or go to a referendum.

I felt the greatest sympathy—and, indeed, a great degree of embarrassment—when a World War II digger expressed concerns about having to demonstrate a genuine reason to possess or use his trusty old .22 or shotgun, especially when one considers that he spent six years fighting to defend his country, which is also our country. It was a personal affront for him to be told that he had to join a gun club or get authorisation from a landowner just to keep his guns. Fifty years ago, in defence of Australia, this person was trusted with all manner of weapons, yet he is now told that this counts for nothing. Let us not lose sight of the fact that this person is not one of Australia's rednecks, this person is one of Australia's heroes.

The other matter which has me considerably bemused is the demonisation of semiautomatic shotguns—a firearm which became the unfortunate casualty of the ill informed. Consider this: a semiautomatic shotgun, which is actually manufactured to fire a maximum of two cartridges, is in restricted category C. However, this firearm is capable of firing no more than a double-barrelled shotgun, which rests comfortably and rightly in unrestricted category A. To people who know even the slightest thing about guns, this is one of the anomalies which continues to be evident with the gun laws we are debating.

Mr Cooper has worked tirelessly to address these anomalies but, under threat of a national referendum, there has been a limitation on how much could be addressed. I think that, as we advance down the track and these laws are implemented and the anomalies become more evident, even to the zealots in the anti-gun movement, who in their own right are just as extremist and unreasonable as the zealots in the pro-gun movement, we will learn much from this process. We will soon come to appreciate the cautious and sensible words from the Police Minister that the laws should have been worked through in a calmer environment.

I have taken much time in my speech illustrating my concerns about these laws. I think, though, through concessions won by Queensland and the onset of commonsense, albeit belatedly, there are some things with which we can be comfortable. People who are currently gun owners will be able to continue to own most if not all of their firearms after these laws pass this place. There will, however, be a greater administrative process, including the process of licence renewal every five years and the registration of their firearms, with registration of firearms being a one-off exercise.

As part of the transferral process, it is hoped that registration will be at no or minimal cost for current eligible licence holders with genuine reason. Current shooters licence holders are to be recognised in the transitional process, which is designed to be as considerate as possible for these people. They will be written to and asked to illustrate their genuine reason for firearms ownership, which will be in the form of club membership, recreational shooter with authorisation from a landowner or occupational shooter just to name some of the genuine reasons. When this is established, they will be asked to list their guns for registration with the demonstration of a genuine need for the ownership of category B and C firearms but, to all intents and purposes, this means that a shooter who has genuine reason will have unrestricted ownership of rim-fire rifles, air rifles, double and single-barrelled shotguns and also have reasonably unrestricted access to the ownership of centre-fire rifles, except for the restriction in the semiautomatic class applying to both shotguns and centre-fire rifles.

For current licence holders being transferred, there will be no requirement for further testing. Their previous licence and the testing procedure needed to get that licence will be deemed sufficient. Landowners will be given access to semiautomatic and pump action shotguns with up to five-shot capacity if they can demonstrate a need, and semiautomatic .22s up to 10-shot capacity. Even though a primary producer can possess only one semiautomatic .22 and one pump action or semiautomatic shotgun, this exemption is essential in ensuring that primary producers have access to the tools of the trade for their occupation. These are essential for tasks such as large sheep culls and crop protection. Queensland was also successful in arguing the case for limited access to category

D firearms for primary producers. This was for the eradication of large feral animals and the culling of large stock.

On the issue of encouraging our young shooters, the other States will allow junior shooters licences from 14 years to 17 years while Queensland has maintained its current provisions of 11 years to 17 years. This is essential for teaching our young people correct firearms handling procedure and to encourage our nucleus of talented young shooters. We are all familiar with Olympic trap shooting champion, Michael Diamond, who started shooting at the age of eight. It would be an absolute tragedy if we did not provide for the encouragement of shooters such as Michael Diamond from a young age. Our legislation also maintains current provisions which provide for the unlicensed family members and employees of a landowner to shoot under authorisation.

A number of shooters have asked me about the process of landowner authorisation for recreational shooters. Of particular concern has been the belief that a written authorisation would be required from each landowner whose property they wanted to shoot on. I would like to make it quite clear that a person requires only one written authorisation to secure a licence as a recreational shooter. Permission to shoot on other properties will be the same as is currently the case, and that is usually in the form of verbal consent.

A major breakthrough for the Queensland Police Minister, Russell Cooper, was his strong and successful assertion to the Prime Minister that trap shooters who are members of a recognised club, shooting recognised disciplines, be allowed access to semiautomatic shotguns for training. This is absolutely essential for the disabled as well as many women, young and elderly shooters. The advantages of these firearms with their reduced recoil cannot be overstated.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank officers of the Police Service Administration Division who have provided invaluable information and assistance to members of Parliament, both Opposition and Government. During the past few months, many members have been inundated by constituent inquiries regarding aspects of the proposed firearms laws. Officers from the branch have been responsive in providing information about these questions.

The issue of personal protection is one that has surfaced as a major concern for many people. Personal protection has never really been a recognised reason for ownership of a firearm in this State. It has never surfaced as an issue, though, as people have been relatively free to purchase firearms without having to state for what purpose they required the firearm. Having said that, let me make it abundantly clear that there will not be any legal diminution of a person's right to use a firearm for personal protection after the passage of this legislation.

Another question I am often faced with when asked about details of the new laws is how surrendered firearms are to be collected. In the not-too-distant future there will be a public education program which will provide information on all aspects of the new weapons laws and the requirements for firearms owners. I would like, however, to provide the following information to my constituents and the people of Queensland: I understand that there will be a number of central collection and processing points established around the State; there will also probably be a number of subsidiary collection and processing points; and in isolated areas, a police station will also be used as a collection point for surrendered firearms. In the case of the collection point, a person will probably take their firearm in and be issued with a receipt for it. The firearm will be transported to a central point where it will be identified, valued and payment initiated. This will be either by cheque or EFT. Practically, this will mean that Toowoomba, in my area, will be a collection and processing centre on the Darling Downs; Warwick will be a subsidiary collection and processing point, and people outside these centres will be able to present their firearms to their local police station, have it receipted and the compensation will then be posted to them.

People will have until 30 September 1997 to surrender category C and D firearms. In the meantime, they can continue to possess but not use these firearms unless they can demonstrate a genuine reason to own or use for occupational purposes a category C firearm. Category A and B firearm owners who cannot demonstrate genuine reason to continue to own their firearms will have this time to sell them.

On the issue of ammunition purchases, a licence must be presented before ammunition and reloading equipment can be purchased. There will be no limitation on the amount of ammunition which can be purchased at one time, even though this is provided for in the legislation. This recognises club shooters, who use large amounts of ammunition over short periods, as well as primary producers. This provision also recognises that many isolated people buy a large volume of ammunition at

one time because they do not have ready or regular access to a point of sale. The private sale of firearms has been recognised and will be able to continue under this legislation. But these sales must be brokered through a dealer. The Government will be setting a maximum fee in regulation for brokerage.

This legislation must be related to Queenslanders after its passage through this place. There still continues to be a great deal of concern and confusion within the community—some justified, some not. The ultimate judge of the success of any law passed by this Parliament is the electorate, and that requires time. I will continue to watch the effects of this legislation but will not hesitate to advocate changes if it proves unworkable or impacts unfairly on the law-abiding shooting fraternity throughout Queensland.

Mr BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—Leader of the Opposition) (3.31 p.m.): I rise to support the gun legislation before the House. In doing so, I acknowledge the significant contribution made by the shadow Police Minister, Tom Barton, the shadow Attorney-General, Matt Foley, and the Police Minister, Russell Cooper, in the bipartisan discussions that took place following the tragedy of the shooting of 35 innocent Australians at Port Arthur.

As members of this House would know, I have many criticisms of the Police Minister, Mr Cooper, which I air regularly both inside and outside the House. However, on the guns issue, we have met with him on a regular basis and he has kept us fully informed of developments at both national and State levels since the Prime Minister, John Howard, established the agenda for the reform of gun laws around Australia. I thank him publicly for that cooperation. Right from the outset, the Prime Minister established this agenda for tougher gun laws. Indeed, at one stage the Prime Minister indicated that, unless there was agreement between the States, there would have been a referendum on this issue. Had there been a referendum, we know what the outcome would have been; the States would have lost the right to make laws and to regulate the ownership and control of guns.

Mr Schwarten: We had no option.

Mr BEATTIE: Indeed, we had no option.

The Prime Minister had an agenda. It was to prevent Australia from going down the American path—a path where the gun culture pervades every level of society, a path that recognises and accepts the gun as part of dispute resolution, and a path that sees gun casualties measured on the hour, every hour, in virtually every major American city. Many people have seen this agenda as being one of gun safety and have based their criticism of it on this false presumption. It is not about gun safety or gun security; it is about ensuring that Australians never come to regard the gun as a part of a solution to anything. It is about ensuring that Australians never come to regard carrying a gun as a normal, acceptable way of life in much the same way as wearing a wristwatch. It is about ensuring that Australians leave the gun culture of our early colonial settlement as just that—a part of our history. It is about looking forward to a time when the rule of law is respected and obeyed for its intrinsic worth and correctness, not its enforcement. This Bill is without doubt one of the stepping stones to reaching that time.

The bipartisan support that the Opposition has given this Bill has undoubtedly brought it from its genesis in May of this year to legislation before the Queensland Parliament. Indeed, as the Minister knows, on one occasion we indicated to the Government that we were prepared to allow this Bill to pass through all stages in a particular day—one Wednesday—so that the debate could be finalised, such was our bipartisan commitment.

Mr FitzGerald: We wanted it debated more fully. That was my decision.

Mr BEATTIE: We had a full day. We were not wanting to truncate the debate. We were wanting to make sure that the law was in place so that appropriate compensation for gun owners could be put in place—for example, the buyback package, which was a concern for us, because shooters had been approaching us, indicating that they wanted that program in place. That is why we indicated our support. We certainly were not wanting to truncate the debate.

To illustrate this point, I quote from a letter I wrote to the Premier on 29 April this year. I table that letter in which I stated—

> "Quite properly the issue of the availability and registration of firearms has again become an issue of debate around the country, and it is clear that the people of this State will expect both of us to take urgent action to enact comprehensive and appropriate legislation in this State, and to jointly ensure that Queensland actively pursues strict uniform National legislation.
>
> . . .
>
> In the light of yesterday's appalling events and similar tragedies which have

> occurred in Australia in the last few years, and in Scotland only a few weeks ago, I do not want to see action on this important issue bogged down in political point scoring or disputes over relatively minor technicalities."

Since then, we have followed through the spirit that I set out in that letter, and it is reflected here in our contribution today.

I believe that, as an Opposition, we have honoured that commitment given in the week immediately following the Port Arthur massacre. I believe that the Bill that lies in this Parliament at this time is a testament to that commitment. Throughout this debate, on many occasions when there were opportunities—and, as the Minister knows, tempting opportunities—we have not sought to politicise the debate or to seek to score cheap political points or any political points. I do not believe that that matter has been given suitable recognition publicly.

This bipartisan support has also been recognised in the wider community. From among the many letters that the Opposition has received on this issue I would like to share one with the Parliament. The letter states—

> "I write to express my strong support for the courageous action which you and the Opposition are taking in bi-partisan support for gun control and to ask that you hold firmly to the commitments made in concert with Governments Federally and in the States on this issue.
>
> In my view we will be well served by the elimination of firearms from Australian society to the maximum possible extent.
>
> The higher good must prevail and I pray that the Opposition will have the strength to continue to seek it."

I table that letter from a Mackay resident. It is indicative of the general thrust of many of the letters that the Opposition received on this subject.

By comparison, it is to the eternal disgrace of some small—and I stress "small"—sections of the gun lobby who fail to give this legislation similar support in an attempt to thwart the wishes of the vast majority of Australians who clearly wanted our gun laws tightened. Their repeated misinformed attacks on the legislation did great damage initially and, at times, threatened to divide the Australian community, and also damaged their support within the community and amongst their supporters. Many decent firearm owners whom we met were very unhappy and very concerned, particularly genuine sporting shooters' organisations, with the attitude taken by some extreme sections of the gun lobby. Their misinformation was crudely designed to create fear in the community and to inappropriately seek to influence the Government and the Labor Opposition to back away from this legislation. Many genuine people, particularly sporting shooters and rural people, had genuine misunderstandings about what was intended. I respected their views.

I am pleased that, in conjunction with the Minister, we were able to provide information to bodies such as sporting shooters and rural people about what the legislation entailed. The introduction of this legislation and the further consultation that has been possible during the months between this Bill's introduction and this debate has greatly assisted in clearing up many of these misunderstandings.

Equally, misunderstandings have occurred with those members of society who believe that our gun laws require even further tightening. We received many representations from those people as well. Hopefully, as the Bill passes into law and its attendant education program comes into play, together with the regulations that will accompany this Bill, much of the misunderstanding will be addressed.

Whereas this Bill is legislation presented and drafted by the State Government arising out of the national discussions initiated by the Prime Minister and from our bipartisan support, we do have reservations about certain aspects of it. In particular, the workability and administration of some of its provisions concerns me deeply. The Opposition supports the proposal that firearm owners must have a genuine reason to own a firearm. We believe that the provisions of this Bill will provide adequate scope for firearm owners who wish to participate in shooting on ranges as members of a club, or on rural property with the permission of the landowner, or collect as genuine collectors, or hold heirlooms.

However, there are many thousands of firearm owners in Queensland who do not participate in the above activities, who simply own and hold a firearm, who are currently licensed and who use the firearm infrequently, if at all. Many, if not most, will be able to comply by joining recognised clubs, by seeking permission from landowners who own suitable property for hunting or by meeting provisions for collectors. The issue of firearm owners who do not meet the criteria for firearm ownership

nor the eligibility criteria for compensation is a vexed one. It will undoubtedly cause consternation among many of those weapon owners, and I can only appeal to those firearm owners to look upon this move as a necessary step in making this State and Australia a safer environment for all. The move by some unscrupulous real estate agents to advertise and market land for joint ownership by hunting enthusiasts is an attempt to subvert this Bill, and that concerns me greatly. The Government needs to monitor such land sales closely and if necessary amend whatever Acts are required to ensure that that practice is nipped in the bud.

Although we have considerable reservations about the workability of aspects of this legislation, we will watch very closely to see how this legislation works in practice. Back in Government, we will examine those sections of the legislation that are simply unworkable. The Opposition decided, because of our bipartisan approach to this legislation, to not seek to move amendments to this Bill on this occasion, so it will not be seeking to do so today. The penalties provided in this Bill are severe. However, because we have given—right from the time of the Port Arthur tragedy and the Prime Minister's announcement in relation to gun laws—a bipartisan commitment to the reform of gun laws, we will be supporting this legislation today in the form presented by the Minister and we will not be moving amendments. In my view, to do so would breach the bipartisan commitment I gave to the Police Minister, and the Opposition is not prepared to do that. Nevertheless, while we are fulfilling our bipartisan commitment today, I set clearly on the record that we have opposed and are opposed to the use of the Medicare levy as a means of raising funds for the buyback of semiautomatic weapons. I state again our opposition to the use of the Medicare levy for that purpose. That money was intended for health and should stay there. To pursue buyback money in that way is inequitable and unfair on low income earners. Many of those people approached Opposition members and raised their concerns with us. I find great empathy with the struggling pensioner who is being required to skimp and save to pay a higher Medicare levy for the Federal Government's buyback plan.

I also raise a very serious concern that the Prime Minister, Mr Howard, must properly fund the States in the administration of these new gun laws. I do not believe that the Commonwealth fully appreciates how expensive it will be to administer these laws. I take heart from his comments in which he pledges to meet the full costs to the State of the administration of these new laws, and I hope that he fulfils that commitment. Again we will join with the Minister in a bipartisan way to pressure the Commonwealth to ensure that it does appropriately fund the administrative requirements of this legislation. As I said, I still do not believe the Commonwealth fully understands the ramifications of the costs involved. The goodwill that has been engendered in Australia as a result of the position taken by the Prime Minister will only remain while the Commonwealth is prepared to fund this legislation appropriately. All States and Territories are enacting virtually mirror legislation on this issue and that is a significant legislative and social achievement in this country in itself. It is an achievement that has not been easily won.

I am the first to admit that the tightening of our gun laws will cause many law-abiding, decent Australians a considerable degree of inconvenience and anxiety, but we need to keep this legislation in its proper context. It is not designed as an attack on the rights of individuals, rather it is an assurance that the rights and wishes of the vast majority of Australians are protected and respected. This Bill is the embodiment of the wishes of Australians as expressed by the collective viewpoints of all of their Governments, Federal, State and Territory, supported by their respective Oppositions. It is a unique achievement and one that must now be matched by proper education, monitoring and enforcement in order that we in this State and this country stamp ourselves as uniquely Australian in our approach to the public ownership and use of firearms. I believe that history will judge this Parliament kindly for the work it will do here today to amend the Weapons Act 1990. In the spirit of bipartisan support the Bill has had from the start, I commend this Bill to the House.

One of the strengths arising from this legislation, as I have stated, is the bipartisan approach and the fact that the shadow Police Minister, the Attorney and I could sit down at different stages with the Police Minister and other Ministers to discuss this legislation and what needed to be done. It is a shame that that bipartisan approach does not apply to other areas. Indeed, it could be extended. I hope that this legislation is seen as a model for future cooperation between the Opposition and the Government. However, some matters put at risk bipartisanship, such as the statement made today by Mr Carruthers. That statement indicates clearly that we have in

Queensland the worst political interference in the judicial system in the history of this State.

Mr Stoneman: How sick can you be?

Mr BEATTIE: The member is sick, all right. Dignity, integrity and honesty are important. Obviously to the member for Burdekin they have no significance; however, they do to the Opposition and they will to the future Government. The member may well snigger as he wallows in the attempts by the Government to downgrade the standards of this Parliament, but the people of Queensland will impose a very heavy price on him and others at the next election.

This legislation and how we behaved and conducted ourselves as members of Parliament are an important example to the State. Whether that bipartisan approach can be continued remains to be seen. I hope for—as I have indicated on a number of occasions—bipartisanship on a range of issues. However, it is sad to say that some events that have taken place today will make bipartisanship very difficult in the future.

Mr STONEMAN (Burdekin) (3.48 p.m.): I rise in this debate to support the Bill. In doing so, I place on record my pleasure in supporting the Minister in the very, very difficult job that he has had trying to weave, as much as possible, a practical line through a virtually impossible legislative command that has come to this Parliament from the Commonwealth. The way in which Russell Cooper as the Police Minister has done that and has allayed a lot of the fears of a lot of people—although he has not been able to achieve a total allaying of concerns—is a tribute to his practical understanding and recognition of honest firearm owners and users upon whom this legislation will most impact.

I know that it may have become a cliche, but all Australians shared the agony of the terrible Port Arthur tragedy and agonised with the families who suffered, as has been the case when any lunatic uses whatever method is at hand to bring suffering and pain on his fellow man. I do not believe that any form of retribution is savage enough to punish those people for the crimes that they have perpetrated. Nevertheless, I believe it is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve an outcome from the nation's reaction that is considered, practical and eminently achievable.

I declare my interest as a collector of firearms of modest proportion. I have two firearms that are proposed to be banned. I will be taking no part in seeking not to hand those in, although I am hopeful that I may be able to continue to use my shotgun for the purpose for which I bought it, that is, skeet shooting in the clay target environment. I am a member of a clay target shooting club. I am also patron of a pistol club. It is worth noting that over my many years of involvement in the use of practical firearms, I have never had any accident of any type. A gun has never gone off accidentally. None of my children has ever been involved in an accident because they have been brought up to not touch or handle firearms until they were considered to be of an age when they were allowed to do so under very careful supervision. I also say that, in relation to all of those firearms that I have had over the years, and still have, I have reloaded them so I know the firearm from go to whoa.

The Federal Government's reaction to the events at Port Arthur was conveyed by the Prime Minister in terms of the briefing paper, which most of us were able to see. In that paper, the Attorney-General asserted that all guns were dangerous. That was quite a ludicrous statement and only highlighted the many other emotional statements and impractical solutions that were made during the development of legislation after the events at Port Arthur. I have to say that the Attorney-General and, therefore, the Prime Minister have overlooked entirely the fact that no gun is dangerous until it is loaded and then it is not dangerous unless it is in the hands of an irresponsible person. However, sometimes a firearm does not have to be in the hands of a person to be dangerous. I refer to an old bush trap gun structure, which has been illegal for many, many years. It was used for shooting dingoes in very isolated areas. In that situation, a gun can be discharged by other than a person.

I think that the commitment by the Prime Minister in his very early statement to ban all automatic guns was an outrage and an insult because automatic firearms had been banned already for many, many years. In fact, I am not aware of any such guns that have been able to be held legally for three-quarters of a century. Nevertheless, those people who were listening to the news broadcast and who were being confronted daily and hourly with assertions from people that there should be a ban on automatic guns believed that those guns probably did exist legally. During those early days, at no stage did the Prime Minister acknowledge that such weapons had been banned for the greatest part of this century.

Those people who raised the matter of registration as the way to achieve commonsense and control of firearms overlooked the fact that concealable firearms

have had to be licensed and registered for 75 years—since 1923, or thereabouts. I have had one myself, although not for that long, but for a great proportion of that time. However, I suggest to members that there are still as many unlicensed concealable firearms in this State, or indeed Australia, as there are licensed concealable firearms. So we need to recognise that the use of registration as a control mechanism is a myth. Nevertheless, I am not suggesting that concealable firearms should be deregistered. The registration of those firearms has been in place and society is generally content with that.

Of course, reasonable people adhere to the rules of the game. The problem we have is that reasonable people are not the people who are causing the problems which occurred at Port Arthur and other areas or who are holding up banks and firing guns indiscriminately. Reasonable, sensible people do not do those things. That is why so many people are outraged that they have been swept up in this all-embracing legislative command that has come from the Commonwealth Government. That has given rise to anger at the Prime Minister's impractical refusal to accept that reducing the magazine capacity of shotguns is a reasonable idea. The Government Whip made mention of the fact that there are specifically manufactured automatic-loading shotguns that have a capacity for only two shots, yet they are on the banned list. As the member for Warwick said, the only difference between a two-shot side-by-side shotgun and a two-shot single shotgun is that the single-barrelled gun is lighter. Therefore, elderly people, young people or ladies find those guns easier to hold and point. Of course, the recoil is a very considerable factor, as is the fact that those guns are usually cheaper. In any case, other types of weapons, such as lever-action weapons or bolt-action weapons, can be reloaded very quickly. So the banning of those weapons is an emotional response that has been poorly thought through.

I find it very difficult to support a ban on .22 automatic-loading firearms. I have not owned such a rifle for many, many years. In fact, I have not owned one since my children were young, because I believed that such a gun served no useful purpose on my property. There was always the chance that a small child could accidentally load one of those firearms, so I have not had one since those days. However, I have had—and still have—an automatic-loading high-powered sporting rifle. It is not an assault rifle. In my view, the Commonwealth Government should never have allowed such rifles into Australia except in special circumstances. However, there are a lot of automatic-loading sporting rifles of about four shots, such as the one which I own, that have a very real place in society in some circumstances. I make the point that I have not used this firearm for about 15 years. So, apart from emotional reasons, it is not going to be a practical problem for me to hand in that rifle.

However, it is also worth noting the reasons and the basis upon which I originally purchased the rifle. The same situation would apply to many, many people although I again make the point that, in my experience, I do not believe that many people who own large properties really have a need to use automatic-loading firearms except in circumstances where feral pests and cattle have become a major problem, particularly on a heavily timbered property. I owned quite a large, heavily timbered property. It was a very well watered property. It had lots of natural water and lots of bores.

When the property became dry, the wild pigs would get into the troughs and the turkey's-nests that were watering the cattle. My property comprised 300-odd square miles of country. Consequently, I could not be at every watering spot every day. I would get there three or four days later—and sometimes even a week later—and discover that pigs had let the turkey's-nest out. I had tried trapping and poisoning. The member for Waterford referred to such circumstances and said that there was no need for automatic-loading high-powered rifles except in rare circumstances. I tried everything. I also had bolt-action rifles. The problem was that I would get one of the pigs as they ran away before they got into the timber but I would not get any more. So the pigs would come back and live on that turkey's-nest. I would not see them except by a fluke when the wind was blowing in the right direction and they did not hear me coming, because pigs are very sensitive to sound.

As I say, I tried poisoning, I tried trapping, I tried everything. When I bought this four-shot rifle, I found that I was able to get three or four of the pigs on each occasion, and mostly the sow and the boar. Then the little pigs, if they were small enough, would either die or not create a problem and I would pick them up later on. I was able to diminish the number of pigs on that property quite dramatically. In fact, I was able to do that to such an extent that I did not have trouble with pigs in the watering troughs and the turkey's-nests. That was a circumstance by which through no other

means was I able to reduce the problem of the pigs.

As I remember the speech of the member for Waterford, he said that graziers could hire rifles from a police station for as long as a week and overcome the problem of feral pests, then take back the rifle. I do not hold the member to saying those words exactly but I would have to say quite frankly that it is quite ridiculous for people to suggest such an action. In the instance to which I have referred, my property was 120 kilometres or 130 kilometres from the nearest small police station. Often the policeman was away 200 kilometres or 300 kilometres north so, when I reached the police station, he would not have been able to give me access to the firearm. If I had been able to get the firearm, I would have taken it home and hoped that I saw enough pigs to justify the 250 kilometre round trip. I would then keep the gun for a couple of days, take the gun back and have it locked up again. What a joke! The situation is even worse for people who live in the peninsula or the gulf or other far reaches of the State. What chance would they have? In limited circumstances, one needs access to a firearm for practical application, but it does not have to be an assault weapon. As I have said, I would not have an assault weapon myself and I see no reason for anyone to have that sort of firearm.

Like all members, I have had a lot of contact with members of the community who are outraged at the impact that this legislation will have. It is generally agreed that there is an enormous number of unlicensed gun owners in this State. While I hope that they will, I do not believe that all of those people will come forward—nor will all the guns that we are seeking to ban be handed in.

Other members have raised the point that gun owners will be recompensed for the value of their gun. In most instances, I believe that the values that have been laid down are fairly reasonable and practical, although it is interesting to note that my firearm is not even listed. I am not sure where I stand on that.

Mr Dollin interjected.

Mr STONEMAN: That could be right. Attached to my rifle is a telescopic sight worth several hundred dollars and a sight mount. I own another firearm that uses the same ammunition, but for many people the ammunition and all the other components of their guns become worthless. Owners will not be compensated for such items when they surrender their firearms. The people who, for whatever reason, do not want to justify the continuing ownership of their firearms will have to sell them on a market that will be swamped with similar firearms.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, guns are bought in good faith and are used for legal purposes. However, it would cost me three times as much to replace my skeet gun, for example, as the amount that I would get for it under the quite reasonable compensation package. While it may be argued that members in this place might or might not be able to afford such an expense, an enormous number of people will not have the capacity to replace the firearms that will be banned. For example, a person may use their grandad's old Browning shotgun, which is usually securely locked away, and may not want to join a club. That person will not have access to a gun if he or she cannot afford a replacement gun. Under this legislation, we may face situations such as that, and they can be quite dramatic.

I cannot understand why, when all the Police Ministers and the Federal Attorney-General were able to come to an agreement on limiting the magazine capacity of firearms, the Prime Minister—having talked about the consultative process—refused crimping point-blank simply because some whiz-kids in the Army decided that they could undo crimping in a certain amount of time. The fact of the matter is that a person who would take his gun to be crimped is not the sort of person who would undo the crimping.

Mr Springborg: It is illogical.

Mr STONEMAN: It is illogical. A gunsmith in my area has developed a process of crimping which results in the complete destruction of the gun if someone tries to undo it. I have great concerns about the meaning of "consultation" within the Prime Minister's vocabulary. I am disgusted that more credence was not given to the practical and legitimate work done by so many people who tried to meet the expectations of the community, the commands of the Prime Minister and the practical implications that flowed from people such as our Police Minister who tried to create practical gun legislation.

The practicality or otherwise of the legislation will relate ultimately to the amount of compliance that the community observes. In my view, the compliance level in Queensland is going to be nothing like that which is apparently occurring in other States. I genuinely hope that we have widespread compliance. However, if, through the regulatory process and as the legislation sees the light of day, we are seen to be screwing

down gun ownership too much, there will be massive non-compliance. Many people have accessories attached to their firearms which can be as expensive as the actual firearm; in many instances they are more expensive. We need to recognise and grapple with those practical components of the Bill, as does the Prime Minister, because those are the issues that will create problems within the community.

I pay tribute to those who have been involved in discussions in my electorate, particularly in the Townsville and Bowen areas. While firearm owners and users in my electorate were upset at many of the suggestions that have been made, they have come to accept that there needs to be legislation to tighten the firearm laws as much as is realistically possible. I do not believe that this legislation will stop the next hatter from creating havoc and I do not believe it will stop the next tragedy, which I hope will never be in any of our lifetimes. Unfortunately, if and when such a tragedy occurs, undoubtedly there will be another outcry for a total ban on guns and further anger will be directed at legitimate owners of firearms. An enormous proportion of gun owners never shoot at a living thing. It has been years since I shot anything, except for the odd pig on my son-in-law's property or my property. Most shooters fire at inanimate objects—pieces of paper, clay targets or bullseyes. People get an enormous amount of enjoyment from such an activity, both in a family sense and in an individual sense. Those people stand to lose the most from the introduction of this legislation, which I nevertheless support.

Time expired.

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeronga) (4.08 p.m.): I wish to advance three propositions in this debate: firstly, there is a need to change basic attitudes towards guns; secondly, the so-called right to bear arms is a nonsense; and, thirdly, there is a need to ensure privacy safeguards with regard to the data collected on the registration of firearms and shooters.

The need to change basic attitudes towards guns was made manifest to all Australian people following the shocking events at Port Arthur. The message from the community is plain enough: business as usual is not good enough. We have been receiving this message for many years from victims of crime, victims of domestic violence and, in recent months, we have heard it loud and clear from the community as a whole. Accordingly, I welcome the bipartisan approach adopted on this issue. If basic attitudes are to change, the elected representatives of the people need to work together. Accordingly, the Opposition joins with the Government in supporting this legislation.

I turn to the so-called right to bear arms which has been advanced as an argument by opponents of this Bill. The argument is a nonsense. The capacity of a person to bear arms is a privilege, not a right. Firstly, it must be justified and, secondly, it can be taken away in the interests of public safety. This proposition is so elementary that it hardly needs authority. That is fairly obvious to my constituents who live in Moorooka, following the hold-up of an armoured car outside the Westpac Bank just before last Christmas. There was a Bonnie-and-Clyde style shoot-out and people were subjected to a most shocking event.

What happens as a consequence is that there is little need to convince them of the proposition that there is no right to bear arms. It is a basic concept in modern society that the right to bear arms is no more a right than the right to bear explosives or to have possession of prescription pharmaceuticals or military artillery, all of which are dangerous and are not regarded by the community as things which people should have as a matter of course. The argument in respect of the right to bear arms is really advanced only by those who cling to an outmoded view of history.

In this respect, I refer to the argument which is advanced frequently that this right finds its origin in the Bill of Rights of William and Mary. The Bill of Rights of William and Mary of 1689 set out certain provisions in respect of the bearing of arms. The preamble to that Bill of Rights stated—

> "Whereas the late King James the Second, by the assistance of divers evil counsellors, judges and ministers employed by him, did endeavour to subvert and extirpate the Protestant religion and the laws and liberties of this kingdom . . ."

It went on later—

> "By causing several good subjects being Protestants to be disarmed at the same time when papists were both armed and employed contrary to law . . ."

And it stated further on—

> "That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law . . ."

The point is that the reference to the bearing of arms is a reference to the need for a militia

in a circumstance of post civil war. The arguments advanced in respect of an absolute right of citizens to bear arms are confused with the historical references to the need for a militia. The historical outline of the development of this concept I dealt with in a speech on 4 September 1990. I will not go over the detail again. Suffice it to say that the so-called right to bear arms is a furphy.

I will deal with the argument advanced in respect of the Constitution of the United States of America. I point out that that again was proclaimed in the context of military conflict. The relevant provision is as follows—

> "A well regulated Militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms shall not be infringed."

That is, the so-called right to bear arms is expressed only in the context of the absence of a well-regulated militia. Living as we do with a modern Police Service, the argument is no longer valid. Indeed, the principles set out in the Bill of Rights of William and Mary on this point have been dealt with by the Westminster Parliament on many occasions going back to at least the Seizure of Arms Act 1820, the details of which are set out in my earlier speech. It is worth at least dealing briefly with that point, because one does hear it argued so often in the flurry of public debate that this legislation or other limitations are an infringement of some basic human rights. That is a nonsense in historical, legal and constitutional terms.

Let me deal with the third proposition I wish to advance, namely, that there is a need for privacy in respect of the data which is gathered in relation to firearms and shooters. This exercise involves the gathering of large amounts of information across the nation. As such, it is information in the hands of police not in relation to persons who are alleged to have committed any offence but in relation to the activities of law-abiding citizens. As such, we need to be vigilant to ensure that stringent privacy safeguards are enforced. I urge the Honourable the Police Minister to have regard to the need for privacy safeguards in his administration of the legislation.

In conclusion, I make the observation that a bipartisan approach is fundamental to the rule of law. It is fundamental to the independent administration of justice. However, I join with the Leader of the Opposition in expressing my dismay and disappointment with the actions of the Government which have led to the announcement by Mr Carruthers today and to the attack upon the independent administration of justice that has come about.

Mr FitzGerald: What did the Government do—nothing!

Mr FOLEY: What did the Government do? The Government set up a commission of inquiry designed to attack the CJC and the Carruthers inquiry, and designed to pre-empt its outcome. That is what the Government did. The Government set up a creature of Government. The Government acted through the Governor in Council. There should be no doubt as to how the Government acted in that matter. However, by contrast, in relation to the Bill before the House, the Government has acted in consultation with the other Governments of the Commonwealth and the States and with the Opposition and, accordingly, has the support of the Opposition.

Mr ROWELL (Hinchinbrook) (4.18 p.m.): The level of support for gun control varies between different sectors of the community. To many people, firearms are used for recreational shooting or as a tool—very often for pest control—and are respected. Guns are treated very responsibly by this group and, despite the fact that they are lethal objects, only a small number of incidents have caused personal harm. Usually, personal injuries result only when firearms are handled by novices.

Those who have a fear of firearms can feel threatened by the presence of a gun and, consequently, want them banned. However, it does not matter what form of legislation or what penalties are introduced, there will always be people who will own firearms illegally, and they are the group which no law will control. The most important aspect of gun ownership is a person's motive for owning a gun. That is an important factor to determine. The Prime Minister thought that, by adopting the measure of not allowing persons to own a weapon if they could not establish the need for one, in some fanciful way he might resolve the type of problem that occurred at Port Arthur. What he does not seem to have come to grips with is the fact that it is not the gun but the person behind the trigger that causes the gun to be activated.

When it is deemed appropriate, we are prepared to train a person in the use of a weapon. It is politicians who send people off to war to protect a belief or defend our country. World War II veterans have rung me about their service .303, which they have retained, saying that nobody is going to take their rifle away from them. Of course, they can go through the process of obtaining a collector's licence to retain their rifle, but they are

aggravated by the need to do so. Unfortunately, the extreme element of the gun lobby has made it more difficult to arrive at a rational position.

Many of the constituents in my electorate want the status quo to be maintained. Gun ownership is high and the level of misuse of firearms is insignificant. The gun type that is purchased will cater for a wide variety of uses, and gun purchases are not based on any of the gung-ho perceptions that may be suggested. The use of a gun for pest control has a history that started with many of the living pioneers who developed the country over the past 50 years and longer. Isolation also creates difficulties for people who live some distance from police stations. While the use of a firearm for personal protection may never have been a valid reason for owning a gun, in certain situations it can act as a deterrent. Australia, and more particularly Queensland, is comprised of a number of towns and cities where services are more readily available than they are in the more sparsely populated areas. People in country Queensland are often left to resolve their own problems.

Martin Bryant killed 35 people and wounded 18 in the tragic event at Port Arthur.

Mr Radke: You can't say that. You have to say "allegedly"!

Mr ROWELL: "Allegedly". The repetitive coverage provided by the electronic and print media of this sad event could have the undesirable effect of inciting a similar type of person to unleash their angst on society. Will the image-building effect have an impact on a person who could be stimulated by the hype that was created by the coverage of the event?

One of the issues that needs to be more closely examined is the reason behind significant gun-related crimes. The stability of a country's economy and social problems can have a major effect on crimes that are gun related. Different races have a varying propensity within a country for abnormal levels of gun-related incidents. Black male teenagers in Washington, DC, have a murder rate hundreds of times greater than that of the white population. This is attributed to drugs, racial disharmony and a violent film culture.

There is a perception that if the proposed gun law restrictions do not actually prevent a repeat of mass killings witnessed so vividly on our TV screens, then they possibly may reduce them. The Hoddle Street shooting in Melbourne in 1987 was perpetrated by Julian Knight with a semiautomatic military-style rifle. He shot 26 people, killing seven. This was replicated soon after when eight people were killed in Queen Street, Melbourne. Then in 1991 in Strathfield, New South Wales, Wade Frankum cut loose with a semiautomatic Chinese assault rifle, killing six people. The seventh person was killed with a knife. A diversity of enlightened opinions about these devastating behaviours have been forthcoming. In 1984 in the USA, James Huberty shot up a McDonalds in California, killing 21 people, because he was chronically angry that he had lost his job the week before. This seemed to tip him over the edge. These are only a few of the atrocities that have occurred in recent times. No doubt there are other human time bombs walking around yet to be detected.

At a meeting on 10 May this year, after it was moved to ban not just military-style semiautomatics but also a range of other weapons in Australia, Prime Minister Howard said—

> "I don't pretend for a moment that this decision can prevent the recurrence of tragedies in the future, but it does represent a tactical, powerful, effective legislative and governmental response to a problem."

Those who have a desire to vent their anger on society by taking human life may look for some other manner of releasing their anguish. As recently as 1995 in Oklahoma we saw the catastrophic mass killing of 168 people when a bomb made from easy-to-obtain components demolished a building. The information on how to make the bomb was simply obtained on the Internet. The Whisky Au-Go-Go arson incident in Brisbane—the biggest assault on human life prior to Port Arthur—resulted in 15 people losing their lives in a petrol bomb disaster. It is frightening when we think of highly patronised sporting events where people could be susceptible to attack by unhinged minds that have no respect for their fellow man.

At times there will be early warning signals of which notice needs to be taken. It is difficult to be aware of the frustration that drives a person to the brink of committing an act that is abhorrent to society. Proposed section 129B of the amendment Bill allows a doctor or a psychologist who is of the opinion that a patient may be an unsuitable person to possess a firearm to inform the Commissioner of Police. This may, in some instances, avert a serious domestic violence situation or even a situation similar to the events at Port Arthur. It is pleasing to note from the Scrutiny of

Legislation Committee's Alert Digest that the Australian Medical Association, the Australian Psychological Society and other groups have explicitly supported this provision. When the resolutions were being discussed soon after the events at Port Arthur, I received a letter from Dr Steven Phillips, the then President of the AMA, saying that I must support the uniform gun laws. I wrote back to him saying that there should also be an obligation on the profession with regard to people who are not suitable to possess a firearm. Proposed section 129B will assist to address this situation as, from time to time, it will come to the attention of medical practitioners that there are people who could cause harm to others if they possessed a firearm.

Much has been said about the Bill of Rights 1688 and the rights of individuals to bear arms. The previous speaker had something to say about that. A citizen's right to bear arms appears to have come about from the conflict that was occurring between papists—that is, Catholics—and Protestants during that period hundreds of years ago. The Bill of Rights addresses the matter in the section dealing with "Subjects' arms", where it states—

> "That the subjects which are Protestants may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and as allowed by law."

Nothing is specifically said about firearms in that legislation. Hand-held firearms in those days were muzzle-loading devices that required considerable skill to load and had a limited range. It was not until the nineteenth century that the types of refinements that we know today were manufactured. Alert Digest No. 7 at 7.5 to 7.8 states—

> "The right is partially recognised in the English Bill of Rights 1688. Article 7 states:
>
> > That the subjects . . . may have arms for their defence suitable to their conditions and allowed by law.
>
> The phrase 'allowed by law' specifically contemplates the legal regulation of firearms. The drafters of the Bill of Rights wanted to ensure that the Crown did not take away arms without the warrant of legislation (or possibly common law).
>
> In the United Kingdom . . . the English Bill of Rights can be amended by Parliament or simply overridden by subsequent inconsistent legislation. In virtually all such jurisdictions, weapons control legislation has superseded Article 7.
>
> The English Bill of Rights is law in Queensland to the extent that it is not inconsistent with subsequent legislation valid in Queensland."

Should a person be able to establish a genuine need for owning a firearm, in the event the weapon is required for personal protection where it is considered that equal force is necessary, the Criminal Code could apply. A genuine reason for possessing a firearm would include membership of a shooters club, being a primary producer or being a professional shooter. Heirlooms have to be rendered permanently inoperable. Collectors will be able to hold category A, B, C and H firearms manufactured after 1990 that are to be made temporarily inoperable, but category D and category R firearms have to be rendered permanently inoperable. The collectors do not necessarily have to be a member of a club.

Mr FitzGerald: After 1900.

Mr ROWELL: Sorry, 1900. Generally, storage conditions for firearms are similar to the current requirement in the State. Many gun owners should be able to establish a genuine reason for owning a gun in the A and B category. Category A and B firearms generally include centre-fire, lever action and bolt action and rim fire plus single and double-barrelled shotguns. However, generally, only primary producers will have access to category C firearms, which will include one .22 semiautomatic with a maximum magazine of 10 rounds of ammunition and a semiautomatic shotgun or pump-action shotgun of a maximum magazine capacity of five rounds.

There are many people dissatisfied with this amendment Bill. Many gun owners throughout the northern section of the State have been very vocal about the effects of the legislation. Meetings in Ingham on a number of occasions have attracted 250 people; in El Arish, 200; and in Babinda, 1,000-plus. A resolution that came from the Herbert River Firearm Owners Association states—

> "I hereby call upon Mr Marc ROWELL to convey our dissatisfaction of the proposals to the Parliament of Queensland and to advise, that it should discard the proposed amendments entirely.
>
> It should instead establish an effective and meaningful prohibited persons register."

They then went on to say that the second suggestion brought forward at the meeting was for the proposal of holding a referendum.

It is disappointing that Prime Minister Howard would not accept the crimping of magazines, and this has already been discussed by other speakers. Many professional people and organisations have the capacity to use these rifles quite safely. A number of organisations have certainly considered it to be the best situation. It was considered by experts the Prime Minister consulted with that the crimping could be reversed, but who, after having the magazine capacity reduced, would want to have the situation reversed? This factor has significantly added to the cost of the buyback scheme. There are inconsistencies, as has already been explained, such as a two-shot semiautomatic shotgun being in category C, but a double-barrelled shotgun being in category B. Both of those firearms have much the same ability. Five-shot capacity pump-action shotguns require an action to load them, as do category B guns, but they are in category C with self-loading firearms.

The rationale laid down by the Prime Minister is hard to follow. The buyback scheme is funded by the 0.2 per cent increase in Medicare for one year for prohibited weapons, ending 30 September 1997. Firearms in category C and D only with a value of less than $2,500 will be paid for at the list price; those that exceed a book value of $2,500 can be paid for at the list price or arbitrated on for their value.

Minister Russell Cooper has done a sterling job with this legislation. His staff have been available to respond to many sensitive questions when requests have been made for information. Due to the diverse nature of the State, such a demand to satisfy the wide expectations with uniform firearm control laws was almost impossible. I would really like to congratulate Mr Cooper on the massive effort he has made in attempting to do just that because throughout the State we have a diversity of interest of people who own firearms and it was never going to be easy to satisfy everybody's needs.

Mr DOLLIN (Maryborough) (4.35 p.m.): All I can say about this legislation is that it is, at best, one great shemozzle. It is neither your elbow nor your ankle; it achieves nothing and pleases nobody and is a prime waste of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money. Battling families have been paying extra on their Medicare levy since 1 July this year, even before this legislation was in place. I believe that it is unlawful and immoral to ask hard-working families, battling to make ends meet, to be asked to buy somebody else's gun when in most cases they do not own a gun and, even if they did, they would not be able to afford or be allowed to keep them under this legislation.

Prime Minister Howard should have had the guts to call this levy what it really is, that is, a gun tax, and apply it only to those with an income of $35,000-plus instead of further flogging the battlers. As I said at the beginning, this legislation pleases nobody—not the farmer, not the sporting shooters and very few rural residents. I have had numerous women contact me saying that their nearest neighbour is 5 kilometres away, sometimes up to 50 kilometres or 100 kilometres away, and that their husbands very often work away, which leaves these women and their children alone at night—quite often four nights a week. They have told me that without a .22 handy, they will not be able to sleep at night. I can understand their fear, for how will they protect themselves and their children when they have to give up their legal guns? Will they beat off the intruders and robbers and rapists with a broom? Mr Howard has taken away the rights and the means of these women under these circumstances of defending themselves and their children.

On the other hand, this legislation will not please the anti-gun lobby because it does not remove many guns out of the community and does nothing at all to prevent a similar situation to that which took place in Hobart. This is because there will be thousands of semiautomatic guns still within the community that can be easily stolen by nuts and criminals who want them. As I have said before, this gun issue is a great shemozzle that will do next to nothing to stop the misuse of weapons. It will tie up thousands of police officers across the nation who could be doing something far more beneficial for the community. I strongly believe that the remanufacturing of magazines would have been a far better option than the destruction of millions of dollars worth of guns that will need to be replaced with a legal version in many cases.

I believe that most people mistakenly believe that this legislation was banning automatic and semiautomatic guns only. Most of the population still have not realised that just about all guns will be prohibited—single-shot .22s, the lot, even air rifles—and there will not be any compensation paid to people without a genuine reason but with non-banned weapons. A genuine reason is membership of

a shooting club, rural landowners and people with proof of permission to shoot on rural land. Security and storage will be a very expensive additional cost.

I have polled my electorate of Maryborough thoroughly and even-handedly and the result was 65-35 pro gun, that is, 65 per cent of people in my electorate are against the Howard coalition legislation. I believe this gives a good indication that many people—especially rural people—do not support Prime Minister Howard's legislation for a whole range of reasons. This is the Federal coalition's National Party legislation—a Government that enjoys a majority of 45 members in the Federal Parliament. With this large majority, Prime Minister Howard and Mr Fischer are capable of shoving through just about any legislation they desire.

I believe that the hundreds of millions of dollars that will be spent on compensation and policing of this weapons legislation would have saved tenfold the number of lives if it were to be spent on hospitals, preventive medicine and road safety and it would not divide a nation. I condemn absolutely the mad, redneck fools of Gympie and other places, the likes of McNiven and Owens, who did the decent, average law-abiding gun owners of this nation nothing but harm with their stupidity. One of the worst features of this legislation is that many honest, decent, law-abiding citizens will be made criminals because of their fear of violence to themselves and their families. This will stop them from handing in their guns, and that will be a great pity.

I will now read in part from speeches made in this House in 1990 by a few members speaking against the Labor weapons legislation of that time—legislation that a great majority of Queenslanders would now dearly love to retain. I refer to *Hansard* of 4 September 1990, page 3426. The speaker was the honourable Mr Russell Cooper, the member for Crows Nest. He stated—

> "On 5 June, in this House, as shadow Minister for Police I outlined the National Party's policy on gun laws and stated—
>
> > 'The National Party is against any ban on or licence for rifles or long arms. It believes that there should be enforced penalty provisions on offenders in the use of firearms and stricter provisions for the storage of weapons. The National Party will continue to support the present licensing for concealable weapons. However, the licence should be for the owner and not for the concealable firearm. Owners should obtain a licence for five years rather than the present two years, and an owner's licence should list the concealable weapons which he owns. The National Party believes that there should be no licence necessary for possession of a long arm and there should be no cooling-off period or need for a permit to purchase.' "

I refer again to *Hansard* of 4 September 1990, page 3419. The speaker was the Honourable Mr Lingard. He stated—

> "This Weapons Bill is just the start of the ALP policy to licence all gun-owners in Australia. It is the start of the ALP policy to register all guns. Clearly, it is the start of the ALP policy to have everyone's name on a list. Then the ALP can eventually have uniform laws throughout Australia, which will give it absolute control over all gun-owners.
>
> . . .
>
> 'Personally, I no longer support the idea of licensing for long arms and believe we should concentrate on strict regulations at sale, identification, cooling-off period etc, and requirements for the storage of rifles.'
>
> What happened to Eric Shaw? Where is he now? He was sacked. He is out of this Parliament. The Government does not want that sort of philosophy in the ALP, because it is getting ready to take control of all guns. People who are concerned that guns will be banned have real cause for concern."

I refer again to *Hansard* of 4 September 1990, pages 3448 and 3449. The speaker was the Honourable Mr Perrett. He said—

> "I welcome this opportunity to take part in this debate and at least bring some sanity back into it because, despite all the flair of the honourable member for Yeronga, he did not come up with one point that has absolutely convinced me of the necessity for this legislation.
>
> This Bill marks the beginning of a police State in Queensland and the duplication of crazy, foolish and worthless legislation from southern States which has already failed and which is making criminals out of everybody. Its language is that of a police State. A Stalin or Hitler

could not have worded it better to enable the State to go after the law-abiding and honest citizen who has the pride to defend himself against the bullies, the thugs and the criminal element that this Government so favours."

Mr Ardill: What about the Indonesians?

Mr DOLLIN: I have not got to them yet. Mr Perrett continued—

"Today, by this legislation the Government is trying to make criminals of a third of the State's population. By opening up a police State special branch that boggles the imagination and that will be a ruthless, vicious and direct assault upon the freedom of all Queenslanders, it is going after law-abiding Queenslanders, not criminals.

. . .

This is police-State legislation. The police can knock down a citizen's door, fingerprint him and take a mug shot of him. They can invade a citizen's house and, if he resists, they can use force to gun him down. It is extremist legislation put together by people with a peculiar hatred of free people and an overdependence on bureaucratic power and police standover tactics.

. . .

I am sure that, once elected, National Party members will move quickly to rid Queensland of this obnoxious legislation and all its abuses of civil liberties and the rights of citizens to own, carry and use firearms in a free society liberated from oppressive socialism and all it has come to stand for in the prison camps of the world.

. . .

The licensing provisions of this Bill are horrific enough to frighten even the toughest of red-tape specialists. The workload that they will generate will most certainly create backlogs, bottlenecks, mass armies of paper-shufflers, buck-passers and the frustration of long and senseless delays of the minutest of things.

. . .

I challenge the Government to put this legislation to a referendum."

That would have been a good idea. Mr Perrett continued—

"It would be defeated heavily, despite all the bleeders and do-gooders and despite the Minister's humbug. This Bill is not the way to go. It is the police State road—the road to massive secret files on everybody—and the creation of oppressive bureaucracy.

When firearm-owners realise what the Minister is giving them, some may want to support him. However, I believe that the great majority will tell him to take a long walk off a short dock and will then go about their business as usual."

We are hearing a different tune today. Is it any wonder that National Party supporters feel that they have been sold out and deceived by the party they elected? It gave one guarantee after another that, when elected, it would abolish most, if not all, restrictions on guns. This is its policy, and it will have to live with it.

Mrs WILSON (Mulgrave) (4.46 p.m.): In rising to join this debate on what must, by any account, be a landmark piece of legislation for this State, and which also has divided this country and, indeed, individual homes, I would firstly like to congratulate the Minister for Police on the manner in which he has handled the extremely emotive and often harrowing public gun debate. Extensive consultations with relevant stakeholders and negotiations with the Federal Government and other Police Ministers were undertaken specifically on the eleven APMC resolutions of 10 May, which form the basis of this legislation, and, finally, the drafting of the Weapons Act amendments which we are debating today, with a final consultation on 13 and 14 June with some 30 independent groups to whom the proposed legislation and the underpinning policy was explained. Final comments were invited from those groups as to the APMC resolutions and how they would be embodied in the legislation. Gradually, a sense of understanding developed, and the availability of the proposed Weapons Amendment Bill provided the community with opportunities for further comment. The overwhelming reaction right across the country to the tragic events at Port Arthur was one of "something must be done" to try to address the availability of weapons, particularly automatic and semiautomatic weapons available in society.

On Wednesday, 5 June, the national executive of the Returned & Services League endorsed a motion that a national firearms register be established. They supported bans and congratulated the Government and the Opposition on their courageous and bipartisan approach to the gun issue. The overriding concern expressed by the Prime Minister and many people was that we were heading in the

same direction as America and that we would end up a gun society.

The underlying principle driving public debate at the time—and this has been encapsulated in the Bill—was that "weapon possession and use are subordinate to the need to ensure public and individual safety" and that "public and individual safety is improved by imposing strict controls on the possession of weapons, and requiring the safe and secure storage and carriage of weapons." It was recognised that if anything meaningful was to be done about gun laws, the effort had to be nationally uniform to counter any chances of a cross-jurisdictional illegal gun trade.

Despite the very vocal criticism which followed, there was an immediate and unwavering commitment and immediate response by this Government to the principle of national uniform gun laws, despite the manner in which the federally drafted resolutions were virtually unilaterally imposed on the States without due and considered regard to their enforcement or workability and, indeed, cost. Queensland quite rightly pushed to get agreement for a more measured and sensible approach to gun law reform. I think the result has been a tough but fair registration and licensing system with which the majority of gun owners will be prepared to comply.

It was a coincidence that Australia's first gold medal at the recent Olympic Games was achieved by a gun shooter, Michael Diamond. There was a fear that this would not happen again and that the gun shoot would have to be done without. So Australia got global recognition in a couple of ways.

I have handed out tens of copies of the proposed Bill to my own constituents. Whereas the feedback and responses I have had have been minimal, I have passed these to the Minister for his consideration. There has been a sense of recognition in my electorate and an acceptance—although not 100 per cent positive acceptance—but that is something with which they are going to cope. The Minister visited the Mulgrave electorate and spoke with gun owners and retailers. He personally dealt with their comments and concerns voiced at that meeting on a personal basis. I thank him for this. The gun owners expressed their appreciation of his visit and this difficult time. I also commend the Minister for his foresight and commitment to letting the legislation sit on the table for a reasonable amount of time to allow for public debate and comment, and the dissemination of just plain factual information on its contents. For instance, concerns were held that restrictions would be placed on young people under supervision participating in gun shoots. In fact, there is no change in the current legislation. Concerns were also voiced about elite shoots, that is, through the Olympics, storage and minimal quantities of ammunition. They have all been addressed subsequent to representations by the community.

It is fair to say that this legislation will not, nor was it ever going to, satisfy everyone. It will not guarantee that no more events such as the Port Arthur event will occur. However, I think we have, as the Minister set out to achieve, practical and workable legislation within the terms of the APMC resolutions. It is disappointing that the Prime Minister refused to consider the crimping of weapons when that was overwhelmingly supported by gun shooters and the community. Certainly the prospect of tighter controls over firearm ownership provoked an outpouring of intense anger and pain from sections of the community. Indeed, that anger still exists in many people. That anger and outrage, while understandable, was accompanied by a great deal of misunderstanding about the proposed laws—what they would mean and the extent to which they would be an imposition on law-abiding people going about their everyday lives. Many of those people believe that this imposition was simply a knee-jerk reaction. The danger of guns is in the management by an individual. The gun shoots that I have attended only tended to indicate clearly to me the very safe methods and rules that exist for club members. It is no wonder that a burst of outrage and anger rose from those members. I thank the many gun owners who spoke to me and identified their concerns in a sensible manner. Farmers became alarmed when they believed that they would be restricted in their usage of guns in feral animal control. Of course they need automatic guns. Many of them talked about facing boars and pigs on their properties and they worried about having only a single-shot gun to control them.

I think most reasonable people, and reasonable gun owners—of which there are many—were prepared to work through the consultation process to achieve a workable and practical outcome, and this has been achieved to a large degree. The gun debate—and certainly the media debate—was hijacked by a fervent minority determined to derail the process and drown it in misinformation and hysteria. Their increasingly rabid hysteria ultimately worked against them with public support, and indeed the support of

responsible gun owners, firmly swinging against them. Despite the distraction provided by the hype and hysteria of the few, the majority of gun owners—the likes of farmers and sporting shooters—although angry at the imposition of more stringent gun laws, were willing to get on with the task of consultation, negotiation, understanding and working out a reasonable and workable outcome.

Early in the public debate of this issue I became aware, certainly within my own electorate, of some of the grave concerns and outrage of gun owners over the prospect of new gun laws. I called a meeting at Babinda, which in excess of 1,000 people attended. People from both within the electorate and outside it came to communicate their concerns to the Government. I am satisfied that many of those concerns have been addressed adequately in the Bill. That meeting was a baptism of fire for me, with people of all ages attending. It was interesting to note that many women attended. They spoke with feeling. People spoke who had been through horrendous wars and felt intimidated by gun laws being imposed upon them—and rightly so. Top of the list of people's concern was the suspicion that all guns would summarily be taken off them. This most certainly is not the case. The Bill provides for bans on specific types of firearms while still allowing a broad cross-section of weapon ownership provided the appropriate licensing and registration is undertaken. It also provides for a compensation scheme for the return of banned weapons. Of course, whether full compliance will occur remains to be seen. I do not believe that we have any idea of the number of guns that are actually owned in this State.

Most importantly, concessions were fought for, and won, in the case of primary producers having access to category D automatic and semiautomatic centre-fire rifles in instances where there is a demonstrated need. The control of pests and vermin, or, as has unfortunately been the case in Queensland in recent years, the destruction of drought-affected stock, have been designated as appropriate reasons for primary producers to have access to category D weapons. There is still a sense of anxiety felt by some of those in the fisheries industry in respect of gun registration. However, the legislation in relation to that still stands.

In terms of licensing, there are a number of provisions in the Bill that are entirely sensible and reasonable, particularly the requirement for applicants to have a genuine reason for possession of a weapon. The reasons listed in the Bill are specific, without being overly restrictive and include the interests of a variety of people, such as sport and target shooters, recreational shooters, collectors and people requiring weapons for occupational reasons, such as security guards.

I recently received and tabled a Statewide petition of some 2,700 signatories, which raised the issue of the right of gun owners to possess weapons for personal protection. The fact is that personal protection has never been enshrined in Queensland law as a reason for having a licence. Citizens are able to use their firearms to protect themselves, but only if they satisfy the test of equal force. The question of equal force may be tested by the courts, and that has always been the case, and will remain the case. There is no change in the current Weapons Bill. It is also entirely reasonable that persons wishing to be licensed to possess a firearm should have as a prerequisite safety training for the use, storage and maintenance of the weapon, as well as having suitable storage facilities. So many accidents involving guns can be put down to inappropriate storage of guns or unsafe handling of a weapon. Statistics gathered on gun injuries between 1988 and 1993 under the Queensland Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project show that over half or 56 per cent of the gunshot injuries occurred at the person's own home, while 31 per cent of the injured were children under 15 years of age. Furthermore, the number of in-patient separations from Queensland hospitals in respect of gunshot wounds in 1994-95 was 160. Of that total, 85 were classified as accidental, and of the 135 deaths caused by firearms in 1995, seven were accidents; so it is vitally important that all gun owners are highly aware and conscious of the proper safety precautions and storage of their weapons.

The licensing of firearms owners and registration of weapons is one aspect of this legislation in which I am particularly interested, in view of my capacity as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care. I attended public meetings and rallies called in support of the proposed amendments. The meetings were attended by many of those involved in the domestic violence field who were anxious that the strictest controls be imposed. Guns are often a part of the domestic violence equation, particularly in relation to intimidation of victims. I am aware that grave concerns exist that the amendments may have gone too far.

An important aspect of the legislation is whether an individual is deemed to be a "fit and proper person" to hold a licence which

includes the mental and physical fitness of the person, whether the person has been convicted of an offence relating to the misuse of drugs, an offence involving a weapon, or the use or threatened use of violence, or if the person has been subject to a domestic violence order. The Bill provides avenues for not only the suspension or revocation of a person's licence if he or she is no longer deemed to be a "fit and proper" person but also the surrender of any weapons held by the licensee under the licence. The benefit of a weapons registration system that records details of each firearm linked to the person's licence is that police officers would be aware of the number or type of weapons that an individual may have in his or her possession. In respect of domestic violence, the registration of weapons is quite significant.

The provision in the Bill for disclosure by doctors and psychologists of information relating to the suitability of a person to possess a firearm—and indemnity if they should choose that course of action—is another landmark development. While concerns have been raised regarding the sanctity of doctor/patient confidentiality, doctors can sometimes be in receipt of information about their patients that may be cause for concern, particularly in relation to violent or threatening tendencies, or indications that they may harm themselves or others. It is thought, and has been accepted by the AMA which is supportive of this provision, that the broader considerations of public safety outweigh the individual's right to privacy.

I think many owners of prohibited weapons under this Bill will be satisfied—albeit not 100 per cent—with the compensation package offered to them. The experience interstate to date has shown this to be the case, and compensations schemes in Victoria in particular have received overwhelming support. The APMC has also resolved to assist certain dealers who lose business as a result of the resolution. I would urge the Commonwealth to continue to contribute a fairer amount to Queensland for the administration of the new gun laws. By all accounts, Queensland has the largest number of weapons in the nation and is coming off the lowest base in terms of licensing and registration. We have never had a comprehensive licensing and registration system before in this State and it is a massive administrative impost that—to be fair to shooters in this State—must be completed by September 1997. It is almost an unreasonable impost.

We want to get started on fulfilling our end of the bargain in terms of implementing the nationally agreed legislation. The Commonwealth, which has been able to raise substantial extra revenue to pay for new gun laws, must be more reasonable in meeting the extraordinary needs of Queensland. I thank the Minister and officers involved for the many hours taken to reach this point. I thank Opposition members also for the bipartisan stance on this matter. I wish the Bill speedy passage so that the legislative machinery is in place in order for the important next stage, the implementation of the gun buyback and licensing and registration scheme, to begin. I support the Bill.

Mr PEARCE (Fitzroy) (5 p.m.): Firstly, in joining this debate on the Weapons Amendment Bill I wish to make several brief statements before going into more detail about some aspects of the legislation and the process. The 20 minutes allocated to members to speak to legislation which has such wide-ranging impacts on all Queenslanders is insufficient. However, those are the rules of the debate and we have to live with that.

Let me start off by saying that I do not own a firearm. I would not allow one in my home. That is my personal decision. That should not be taken out of context and it should not suggested that I am totally against people who, for one reason or another, may wish to own a firearm. Like me, those people have made a decision, and that is their choice. I was raised on the land and taught how to use and respect a firearm. I was educated in the safe use of a firearm and know full well that firearms are part of the tools of trade for landowners. As a 20-year-old, I was called up for national service, trained in the use of machine guns and self-loading rifles and, by being sent to Vietnam, was given a licence to kill. Fortunately, I was not involved in any major conflict, but I have seen what firearms of the sort used at Port Arthur can do to humans. I can say to members that it is not a pretty sight.

I believe that the Bill before the House is a sham. It does not treat all Queensland firearm owners equally. Some people who comply with certain requirements of the Act will get to keep their firearms, but many ordinary Queenslanders will feel the full impact of the new laws. It does nothing to address the real public issue of criminals with firearms, because they will simply not comply. There are people who will hand in their firearms quite willingly. Some people will be compensated; others will not be compensated. Some people will join

gun clubs and others will receive letters of approval from landowners to shoot on their properties. Those people will be licensed to own guns because they will have a genuine reason for that.

Yes, this amending legislation outlaws semiautomatic military-style firearms for all but a few who have a genuine reason to own such guns, such as because of their occupation—professional shooters. To be honest, I do not have a problem with that so as long as the military-style rifles are taken out of mainstream society. This legislation also takes out of society other firearms. However, it takes them away from those persons who are least likely to use them to commit an offence. They are being asked to surrender their firearms—some without compensation—while others will simply ignore the new gun laws as they have always done. The new laws will create a new group in the community who are hostile towards the need to comply with giving a genuine reason, who will take the risk and not hand in their firearms. That is a reality, and one that I encourage people to think about seriously. Those people face criminal charges if they refuse to give up what they believe is their right to own a firearm. I will talk more about that later.

In common with everybody else, I want Australia to be a safer place not only from guns but also from drug-related crime and from other forms of violence. As an elected representative of the people, I have a responsibility to support well thought out laws that achieve maximum outcomes. The Weapons Amendment Bill takes away firearms from some people and allows others to carry on. The arguments for rural producers, approved recreational shooters, gun club members, collectors and professional shooters are valid. But what about the hundreds of thousands of people who do not fit into one of those categories?

I am most fortunate that in my electorate I have constituents who have displayed a commonsense approach to the gun debate. They are aware of the way in which I work my electorate and they know that I will stand in this place and put forward what I believe is the general feeling of the electorate on an issue. The feeling of the people of my electorate may not be what I support or believe in personally but, as their local member, it is my job to represent those people who put me in this place. The gun debate has been a sensitive issue. I have attended public meetings—some of those with my colleague the member for Rockhampton—I have received hundreds of letters, faxes and telephone calls, and I have deliberately approached people in the street, at shopping centres and at sporting events to listen to what they have to say about the gun laws. I have had close to 2,000 contacts on this issue and I hope that today I am able to present to the Parliament what I believe the people of central Queensland want out of this legislation and what they do not like about it.

The legislation before the House is John Howard's legislation—not mine; not the Labor Party's—and people should not forget that. John Howard and Tim Fischer have forced the new gun laws on the people of Queensland through this coalition Government. The Weapons Act 1990, which was introduced by the Goss Government, has worked and to my knowledge it has never been exposed as inadequate, even though at the time the legislation was debated National Party members opposed it strongly. My concern about this Bill before the House is that it is unreasonable in some areas and necessary in others. During the Committee stage, I will refer to a couple of clauses of the Bill which I consider to be open to abuse by both the police and by the public.

Although I support the total banning of automatic and semiautomatic military-style firearms, I have some real concerns about the sleazy way in which the whole issue has been dealt with. The majority of Queenslanders believe that it is only the semiautomatic military-style firearm that is being outlawed. It is only when they realise that the legislation targets every firearm owner in Queensland that they will realise that they have been conned. Some sections of the media, politicians and sections of the public believe that all shooters or firearm owners are ratbags. However, if they stopped for a few minutes and thought sensibly about the issue, they would soon realise that most firearm owners are like most non-firearm owners. They are our neighbours, public servants, railway workers, coalminers, graziers, labourers, members of the business community, local councillors and, yes, even members of Parliament. They are ordinary Queenslanders. In the main, firearm owners are not freaks or some mad segment of society; they are people from all walks of Australian life. That is where John Howard, Tim Fischer and some other members of Parliament have got it wrong with this legislation before this House today.

This Bill will bring in laws that will hurt most the good people and do nothing to restrain the actions of criminals. The criminals and those intent on a course of action will always find a way to gain possession of a firearm if

that is what they want. The public perception is that, through this legislation, automatic and semiautomatic military-style weapons were to be targeted. Thousands of decent, respectable citizens do not understand that unless they have a legitimate reason to own a firearm, as set down in the Bill under clause 6, they will be required to surrender their guns. Although there is widespread support for the need for tighter controls for licensing and possession of firearms, there is strong resentment as to the manner in which the issue has been handled by the Federal and State leaders. There has been much comment about and support for the argument that legislation formulated on intense emotion will achieve little and will have no impact on those undesirable elements within the community who will continue to gain access to guns.

The proposals in their original form were considered to have been prepared in haste without due consideration being given to the impact that such proposals would have on various sections of the Australian community. After much consultation, many of the contentious issues have been addressed. Landowners, professional shooters, recreational shooters, sporting shooters, gun club members and collectors can carry on as they did before provided they meet certain requirements of the legislation. To some extent, those requirements have been softened to allow that to happen.

The lack of open and accountable consultation on this issue has led to confusion, uncertainty and, in many cases, outright rejection. The comments made to me include that the proposals are an example of a knee-jerk reaction to a massacre; gun control was being forced upon the people; the manner in which the proposals were arrived at was both panicky and dishonest; that there has been no consultation, and that the proposals for tougher gun controls have been dictatorially imposed upon gun owners. The Prime Minister has to accept full responsibility for that type of response from the public. His jackboot tactics will come back to haunt him because his attitude and approach to this issue will impact on more Australians than he anticipates.

As I have said before, there is widespread support for the banning of military-type automatic and most semiautomatic weapons. There is also strong support for strict enforcement of the law and for a hardline approach when imposing penalties on those who choose to ignore the law. However, many people are alarmed at the extent to which the legislation appears to have been taken and the range of firearms which will be affected. I refer to guns such as .22s and slug guns. Recently, one citizen—a non-gun owner—who wants the military-style firearm taken out of society said to me that he did not agree with the proposals for other firearms as it was victimising legitimate gun owners because of an incident that occurred which was outside their control. Feedback from my discussions supported the argument that premeditated violence with a firearm usually means that the perpetrator would have been expected to obtain a firearm as a preferred weapon, anyway. Many of those people who have contacted me have highlighted the fact that already thousands of Australians adhere to the current firearms legislation. It has been stressed to me that no firearms legislation, no matter how strict, will ever control the criminal element. In fact, the only thing that will thrive is the black market.

Firearm owners are concerned that the legislation will turn honest people into criminals. It distresses me that many owners will simply refuse to hand in their firearms. Honest, currently licensed firearm owners will be made retrospective criminals if they refuse to hand in their guns or do not comply with the legislation by showing that they have a legitimate reason to own a firearm.

The Prime Minister has stated—

> "I don't pretend for a moment that this decision can prevent a recurrence of tragedies."

This admission has not stopped him from bringing in legislation that hits the good citizen with an everlasting restriction on the possession and use of a firearm. Police Minister Russell Cooper said that he believes tighter gun laws will not eliminate the chance of a repeat of incidents such as that which occurred at Port Arthur. Those statements are in line with the feedback that I have received from my constituents.

Many firearm owners in my electorate say that the radical elements of the gun lobby have clearly damaged the cause of concerned gun owners by espousing extremist views on this issue. People like Owens and McNiven have shown that they believe themselves to be above the law by threatening not only politicians but also everyone who has spoken out against them. Their actions have had a negative impact on the whole gun debate. The exposure given to the ratbags is disproportionate to its membership, its influence, and the number of firearm owners who are looking for someone to stand up and speak on their behalf.

Many people have expressed anger over the increase in the Medicare levy to fund the firearms buyback system. That is a divisive issue on its own, separate from the issue of gun control. Many people believe that the increase will remain once the buy-back system has been exhausted. It is a joke when one considers that, under the scheme, firearm owners who pay the levy will in effect be paying themselves out. Many feel that taxpayers should not be burdened with a levy which affects only the more honest gun owners who are willing to surrender their guns. They know that the crooks will not comply, as I have said before.

There is real concern in the community that there is no provision in the Bill to allow for personal protection as a genuine reason for the possession of a weapon. In his second-reading speech, the Minister said that personal protection has never been a reason for owning or possessing a firearm. That is true. He also said that the use of a firearm does not preclude the use of a firearm for personal protection where the Criminal Code provides the relevant consideration, that is, the test of equal force. I accept that it is unlikely that the possession of a firearm would be a practical means of self-defence, unless the firearm was carried by a person in expectation of an assault or home invasion.

Citizens claim that they have a right to own and possess a firearm for personal protection, and I have already cleared up the point about personal protection. The argument that people have a right to own a firearm is, of course, incorrect. No-one has that right; it has always been a privilege. However, I support the argument that citizens have a right to hold onto what has been a longstanding privilege, so long as the principles and proper processes of the privilege are respected.

However, there is no doubt in my mind that people see the right to have a firearm in their home as a security blanket. A person may feel more relaxed about living alone. A woman may feel more secure and better able to defend herself when her husband is away if she has a firearm. A lot of people should take into consideration the fact that the uncertainty of whether an occupant of a house has a firearm or not is a definite deterrent to would-be offenders. Criminals are going to be far more relaxed about entering homes with the knowledge that the chance of the occupants possessing firearms has been significantly reduced because of the new laws.

The main supporters of new gun laws in my area have been women. I can understand that because, in the main, women have a genuine fear of firearms. I have spoken with women who have lived in fear of their lives and the lives of their children because they shared a relationship with a man who used a firearm to intimidate them. This is a practice which all members would agree is intolerable and which provides a strong case for the banning of firearms in the possession of such persons. As far as I am concerned, those persons should never be allowed anywhere near a firearm. These cases are not consistent with other women who argue for the retention of firearms for personal protection because they fear for themselves and their family.

Like it or not, the world we live in is changing. The bad element in society is growing more savage. I believe that taking away a person's ability to protect themselves is not in the best interests of the community. Unfortunately, it will take an outbreak of crime or a serious event before people understand what has happened here today. We must address other issues such as television and movie violence, the provision of more police, more resources and more severe penalties for crimes of violence before we take away the ability of people to defend themselves.

From my observations and discussions, urban-based women appear to be more vocal in their calls for elected representatives to support proposals for tighter gun controls. However, to my surprise, many softened their approach to the issue when they were made aware of the impact that the proposals would have on rural producers, gun club members and the rights of rural women to own a firearm for personal protection. Many argue strongly for no firearms at all; others focus on military-style weapons being totally banned. The arguments put forward were well thought out and they certainly earned my respect.

Women support both the licensing of firearm owners and the firearms in their possession. Women are very supportive of the need to establish a prohibited persons register. They argue that the register should include persons of proven mental instability, persons convicted of criminal offences and persons who have demonstrated a violent reaction to authority. The women I have spoken to are strongly committed to having registered the names of men and women who have a history of domestic violence and those who are involved in a hostile marriage or relationship breakdown. I strongly support these views, as I believe that the emotional stress of a breakup can cause men and women to act without thinking. It has been proven that a violent reaction to an emotional

event is more likely to be fatal if a firearm is involved. It should therefore be an automatic requirement for firearms to be surrendered when a relationship breaks down. Women are more vocal in their push for greater control of the sale of videos and the broadcasting of news stories which send messages to our young people that violence is acceptable to the community. Women also appear strong in their support for effective penalties against those who choose to break the law and who ignore the laws established under the Bill now before the House.

In my view, the Prime Minister's handling of this issue is a disgrace. There is no doubt in my mind, or in the mind of any other fair-thinking Australian, that following Port Arthur something had to be done to put in place national gun laws that would reduce the risk of such disasters, which have sickened the world. Within hours of the Port Arthur massacre, there was an outburst of emotional debate from extremists on both sides of the issue, none of which was particularly constructive or objective. The Prime Minister took advantage of a very sad event in Australian history to push for tough gun laws, which has always been his agenda. He used Port Arthur as a trigger to dictate to the Australian people what he wanted to see in legislation. In my heart, I support the need for tighter gun controls, but, as a matter of principle, to achieve the best outcome the process should have been dealt with differently.

John Howard falsely dictated terms and immorally used the media to create a perception that he was targeting automatic and semiautomatic firearms while knowingly pursuing a much broader agenda. Because of his deceitful ways, I have lost any respect that I may have had for him, and I have certainly lost respect for the process. If John Howard had been fair dinkum about achieving the best outcome as the Prime Minister of this nation, he should have stepped back, condemned what had occurred at Port Arthur and asked the people of Australia to join him in reviewing and introducing gun laws that would make Australia a much better place in which to live.

Letting the people get involved gives them ownership of the process and a greater willingness to make it work. Australians reject the standover tactics of people like John Howard. John Howard has dictated and we have legislation that hits hard at a section of society which is least likely to offend with a firearm. Sure, the legislation takes firearms out of society, reduces the risk of firearm accidents and suicide and takes away a dangerous tool in a relationship breakdown—that is, of course, if everyone who does not have what is considered to be a genuine reason to own a firearm complies with the laws.

The legislation before the House certainly has some good points. I know that a lot of people in the community support it. However, a lot of aspects of the Bill concern me greatly because decent, hardworking, honest Queenslanders who have no intention of offending in any way, but who own a .22 slug gun, are going to be most affected.

Time expired.

Mr BAUMANN (Albert) (5.20 p.m.): In speaking to the Bill before the House, I take the opportunity to express the very real concerns of many of my constituents in the electorate of Albert. We are all very well aware of the highly emotive and extremely horrendous circumstances that led to the introduction by the Federal Liberal leader, Mr John Howard, of the guidelines to amend and unify our gun laws in this State and country. Very few people dispute the necessity to review and amend all laws from time to time and most perceive a necessity to ban the importation and sale of all semiautomatic, Army surplus, Rambo-style weapons. Similarly, there is a perceived need to revamp security with regard to the storage of firearms and ammunition.

The emphasis on training and responsibility for new firearm owners has been applauded by all law-abiding citizens of this State. Of great concern to the very same law-abiding gun owners who did the right thing and obtained shooters' licences in the belief that the money spent covered them for life will be this Government's assurance of fair and reasonable recognition of their initiative when new licences are issued. The proof of reason to own and/or use a firearm is something that does not sit well with many law-abiding people in our community. There will need to be an extensive public education program to ensure that they understand that their rights have not simply been revoked.

One's rights to defend oneself, one's family and property with whatever degree of force one sees as necessary—even through the use of firearms—are protected under the Criminal Code, and those rights will also need to be included in the aforementioned public education program. That will further help to balance the misconception that previous gun laws actually covered such a situation.

A great disappointment to many is the incorrect categorisation of pump-action and semiautomatic shotguns into the same band as high-powered, centre-fire rifles. One could

but speculate on the experience of the eggheaded intellectual who recommended that masterstroke—one that will add some $180m to the cost of acquiring these guns. Likewise, law-abiding semiautomatic, centre-fire target shooters of international disciplines will fall into a group being discriminated against, and will lose their right to train for and compete in the sport of their choice. I can but speculate on the legal challenges and appeals to flow from some sections of this legislation, and I foreshadow the possibility of amendments in the future.

The enhancement of a prohibited persons register will be a positive initiative, as will the legislative changes protecting the medical staff or various authorities charged with the notification process. As has been observed by previous speakers, this should have a positive effect in the area of domestic violence.

Part of the overall reform is the weapons register itself. Whilst most people see compliance as being no great burden, questions have often been raised about the necessity to register legal, law-abiding citizens and their guns, and whether a different view should be taken of criminals and mentally unstable persons. The cost of initiation will be huge. I point out also the failure of the practice to be continued in other jurisdictions.

I join with the many people of my electorate who recognise the need for tighter gun laws and, therefore, for the sake of national uniformity, support the reform process. However, the perceived attack on the rights of the ordinary, law-abiding citizens of our great country definitely does not sit comfortably with me. In closing, I ask the indulgence of this House to observe one minute's silence to mark the demise of commonsense in the legislative process of our country.

Mr SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton) (5.24 p.m.): It would probably serve us well to ponder why this legislation is before us tonight. The answer is twofold. Firstly, it is because of the refusal back in 1990 of members opposite to accept and heed the warning being dished out by the public to do something about gun laws. Had they taken the same responsible attitude that we took under those circumstances, the level of public pandemonium and the demands that we do something to toughen gun laws would have to some extent been dissipated. However, that did not occur and we find ourselves debating this legislation tonight.

Secondly, we find ourselves debating this Bill tonight because of the vulgar and brazen political stunt by John Howard, who set up a smokescreen in the wake of the terrible disaster at Port Arthur. Those deaths have been used to cover up the real agenda that he was pursuing in Australia—something which became obvious as time went on. While he had half the country at the other half's neck over the issue of gun laws, he was pillorying students and removing services from places such as Rockhampton. He was telling our students that they were well off, yet he was doing his best to interfere with their allowances and so on. He had a great diversion in the form of the gun debate. That is the reason he pushed the issue. He did not do so out of any real belief that what he was seeking to do would change the face of this country. If he was going to do that, he would have taken on difficult social issues such as unemployment. But, no, he stuck to this issue. I have to say that the strategy worked, because the gun debate succeeded in gaining more media coverage than any other issue has this year.

What were the options for the Queensland Government and the people who sit in this place? Obviously, the first option was to go it alone and do what a lot of people have suggested to me, that is, draft our own laws. Anybody who suggests that does not understand the Constitution of Australia—and a lot of these people claim to be constitutional experts! The fact of the matter is that Howard would have got a referendum off the ground and we would not be worrying about gun laws in Queensland any more; that would have become an issue for the Federal Government. I would bet my bottom dollar that the question Howard would have put on the referendum paper would have been a simple one giving power to the Federal Government to oversee gun laws. I will wager anybody who wants to have a little bet with me that had that referendum been put to the people of Queensland, it would have been carried overwhelmingly.

Mr FitzGerald: You'd be the judge and take your money, wouldn't you? I believe you're right.

Mr SCHWARTEN: In answer to that interjection—I notice that my good friend and learned colleague the member for Fitzroy referred to Messrs Owen, McNiven and so on. People have put it to me that those people were actually working for the anti-gun lobby. Every time they got up to their shenanigans, my phone would ring off the wall with calls from women advising me that their husbands had firearms. How do members think they would have voted in the secrecy of the polling booth? They would have voted in favour of

John Howard's proposal to centralise all gun laws in Canberra. I guarantee honourable members that there would not be any argument about the categories of firearms and some of the leniencies that have been explained by other speakers tonight. Let us put to death once and for all the view that a referendum would not have been carried. In my view, it would have been carried overwhelmingly.

The second point that I would like to make about that whole charade is that, by John Howard's own admission, this legislation will not avert another tragedy of the sort we saw at Port Arthur. Anybody who believes that it will do that is simply kidding themselves. The fact of the matter is that there will not be one fewer case of domestic violence or suicide as a result of this legislation and it will not stop the crooks from getting their hands on all manner of firearms. By any test of the issues which must concern us in this place, the legislation will fail.

I must follow on from what my friend the member for Yeronga said before. He said that we must stop the basic attitude to guns, and that that is what this legislation will do. I think we have to stop the basic attitude that we have about one another in this society. I refer to the way we marginalise people and do not tolerate people in this society. Because we cannot argue our point in a civilised way, we feel the need to resort to violence. In this society, until we get to the point at which we can respect and expect people to have a different opinion, we might as well forget about trying to legislate to stop that sort of violence.

In my view, that is the real challenge for John Howard and his leadership: to try to get a more inclusive society in Australia, a society that is gender balanced, that is racially balanced and that does not poke fun at the afflicted, if one wants to use that word. The fact of the matter is that we do not do those things well enough in Australia. I can guarantee here and now that we can expect to see more intolerance and more violence in Australia—not less, more—as a result of some comments that have been made by a certain politician in recent days. This legislation is completely and utterly fruitless unless we change the way that people think.

I turn now to the issue of compensation, which other speakers have raised. I do not agree with the imposition of an increased Medicare levy. I do not care what anybody says: I will bet London to a brick that the increased Medicare levy stays on—that Howard will find a way to do it down the track because he will get public support on this issue, and he will have the AMA or somebody else out there. Regardless of that, I do not believe that it is a fair and just way to collect money for this particular cause. John Howard should have been halfway decent on this particular issue. It was his baby; therefore, he should have found the money within his own Budget resources to do something about it.

Mr Elliott: He used it as a weapon.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Precisely: he used it as a weapon to impose the increase in the Medicare levy, again for a political reason. As I said, you can bet your bottom dollar that it will not go down after the compensation issue has been resolved.

I believe that the compensation factor is unfair in that there are people who will be discarded by this process who will simply have to hand in their firearms or sell them, for they will get five-eighths of seven-tenths of nothing—I nearly said something else then—for them from any dealer because there will be a glut of them. The honourable member for Fitzroy is correct. A lot of people have not yet recognised the fact that those who cannot supply a reasonable reason to have a firearm will be in that category. They will not have the semiautomatics—or "the nasties", as I call them—which are unlawful and for which compensation is available under this legislation, but they will have firearms and they will not receive one dinar of compensation for them. That is a hole in this legislation, and again it can be sheeted back to the compensation package being provided for by Howard and Fischer. As the member for Fitzroy has rightly pointed out, this is not our legislation. We are just the wood-and-water joeys of the Federal Government on this particular issue. This is its legislation.

Mr Pearce: Blackmail legislation.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is blackmail. We talk about guns. This is the gun at the head of this Parliament, saying to us, "If you do not do it, we will fix it up down here." Let there be no mistake about whose legislation this really is. It is John Howard's legislation. The Federal member for Capricornia, Mr Marek, persistently sent people around to my office, the office of the member for Fitzroy and the office of the member for Keppel after claiming that it was not his problem; it was a State issue. I am going to remind him and remind him and remind him and his electors that this is legislation that came from him and that he cannot stand in one forum with the gun owners and say "I support you" and go to the anti-gun people and say the same thing.

Some of us have some idea of what some decency in that argument is.

I want to talk briefly about semiautomatics. If ever there was an insistence on stupidity in this matter, it was Howard's refusal to allow the remanufacturing of semiautomatic shotguns. Jim Sivvyer, the local gunsmith, was the first one to alert me to this matter. I brought it up with the Honourable the Minister at the time. I believe I was the first one—and the Minister can correct me if I am wrong—to raise it with him. I thought that was an option out of it on two grounds. The first was that the amount required for compensation would have been less had this measure been allowed. The second was that it is no more advantageous to have a two-shot automatic than it is to have an under-and-over or a side-by-side double-barrelled shotgun. They both fire two shots, and in fact one can reload a double-barrelled broken shotgun quicker than one can reload a semiautomatic. But Howard was not of a mind to listen to that, which clearly illustrated to me that his agenda was completely down that track. The arrogance of the man——

Mr Elliott: Egocentric driven.

Mr SCHWARTEN: He was egocentric driven; there is no question about that at all. He did not even entertain sensible suggestions such as that.

Rural producers will be able to keep their limited semiautos—the shotguns and the .22s. That is fair enough. However, my constituents will have to get rid of theirs. I believe that that is an injustice. That is making fish of one and fowl of the other. I believe that that is regrettable, but I understand the nature of compromise and what has gone into achieving that particular position.

I must place on record that I do not believe that SKSs and those high-powered heavy-calibre semiautomatics have any place in our society. I have never used them. I do not see any great need to use them. They were put on this planet for one reason and one reason only: killing a large number of people as quickly as possible. I do not believe that they add anything whatsoever to our society. It was the Federal Labor Government of the day that allowed them to come into the country in the first place. It stands condemned for that.

Mr Elliott: An old roo shooter said to me, "Show me a man with an SKS and I'll show you someone who is a bad shot."

Mr SCHWARTEN: Absolutely—couldn't hit the side of a barn with a bucket of salt. From my observations, by and large the people who are attracted to those types of guns are the Rambos, who, in my humble opinion, in most cases ought not to have firearms, anyway. But that is a personal view only.

I understand why people hate guns. I understand the passion of people who are opposed to them. I understand why the member for Fitzroy, who has been to Vietnam and who has seen the horrors of war—and I hope that I am not embarrassing him in making this statement—would not want to have anything to do with firearms. My own father, who served in the Second World War, is of a like mind: he will not have a firearm in the house. On the other hand, there are people like me who have collected them for a long period. It would not in any way enter my psyche to turn my firearms on my kids, my neighbours or anybody else. That just does not enter my thought processes. I have been a sporting shooter for all of my adult life, although in recent years I have not pursued it as time has not enabled me to do so. But a lot of my mates are tied up with rifle shooting, skeet shooting and pistol shooting. I have done all of that. People derive a great deal of relaxation from such activities. I do not see anything wrong with them, and those people do not deserve to be pilloried in the way that they are by some of the outer fringes of the anti-gun lobby.

Again, the issue of tolerance comes into it. We must be tolerant of other people. Somebody said to me the other day, "I can't understand anybody collecting guns." I said, "Well, I can't understand anybody collecting stamps." I know some people who collect barbed wire and used motor mower blades. People want to collect all manner of things. We are all different, and thank goodness we are. But the fact of the matter is that that is a hobby that I have had over a period. I must say that I do not have a great deal of enthusiasm for it any more, but I can understand why people do collect firearms, and I understand why they pursue a sporting interest in them.

I do not swallow the nonsense we hear from members of the League of Rights about defending the country, nor do I require a firearm in my house to defend my home and my family against invaders. If somebody gets into my house and pinches my video, I hope they do not wake the family up. I hope they take it and go on their way, because I do not want on my conscience the fact that I have blown somebody's brains out over a $500

video that is insured anyway. Nobody in their right mind would suggest otherwise.

It is a nonsense to suggest that 70-year old ladies barricade themselves in their homes with a trusty double-barrelled shotgun under their beds. Perish the thought of the Indonesians screeching over the Berserker Mountains in Rockhampton; we could trot out our trusty old .303s from under the bed and fire them off! The people who believe such things have to be held to account. The fact is that whenever there has been a war in this country, the first thing the Government does is take guns away from people. My father remembers in 1939 taking a shotgun and a .22 down to the local police station. The last thing the Government wanted was a heap of people running around the streets armed with guns thinking that they were in the Army.

Some motley crew members from the League of Rights say they will defend this country; the first thing a general would do would be to turn the M16s on them. We have an Army in this country—which, I admit has always been underresourced—but in World War II, we mobilised troops overnight, either by conscription or volunteers, and let us leave it at that. Let us not have this nonsense of people barricading themselves in their houses with .22s to defend the country. It is absurd nonsense and claptrap and none of it washes with me at all.

I want to turn to the registration issue, and perhaps the Minister might address that in his summing up. This is creating a lot of anxiety amongst gun owners because they see it as a way of pricing people out of the firearm collection business by stealth or of simply increasing the amount of money on the registration of the firearms. Many years ago when I had a pistol, I think it cost $2.50 a year to register. I think it now costs $60 a year—but it is a long time since I have had one. People have told me their concerns, that it will cost $50 or $60 per firearm that will be registered. I hope the Minister can clarify that for me when he sums up.

Nobody in this place has got any joy out of this debate.

Mr Elliott: The most horrendous thing I've ever seen.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is one of the more ridiculous things I have ever seen in this place. It will not achieve one change in the attitude of people, and that is what we have to change. In order to get a more inclusive and decent society, we have to change how people think about one another and how they treat each other.

The Minister responsible for this legislation has done about as best as he could with the situation. I think that, by and large, most people who want to keep their firearms will be able to do so; they will fit into one of the categories that have been provided. Unfortunately, there will be some who will fall through the net, and that is indeed a great pity. If I thought that one life would be saved as a result of this legislation, I would be the first one to support it. If I thought as a result of this legislation that there would be less likelihood of a tragedy such as occurred at Port Arthur, I would be the first one standing up here supporting it, but I regret to say that I do not believe that is the case. People who are drawing comfort from this legislation, thinking that they are going to be safe as a result of its introduction, are kidding themselves.

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands) (5.45 p.m.): In rising to take part in this debate and make some brief comments on this Bill, firstly I would like to acknowledge the efforts made by the Premier and the Police Minister in developing this legislation in as sane a manner as possible from the original memorandum of understanding, the intent of which was to prevent the recurrence of another Port Arthur massacre.

Without going into the likely success or failure of this legislation, the test of which will be the fullness of time, I feel it would be remiss of me not to mention the Federal Government's role leading up to this action. I believe that the Federal Government is largely to blame for the action or lack of action over the past decade or more in allowing large numbers of semiautomatic military-style weapons to be imported into Australia, knowing that many of these would likely fall into the hands of the untrained and undesirable. I also wonder how much revenue was derived by way of import duty, sales tax or income tax from dealers over the same period from the sale of these weapons.

I believe the Federal Government has a lot to answer for and therefore should take the full responsibility for the compensation aspects of this legislation. Whilst other speakers have spoken about the inappropriateness of the funding provisions for the buyback scheme by using the Medicare levy, all Government funding comes from the community in one way or another, but to expect the State to contribute out of its limited revenue base is unacceptable. Speaking further on the buyback scheme, I feel it is only fair and reasonable that ammunition and accessories of category C and D weapons be included in

the purchase of these weapons. Accessories such as magazines, telescopic sights, etc., in many cases are suited specifically for these weapons and their value is relatively small when not sold with the weapon. Ammunition also, particularly when bought only for a weapon that has to be handed in, can only be offered with the weapon or disposed of separately, probably without monetary return, owing to the oversupply in the current market. Similarly, category A, B or H weapons whose owners cannot qualify for a licence because of a lack of need or reason will not receive compensation under current legislation. The Federal Government has a duty to compensate these gun owners who wish to hand in weapons that they can no longer legally keep.

Another section of the shooting community that has been most affected by this legislation is the military shooters. Currently, no provision has been made for military weapons enthusiasts under any revised or restricted conditions. A large majority of ex-service personnel make up these military enthusiasts. As one who has had some association with the armed services over a number of years, I know the majority of these shooters to be responsible and respected community members. From their background and training, there would probably be few others who would know as well as they do the effects that military weapons can have and the undesirability of these weapons in the hands of the untrained and the undesirable. Most of these shooters recognise the responsibility of being entrusted with such lethal weapons. That is something that is always stressed in service life. I would have hoped that some provision could have been made to enable military shooters to qualify to keep some of their weapons in a manner similar to the way the military secure their weapons in a central armory or depository when not in use.

I believe such measures, together with a licensing process similar to that undergone by concealable firearms owners, could have provided adequate control and security to prevent these weapons from falling into the hands of the undesirable and the untrained. This could have maintained the state-of-the-art knowledge which we recognise in an historical context with period style militia and the like. I hope the Federal Government will consider ways in which this small but nonetheless important section of the shooting community can be accommodated in the future.

Mrs EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha) (5.49 p.m.): As I rise today to speak briefly in support of this Bill, there is a certain deja vu feeling about standing here debating firearm restricting legislation in the aftermath of a senseless and horrendous tragedy where dozens of innocent and unsuspecting people were killed, but on this occasion we are supporting legislation that the Government has introduced in a bipartisan commitment. This is in sharp contrast to the Weapons Bill debate of September 1990 where the same members who are now introducing this Bill vigorously opposed every aspect of that very moderate legislation. However, I am not here to dwell on that; I welcome that change of attitude.

I wish to correct some of the misconceptions of people in the electorate—not my electorate, for I have received overwhelming support there for my stance both in 1990 and now, with only three dissenting commentators who have contacted me, and they were of the more rational type, I hasten to add. I wish to answer the arguments put forward that this legislation is hasty, ill-considered and a knee-jerk reaction.

At that time, this country was reeling from the Hoddle Street and Queen Street massacres, a shoot-out in the main street of Burleigh, and several appalling incidents in which guns were used by another family member to wipe out families. At that time, I raised my major concerns, not because I am afraid of guns—I grew up on a farm and have used them—but because of the overwhelming evidence that, as the number of firearms in society increases, so do the number of firearm-related deaths.

I am not referring only to the number of people who were tragically killed at Port Arthur. Each year in Queensland, well over 100 people are killed by firearms. In 1994, 135 people were killed by firearms in Queensland; 113 of those were suicides, most of whom were young males in country areas. It always surprises me that members in this House who are representing country areas are so little concerned about those continuing tragedies. Many people have argued that if someone is going to commit suicide, that person will succeed. Although that is true of a few individuals, many of those sad, young people are simply going through the emotional upheavals of adolescence. If they were not so successful with that first impulsive action, they would quickly get over their momentary depression. Unlike most members of this House, I have actually seen and talked to people who have attempted suicide with a shotgun to their middle and have survived. I have not met one who said that he wished he

had actually died. They were all quite grateful for the modern medical science that pulled them through.

It is fair to say that my concerns are also influenced by years of living in New York, where firearms were a way of life and death by firearm made the news only if it was particularly bizarre or exotic. On a regular basis there were snippets relating to accidental deaths, when children or spouses were killed by nervous firearm holders who slept with loaded guns under the pillow or by the bed and, in the middle of the night, when half asleep, blasted off without asking questions. There has been a massive increase in the number of spouses, lovers and children who have been mistaken for burglars or prowlers. This increase parallelled the climb in gun ownership.

Mr Elliott: Quote some statistics on that. That is a very broad statement to make without statistics.

Mrs EDMOND: The statistics are horrific. Something like 40,000 people die in the United States each year. The member should read the statistics.

But, as I said then, and as I repeat now, I am prepared to speak out for the more than 50 per cent of the population who are not enamoured with firearms, that is, women. It is certainly a fact—as my colleagues on this side of the House have recognised—that many women constantly live in fear of their spouses, and this fear is exacerbated when that spouse owns a firearm. Almost half of all female homicide victims are killed by spouses, and 40 per cent of those deaths are caused by shootings. Because their husbands own guns, those women live in constant fear for themselves and their children. They live with the threat, "If I can't have you, no-one else will. If you leave me, I'll kill you and the kids." These women believe the threat; and who would not, when the media regularly reminds us of the reality of these family tragedies? It is appalling that, in the Sunshine Coast area, there has been an increasing number of family tragedies, yet it is from the Sunshine Coast area that we have had the most extreme and ridiculous letters advocating no control whatsoever in relation to guns.

Mr FitzGerald interjected.

Mrs EDMOND: I think there is a strong correlation when people who claim to be responsible gun owners think that responsible behaviour is baring their backsides to the police. Those things worry me greatly.

In 1990, I spoke out about the need to bring gun ownership under control to prevent another senseless Hoddle Street and Queen Street disaster. Since then, we have seen the tragedies of Dunblane in Scotland and Port Arthur in Tasmania, where rapid-firing firearms were used to maximise the killing of innocent people. Those firearms are designed to maximise the ability to kill the most people in the shortest possible time.

I acknowledge that many people seem to have close attachments to guns. I acknowledge also that many people have a legitimate interest in collecting firearms. I know that there are many responsible people with an interest in shooting as a sport. But those who do not agree with this legislation must also acknowledge that those who strongly support this legislation have long held those beliefs; that our support is not a knee-jerk reaction that we feel for those women who live in fear; that we are horrified at the waste of young men's lives in rural areas; and that we believe there is a need to change direction and not follow the US tradition of increasing violence.

As a health professional of many years' standing, I would like to acknowledge the support for this legislation from the various medical practitioner organisations and health professionals. On the last occasion that we debated this issue, I expressed my regrets that the then shadow Minister for Health opposed the legislation. This time, I express my regret that the current Health Minister has refused to speak out in support of this Bill, as his Federal and State counterparts have done. I commend the Minister for introducing the Bill to the House.

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham) (5.56 p.m.): In taking part in this debate, the first thing I would like to say is that, of all the Bills that have come before this House and the issues that have been raised over the years, this probably has proved to be the most divisive and time consuming of just about any issue that I can remember, and I have been a member of this Parliament for 21 years. It has pitted families against families, friends against friends, people in the same party against one another, and people in opposite parties against one another. Quite frankly, I believe that it has been an unmitigated disaster. If anyone wants to report what I am saying, I ask them to report it in full, because it is very important.

There is an old saying in the bush that one should not make decisions on the way home from funerals. I certainly would not want

anyone who was a party in any way to the tragedy at Port Arthur to take those remarks lightly or to think that I am saying something that is irreverent, because it is not meant that way. But it shows what can happen when there is a knee-jerk reaction and people go off and make a decision on the spur of the moment in very emotional circumstances, such as all members found themselves in. We really should not make decisions with our hearts; we must make decisions with our heads when we are thinking logically and when we are able to consider all the facts. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister of this country did precisely that, in my opinion. We were all then corralled into a situation with which we had to live. That has most certainly been an unmitigated disaster.

I strongly support the control of some of the military-style weapons. I believe that members on all sides of politics, particularly in the Federal arena, stand condemned because they allowed into this country many of those weapons with no controls over them. The hoons of the world wander around in the bush shooting holes in mailboxes. There are plenty of them out there. They were able to get hold of those weapons cheaper than one could buy a reputable brand of .22, together with about 1,000 rounds of ammunition. Is it any wonder that those people are indiscriminately shooting holes in mailboxes?

Debate, on motion of Mr Elliott, adjourned.

QUEENSLAND TRANSMISSION AND SUPPLY CORPORATION

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa) (6 p.m.): I move—

> "That this Parliament condemns the savage rationalisation and privatisation proposed by the Borbidge Government for the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation.
>
> That the Parliament calls on the Government to—
>
> (a) abandon the planned increase in electricity prices for domestic users, as a cruel impost on ordinary Queensland families;
>
> (b) reject any moves to dismantle tariff equalisation which would be a massive attack on rural and remote Queenslanders;
>
> (c) recognize the continuing importance of regionally based boards;
>
> (d) stop the 'downsizing' of the QTSC workforce by 23%, or 1500 jobs, due to its severe impact on the employment base of regional Queensland;
>
> (e) reject the privatisation of the electricity industry as a senseless attack on essential State assets, which we cannot afford to let fall into private hands; and further
>
> That the House calls on the Borbidge Government to stop slugging Queenslanders with a growing list of unnecessary increases to State taxes and charges."

The Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation is not confronted by competition; it is confronted by its own irrelevance. The Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation acts as an umbrella for the Powerlink transmission sector and the seven regional distribution boards. Most people agree that the transmission task undertaken by Powerlink should now stand alone from both generation and distribution, but that only leaves the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation with the role of distribution. Distribution is operated by the regional boards. However, those boards are made up of local representatives and they also employ local people.

Rather than let the boards carry out their operations independently, the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation executive has unilaterally decided to wipe out the regional boards to give themselves something to do. By combining the electricity distribution networks across the State into one company, the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation will become a huge monopoly distant from its customers. It will limit the potential for competition between regions, which could ensure that electricity is distributed to customers in the most efficient and most effective way.

The Minister has tried to duck and weave on this issue by alleging that his changes are simply an inevitable continuation of the previous Government's policies. As the previous Minister responsible for energy, I can say with absolute confidence that nothing could be further from the truth. Minister Gilmore is all about splitting up the industry and selling it off to private investors. That is not the policy of Labor; it never has been and it never will be. Yes, Labor would have separated Powerlink from the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation, but that is where the similarity ends. Labor would retain

the regional distribution boards, and instead wind up the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation, which is essentially just a corporate headquarters. We would not—I repeat, "we would not"—privatise any of the existing elements of the electricity industry. The Minister is plainly wrong.

To meet the requirements of the Heads of Government Agreement on Electricity, we do not need to abolish our regional boards. We do not need to cut the staff of the supply sector by up to 2,000. We do not need to raise power prices for Queensland's families. We do not need to end tariff equalisation. We do not need to privatise those vital State assets. Not one of those is necessary to comply with the national strategy.

As to yesterday's announcement by the board—we now have confirmation that higher electricity prices and fewer electricity jobs are the direct consequences of this Government's energy policy. The Borbidge Government does not care about the interests of ordinary Queenslanders. It just wants to flog off our prized State assets. That is laid out in the Commission of Audit report. A primary recommendation of that report was the privatisation of the electricity industry, and this Government cannot wait to cash in. In this Government's indecent haste to privatise the electricity industry, workers and consumers are left in the dark. Only 65 per cent of electricity consumers now think that they receive value for money in their power supply. How low will customer satisfaction go once this Government has its way? Why do electricity prices have to rise when AUSTA Electric announced last week that the cost of generation is likely to drop by 16 per cent over the next five years. It is important that the cost of power to industry continues to fall, but why can that not be achieved without slugging ordinary Queenslanders with higher charges?

Let us compare the record of the previous Government with that of the present Government. We reduced the cost of power to industry by an average of 10 per cent but, at the same time, we froze electricity charges to ordinary Queenslanders. As with every other issue that it has tried to deal with, this Government simply cannot rise to meet a management challenge. It is simply not up to it.

Let us consider regional boards. What is the benefit of abolishing the regional distribution boards when the stated outcome will be higher prices and poorer services? Those boards are uniformly composed of senior regional representatives, such as local mayors, councillors, business people, solicitors and accountants. All of those people are drawn from the local area and all have the interests of the local area clearly in mind. Those regional bodies also provided a large range of employment opportunities for local people. If those boards are centralised, the most our regional centres can hope for is a depot for some linesmen and technicians. To discard that excellent model in favour of concentrating power in the hands of a few executives in Brisbane is the height of lunacy.

I turn now to tariff equalisation. Why is tariff equalisation being thrown on the scrap heap without any public debate about the need to maintain essential services at reasonable prices to rural and remote Queensland? The Transmission and Supply Corporation yesterday confirmed that cross subsidisation of prices across consumers was under threat. That follows on from the comments made in the Fitzgerald Commission of Audit, which I quote—

> ". . . uniform electricity tariffs are inconsistent with market operations in that they . . . prevent users from facing the true cost of their consumption of electricity."

There are thousands of electricity consumers in rural and regional Queensland—many of them in my electorate—who would think that tariff equalisation is a good thing. Why should the industry in regional and remote Queensland be penalised? That is what would happen if this proposal comes to fruition.

This Government's obsession with the market would result in the ridiculous circumstances of electricity and similar services being too expensive, so it would simply move out of the area. That is the market at work. It might satisfy the economic rationalists; it certainly does not satisfy the Opposition. What we are debating tonight is the future of this industry. The members opposite are suggesting a reduction in the price of power for the corporate bodies and an increase for ordinary Queenslanders. Tonight, they are proposing the abolition of 1,500 to 2,000 jobs, which the Opposition is not prepared to accept. They are talking about the abolition of regional boards; we are not prepared to accept that. They are talking about the abolition of tariff equalisation, which we are not prepared to even discuss.

I understand that the member for Gladstone will move an amendment tonight. There are two parts to the amendment that I cannot accept. The first part suggests basically that CPI increases be permitted. I do not

believe that there is a need for power prices to rise even by the CPI. The second part seeks to ensure that any reduction in staff by the QTSC occurs by natural attrition. I cannot stand here tonight and defend a situation in which 1,500 to 2,000 jobs disappear. I do not care whether it is Tom Jones or Mary Smith. The facts are that this proposal means widespread sackings in the industry, which is something that I have fought against since I have been in this place and something tonight that I am not prepared to allow.

Time expired.

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee) (6.10 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I second the motion moved by the member for Mount Isa. Once again, the economic fundamentalists in this State, who were held in check to some extent at least by the Labor Government when it was in power, are out in the streets celebrating the impending privatisation and sell off of the electricity industry.

The first celebration that those people had was when the Hilmer report was released a couple of years ago. They regrouped and gave three cheers when Dr FitzGerald's Commission of Audit was released. Now those of them who have their eyes on the electricity industry are rubbing their hands in glee awaiting the inevitable sell off of one of the State's most valuable assets and getting access to the potential profits that can be made.

The motion moved by the member for Mount Isa quite properly condemns the Government for the proposed rationalisation and privatisation of the industry—something which Opposition members in this place have opposed quite strongly. This is the secret agenda of this Government: privatise as much as possible, withdraw the Government from its direct involvement in the delivery of services, and put itself in the role of a policy maker, which will allow the private sector to buy the assets, deliver the services and reap the profits—except, of course, those public services and assets where there is not much money to be made, such as certain transport routes and the universal hospital and education system.

The workers and the general public have had enough of unnecessary rationalisation exercises and are quite rightly starting to stand up and challenge the assumptions on which they are based. They are fed up with the job cuts, they are fed up with the cuts to services, and they are fed up with the arguments and the nonsense that the public sector cannot deliver services efficiently and effectively.

In that regard, it is worth looking at the Queensland electricity industry, particularly the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation. In this year's annual report of the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation, it is reported that it made an after-tax profit of almost $216.5m—almost double the profit that it made last year. At the same time, what is the message that goes out to the workers in the industry who helped to generate that profit? They are told that nearly 1,500 of them—about 23 per cent of the work force—will lose or potentially lose their jobs.

When Labor was in office, it gave a guarantee to workers that there would be no forced redundancies. Where is the guarantee along those lines from this Government? In respect of the contributions that those workers in the industry have made towards improving the efficiency of the industry, I have a message to the Minister from them: "Thanks for nothing."

One of the biggest ironies in this matter is contained in the annual reports that were tabled this morning. I refer firstly to the QTSC's annual report, which states on the first page—

> "Our strength comes from the commitment of our people to improving business performance and responsiveness, and through their creativity in dealing with changing business needs."

The SEQEB annual report also refers to its employees in glowing terms. It states—

> "Our employees have always been a major asset. Their dedication to their work and their communities was evident during the summer storm season, when the worst floods since 1974 swept south east Queensland in May. The response of SEQEB staff was excellent. Their outstanding efforts in restoring power during terrible conditions were applauded by customers, the Government and the media. I would like to take this chance formally and publicly to state my appreciation for the dedication and professionalism displayed by SEQEB staff."

Those are great words in an annual report, but when it comes to the real commitment to the staff, it dissipates very quickly. What a cruel blow to the 1,500 employees who have helped double the profit that the industry made last year; what a cruel preamble to the annual report that these employees will now start to read in their lunch rooms over the next few days.

What about the tremendous gains in productivity that have been delivered by employees as a result of increased training, award restructuring and enterprise bargaining in the industry? What about the hand of cooperation that was extended by those employees in an effort to make the industry more efficient and more productive? Where is their reward for making this effort? For many of them, their reward will be the sack—the loss of jobs and the loss of secure employment. Once again, on behalf of the employees, I give a very clear message to the industry and to the Government: "Thanks for nothing."

Last Friday in the *Courier-Mail* there was an interesting letter to the editor regarding the effects of privatisation in New Zealand. It is worth reading part of that letter into the *Hansard* record because it encompasses much of the sentiment that is starting to develop in the community about privatisation and rationalisation of industry. The letter states—

> "I was horrified to read a letter from J Murphy holding New Zealand up as a shining example of privatisation. I'll gladly trade places with him tomorrow. He is welcome to my place in the miracle.
>
> Seventy per cent of New Zealanders earn less than $27,000 per year. A kilo of lamb chops costs $9, a kilo of Mainland cheese costs $8.50, petrol is 94 cents a litre and my electricity costs about $56 per week."

Time expired.

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers) (6.15 p.m.): At the outset, I wish to say that I agree with the motion as it will read if the House agrees to the amendment circulated and proposed by the member for Gladstone. It is more in line with what this Government is doing.

With regard to the motion, which condemns this Government for savage rationalisation and privatisation, it is well out of kilter. Let us get it straight right from the start: there will be no privatisation of the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation.

The first State Budget introduced by the Borbidge Government on 10 September 1996 created a sound foundation for the future management of the State's finances. That foundation means that the Government will not face the same pressures experienced by those Governments in the south where Government asset sales were necessary for budgetary purposes. The Government's first imperative in developing workable electricity reforms for Queensland is to ensure that the appropriate framework is in place for the future, including the optimal structure arrangements. The issue of public or private ownership is not fundamental to the delivery of an efficient electricity supply industry for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

In accordance with the agreement signed in April 1995 by the Council of Australian Governments, Queensland is committed to competition reform. In return for implementing reform, the State will receive $756m in competition payments, with such payments divided into three transactions beginning in July 1997. The electricity supply industry is a major element of competition reform and Queensland is committed to participating in the national electricity market under a series of agreements, the first of which was entered into in 1991. Reform of the Queensland electricity supply industry is being pursued, and must continue to be pursued, in a timely and orderly manner to ensure that the industry can compete effectively in the national electricity market.

To this end, in June 1996 the Minister for Mines and Energy established the independent Queensland electricity industry structure task force to recommend a set of structural, institutional and regulatory arrangements for the electricity supply industry that will best suit the energy needs of Queensland, while having regard to the Government's regional and economic development objectives and the need to maintain system security. Currently, the task force is finalising its report to the Minister. The Government has not made any decision on, or considered, the issues being examined by the task force or those raised in the notice of motion. To do so would pre-empt its consideration of the task force recommendations.

I can assure members that, contrary to the suggestion made by the member for Mount Isa in his notice of motion, the Queensland Government will not be launching into a savage rationalisation of one of its most important industries. The Government is fully conscious of the vital role that the Queensland electricity supply industry has to play in relation to regional employment and development. In formulating its reform proposals, the Government will ensure the maintenance of a strong regional presence with change to be introduced in a managed and timely manner.

The coalition Government remains committed to protecting Queensland's

domestic electricity consumers from any adverse price impacts resulting from the previous Labor Government's corporatisation of the power industry. It was the corporatisation of the QTSC by the previous Government, which demanded that it operate on a fully commercial footing, that placed the QTSC at arm's length of any Government of the day. It was also the Labor Government which committed Queensland to the National Competition Policy, thereby tying future Queensland Governments to losing hundreds of millions of dollars in Federal money.

The former Minister for Minerals and Energy is being hypocritical by now suggesting that the impacts of the policy to which Labor committed this State—which went well into the future—are proposals of the coalition. They were proposals by the previous Labor Government. Today, the Opposition—the previous Government—is opposing its actions, which were designed to restore the Queensland electricity supply industry to the dominant position that it once held.

As I said before, the coalition is committed to improving the performance of the power industry, and it is also committed to ensuring that the processes work to the advantage of the State and of all Queenslanders.

Ms SPENCE (Mount Gravatt) (6.20 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to support the motion moved by the Labor Party this evening. Like all Queenslanders, I was delighted to open my *Courier-Mail* yesterday and find out that the electricity industry had made a profit of half a billion dollars this year. The first thought that came to my mind was that obviously the Labor Government had left the electricity industry in a very healthy state if it showed such profits. Honourable members can imagine my surprise when I then learned that the Government expects to increase the price of electricity for Queensland consumers and to sack electricity workers in this State.

The last time most Queenslanders gave much thought to those who work in the electricity industry was in the 1980s when another National Party Government decided to sack electricity workers because of their belief in trade unionism. Now we discover that a National Party Government is going to sack at least 1,500 electricity workers when the industry has just made a profit of half a billion dollars. This time, is the Government going to rob those workers of their superannuation entitlements as well? Are electricity workers, like all Queensland workers, meant to sit back and accept this under the mantle of economic rationalism?

No doubt the sacked workers will come from provincial cities and rural areas, and that will mean that fewer wage packets will be circulating throughout those towns. The Government will increase unemployment in rural and provincial Queensland, so people will have even less hope at a time when the Government is also cutting back on employment programs. This is another example of the National Party doing what it always does best: it is walking away from rural areas.

How does the Government justify sacking 1,500 people after announcing a profit of half a billion dollars? It is no wonder that people are angry, that they have lost confidence in and are fed up with Australian Governments when they see such idiocy in policy and decision making. The Goss Government enforced a positive policy for Queensland consumers. Electricity prices never rose by more than half the consumer price index. We ran that policy because we ran the Government. Unlike the National/Liberal Government, we had no need to increase charges on basic things like car registration, tyres, oil and electricity every time we needed to feed the Treasurer's coffers.

The average consumers in this State are questioning electricity price increases following the announcement of such a profit by the electricity industry. Recently, the Minister committed $800,000 to doing up his building in Mary Street. Is that how he justifies these electricity increases? The hard-working consumers of Queensland will have to foot that bill as well.

The Labor Government ensured that the prices never increased by more than half the CPI. When we reduced the price to commercial users by between 9 per cent and 10 per cent to create a favourable business climate in Queensland, we froze domestic electricity prices so that consumers would not pay. This climate was designed to create jobs throughout the State. Now the Government wants to reverse those achievements. It wants ordinary everyday Queenslanders, who have already been hit by the Treasurer's seven new taxes and charges, to subsidise big business. This is the Government's idea of justice for consumers!

I ask the Minister: what will happen to the rebate for aged pensioners when the industry is privatised? If the Minister is going to run the industry solely for profit, will the pensioners continue to get their electricity rebate? What

about other consumer obligations such as the consumer advisory service? Will it stay or disappear? What about the testing of electric appliances, which is currently a free service provided by the electricity supplier?

Time expired.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone) (6.25 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"That the words—

'That this Parliament condemns the savage rationalisation and privatisation proposed by the Borbidge Government for the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation'

be deleted;

that the words—

'Abandon the planned increases in electricity prices for domestic users, as a cruel impost on ordinary Queensland families;'

be deleted, and the words—

'maintain control of electricity prices for domestic users to CPI increases or transparent cost increases only;'

be inserted;

that the words—

'stop the "downsizing" of the QTSC workforce by 23%, or 1500 jobs, due to its severe impact on the employment base of regional Queensland;'

be deleted, and the words

'ensure any reduction in staff by the QTSC be by natural attrition or voluntary early retirement;'

be added;

that the words—

'reject the privatisation of the electricity industry as a senseless attack on essential State assets, which we cannot afford to let fall into private hands; and further that the House calls on the Borbidge Government to stop slugging Queenslanders with a growing list of unnecessary increases to State taxes and charges'

be deleted, and the words—

'rejects any privatisation of the existing electricity industry which is an essential State asset.'

be inserted."

If the House agrees to the amendment, the motion will read—

"That the Parliament calls on the Government to—

(a) maintain control of electricity prices for domestic users to CPI increases or transparent cost increases only;

(b) reject any moves to dismantle tariff equalisation which would be a massive attack on rural and remote Queenslanders;

(c) recognise the continuing importance of regionally based boards;

(d) ensure any reduction in staff by the QTSC be by natural attrition or voluntary early retirement;

(e) rejects any privatisation of the existing electricity industry which is an essential State asset."

The positives in the motion moved by the member for Mount Isa should be reinforced. My purpose in deleting the first paragraph came from advice that the current QTSC structure and many future structural changes to power supply entities in this State stem from agreements reached by the previous Government regarding national competition policies. At this time the price rises, as addressed in the original motion, are unconfirmed.

Paragraph (a) of the amended motion maintains control of prices while recognising that some reasonable and sustainable increases may occur in the future. The paragraph is not intended to approve the CPI increase as an acceptable increase year by year, but to set the CPI increase as a maximum. The previous Government policy was an increase of half the CPI and, quite apart from the economic rationalists, if the corporation is functioning profitably no cost increases should be entertained.

Paragraph (b) rightly reinforces the need for tariff equalisation. Our diverse community is interdependent. The city will not survive without the rural and regional contribution and, in a different way, the country needs the city.

Paragraph (c) reinforces the valued contribution made by the regional boards. Those boards should be retained. In fact, the regional boards add a very local flavour and local knowledge to the electricity generation business. Again, because of the diversity of our State, that local knowledge is vital.

In paragraph (d), I acknowledge the comments of the member for Mount Isa. In amending paragraph (d) as circulated, my

point is to recognise that employment needs change over time. Those changes can be predicated on a number of things, but the most noticeable has been changes in technology. If change occurs and impacts on staff numbers occur, reductions should only be by voluntary early retirements or by natural attrition. However, it should be remembered that the impact of job reductions in rural, regional and, indeed, urban Queensland is significant. A number of jobs lost in regional and rural Queensland can impact on a whole town, so employment reductions should only be entertained as a last resort.

Paragraph (e) reinforces the motion carried earlier this year that the current electricity infrastructure should remain in public ownership. We have a very good public infrastructure. If the QTSC proposals do not enhance the service provisions, they should be rejected. Economic rationalism is not the be-all and end-all of good management of community assets. We need to take the positives, but be resolute in rejecting anything that does not benefit Queenslanders. I commend the amendment to the House.

Mr ELLIOTT (Cunningham) (6.28 p.m.): I have much pleasure in rising to second the amendment moved by the member for Gladstone. On a fairly regularly basis in this House, the member for Gladstone brings commonsense to things which have often been quite over the top.

I turn to a couple of comments made by the honourable member for Mount Isa. In paragraph (b) of the honourable member's motion, he calls for a rejection of any moves to dismantle tariff equalisation which would be a "massive attack" on rural Queensland. My goodness: he is the champion of the bush! I remind the member for Mount Isa of the time when Tom Burns led the Labor Party and I watched Labor members walk out——

Mr McGRADY: I rise to a point of order. I remind the member that in 1066 we had the Battle of Hastings.

Mr ELLIOTT: I find the hypocrisy of members opposite quite incredible. There is a tremendous divergence of opinion in this House and all honourable members respect each others' views, within reason. I can stand most things. However, if there is one thing I cannot stand it is hypocrisy. Members of the Labor Party were dead-set against any sort of equalisation of the electricity tariffs of this State. They jumped up and down, marched in the street, addressed and harangued crowds and carried on about it. Then the whole Opposition walked out of this place over the issue. I watched them do it.

The honourable member cannot tell me that he supports the bush. I was here for the six years that the Labor Government spent dismantling everything in the bush that it could find. There is hardly a courthouse to be found in my area. There is hardly a thing left. The Millmerran Court House has gone. Members opposite are the biggest hypocrites I have ever seen. It is really refreshing to see the member for Gladstone moving an amendment which brings some commonsense into the debate tonight. None of us in this place with any commonsense wants to see tariffs increased in the electricity industry. When the industry is making money, as it is at the moment, I do not for one minute support any increase in tariffs. Obviously, as I have just indicated, I totally support the equalisation program in this State. It is tremendously important.

Mr McGrady interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mount Isa is in the wrong seat and is making frivolous interjections.

Mr Gilmore: Might I ask you to please inform the House if there have been tariff increases this year?

Mr ELLIOTT: No, there have not been any increases. They were refused earlier this year. It is quite hypocritical for members opposite to suggest what they are suggesting. Within reason, we all believe that the board policy is a good one, because it allows local input. We have all seen what the Government has done in respect of hospitals. It has put in place councils and done away with the bureaucratic nonsense that Labor built up. Labor built up bureaucracies around the State. People were shining chairs and producing nothing. That was not the way to go. We will now see people with not an interest in the health of their pocket book but in the good of the area working towards ensuring that those hospitals are run well. There will be local input from people who understand the problems.

As to the electricity boards—I believe they are doing a good job. When an issue arises, the local councillors on the boards will understand what is going on. However, by the same token, let us not say that they know everything and that there is no room for improvement. I would like to see greater efficiencies. I saw what happened in the days of the strike. I witnessed the threats and intimidation. They ruined old ladies' fridges and freezers full of food and so on. We want to see further efficiencies in respect of bringing

down prices and ensuring efficiency in the industry.

Time expired.

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay) (6.33 p.m.): This evening I rise to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Mount Isa condemning the savage rationalisation and privatisation proposed by the Borbidge Government for the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation.

Once again, I am deeply saddened that I have to stand in this House and criticise the cuts in services and jobs to rural and regional areas of Queensland by this conservative Government. Conservative Governments at both State and Federal levels are big on the rhetoric of job creation and service delivery, but do little. They campaigned on the issue of the need to create more jobs in regional Queensland. Let us look at their latest track record on job creation and service delivery.

Last weekend at the National Party talkfest at Hervey Bay, they spoke about the need for going back to the bush and delivering more jobs and services to regional Queensland. They admitted and accepted that they had let down the people of regional Queensland. They asked for forgiveness, but let us look at the penance that they are proposing to dish out to the domestic consumer of electricity in regional Queensland and the workers in the electricity industry.

They want to vertically integrate the Queensland Transmission and Supply Corporation by abolishing the seven regional electricity boards with their own autonomy and local decision-making powers, and form one large organisation with all powers and wisdom vested in Brisbane. They want to rid the industry of 1,500 jobs, or 23 per cent of its work force. They want to dismantle tariff equalisation. This is the way in which they want to repay the people of regional Queensland for their forgiveness!

The proposed abolition of seven regional electricity boards will have a huge impact on the economies of regional and rural Queensland. In my home town of Mackay, the impact will be enormous. The Mackay Electricity Board and its predecessors have been part of the Mackay community since electricity was first generated in Mackay nearly 100 years ago. The Mackay Electricity Board employs approximately 246 permanent employees plus 28 casuals and serves an area running from Proserpine in the north down to Clairview in the south and out to Moranbah in the west. It is the smallest but one of the most profitable of the seven distribution boards.

The announcement has had a devastating impact on the morale of this dedicated work force, who take pride in their work and are proud of the service they provide to rural, domestic, commercial and industrial customers. These dedicated workers are unsure of their future and feel a loss of dignity. They need reassuring by this Government that they have a future in the industry. If the 23 per cent cut were made uniformly across the MEB work force, over 55 jobs would go. However, the likely scenario will see the abolition of the administration section. If this is the case—and I hope it is not—job losses could be as high as 100. Jobs likely to go are in the areas of accounts payable, billing, information technology, finance, wages and employee relations. Because of technology, these jobs could be located in Brisbane. Already cash receipting is no longer available to customers at the Proserpine and Sarina offices of the MEB; that is now handled by private agents. The same thing will happen to the Mackay office.

Field staff are worried that their jobs will be privatised and contracted out. Workers in small rural and country depots such as Nebo, Pinnacle, Calen and Moranbah are concerned that their depots will be closed. This will be another blow to these smaller communities. The loss of any jobs and cuts in services are also felt by the wider community. Currently, the wider community has no confidence in the economy because of the uncertainty created by this coalition Government. A decision such as this one will only reinforce feelings of no confidence in the economy. How can jobs be created in a climate of uncertainty?

Another loser will be the domestic consumer in Mackay. Through the QTSC, the Government will abolish the freeze placed on electricity prices by the former Labor Government. It will apply at least full CPI increases to tariffs. Prior to the freeze, the former Labor Government had kept electricity price increases to half of the CPI increases. They have also stated that this restructure will not result in cheaper electricity prices for domestic consumers. Again, this Government is hell-bent on hurting low-income families. Once again, the proof is there that this minority Government is the biggest shareholder in Queensland "Misery Inc."—a company that deals in misery and despair. The destruction of Queenslanders' jobs means nothing to the coalition Government.

Mr HARPER (Mount Ommaney) (6.38 p.m.): This morning, when I heard the honourable member giving notice of this motion, I thought to myself, "Well, here we go again. The member for Mount Isa is back on the same old track." Time and time again, we hear his scaremongering in an attempt to cause panic purely to seek political advantage for his party. He does not care about the people whom he claims to represent and wants to look after—supposedly. Perhaps the member for Mount Isa has forgotten that and now tends to disown his actions.

Let us face up to some facts. As we have heard tonight, it was the ALP which corporatised the QTSC and introduced the massive reorganisation that went on in the whole of the electricity industry. It was Labor also that committed Queensland to the National Competition Policy, and any deviation from that would cost this State hundreds of millions of dollars. Why do the ALP and its shadow Minister not face up to the facts for once and admit that they are on the wrong track again?

Today in the debate on this motion we have heard comments about downsizing of personnel. Once again, the member for Mount Isa seems to have had a memory lapse. Let us refer to reports that he himself as the then Minister tabled in this House. Let us look at the figure as at 30 June 1990—and that is giving them quite a few months from the time when they took over as the Government. The total work force in the electricity industry in Queensland was 8,533. As at 31 December 1994—only a couple of years ago—that figure had reduced to 7,661, a reduction of 892. Those are the figures from the reports tabled by the former Minister. He seems to have forgotten that. What a convenient lapse of memory!

Another thing that the member for Mount Isa seems to have forgotten when he talks about cutting tariffs and the freezing of tariffs is that it was the former coalition Government that first started to cut the increases and then imposed freezes on tariffs. It was not the ALP and not the former Minister that did that. Once again, that fact seems to have slipped from his memory.

Another fact which ought to be faced up to and which members opposite have not wanted to admit is that the comments yesterday were from the QTSC and not from the Minister. That has to be addressed. How does the member for Mount Isa know what is in the Anderson report? That is another question that should be answered, but I am sure that the member for Mount Isa will not do so. That is a confidential report. It has not yet been completed and it has not yet been fully presented to the Minister, as he said this morning. How can the member for Mount Isa claim that he knows exactly what is in it? Is he saying that he has obtained leaked information relating to that report? That would be an interesting question for him to answer.

As the ALP and the former Minister have raised the issue of performance, it is interesting to consider the performance of the QESI. An efficient and reliable electricity supply industry is fundamental to the wellbeing and future development of this State. That is a fact which this Government well and truly realises, faces up to and is doing something about. Under the policies of the previous Labor Government, the performance of the Queensland electricity supply industry slipped significantly while other States continued to improve. We need only refer to the graphs from the Productivity Commission. If we go right back into the 1970s, we see that under the former coalition Government the electricity industry was taken upwards in Queensland. Its performance increased to the point at which, in the mid-eighties, it was on top in the States in Australia. In 1992-93, it was No. 1. Under the continued guidance and stewardship of the ALP and the former Minister, what happened? By 1993 it had slipped to No. 3. The former Minister had the hide to talk about and criticise performance and carry on in the way he did, when it was under his stewardship that that slip occurred. It was under his stewardship that there was that massive decrease in employment, yet tonight he is trying to accuse us of dastardly things when it was under his Government and his stewardship that all of those jobs were cut.

We need to place Queensland at a competitive advantage—unlike the former Government, which put us at a competitive disadvantage—as we are about to enter the national electricity market. This is something that has to be faced up to, which the Minister is doing. Some parts of the Queensland electricity industry are still performing very well, despite the stewardship of the former Government. For example, the economic performance of the Queensland transmission system is high by world and Australian standards, and some of the State's electricity distributors/retailers are close to world's best practice. We did not hear any commendation from the former Minister tonight in regard to that. The Queensland Government has recognised this situation and proposes to enhance the efficiency of the electricity supply

industry ahead of the State's direct participation in the national electricity market, which is planned to occur around 2000 with the interconnection of the Queensland and New South Wales grids.

I conclude by saying that once again we are seeing more hypocrisy from members opposite.

Time expired.

Hon. G. N. SMITH (Townsville) (6.43 p.m.): I rise in support of the Opposition spokesman, Mr McGrady, who was very ably supported by other Opposition spokesmen, particularly the member for Nudgee, who has a specialist knowledge of the electricity industry, and my colleague the member for Mackay, who, like myself, worked in a regional authority. I worked in a middle management position and I am very much aware of what is going on. We have lived through this sort of thing before. What we hear from the other side is the blustering rhetoric of a Government trying to justify the steps that have obviously now been put in place.

The measure that has been announced over the last couple of days is really the first step in the sell-off of a major public asset. It is the beginning of privatisation. We will probably see privatisation of water boards and that sort of thing before very long. It is becoming increasingly evident from recent overseas experience that the sale of electricity and water authorities does not always bring efficiencies. In fact, a very good example was given the other day. The profits rise for the investors, and the costs go up for the consumers. That is okay if one is in a position to be an investor and reap those profits, but most people do not have that opportunity, and the people who end up being hit are the domestic consumers—the people without muscle—and small-business people. That is the inevitable outcome.

As has been said, but it needs to be emphasised, this is a further attack on regionalisation. I do not believe I can be criticised for saying that to me this sounds more like dry Liberal policy than traditional National Party policy. In fact, I suspect that some National Party members will be shuddering in their seats when they realise the impact that this is going to have in the community. We are looking at an erosion of decision making in regional Queensland, and we are looking at a loss of jobs and the disruption of the careers and lives of people in that community. We are looking at the loss of somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 jobs—jobs that have been regarded as secure, and that will cause a further loss of public confidence at a time when the community needs not another kick in the guts but reassurance and a Government commitment to grow, not erode, regional opportunities, particularly employment opportunities.

The announcement heralding further job losses comes at a time when housing commencements in my home town of Townsville are at an historic low, at a time when new vehicle sales—except for fleet buyers and cars that are so small that one has to pull them on rather than get into them—have just about disappeared. Since the change of both the State and the Federal Government, the economy of Townsville has faltered to the extent that it is now worse than it was at the time of the pilots strike. I am not referring to the beginning of the pilots strike, because it took quite a while for it to percolate through to Townsville; but when it did, everyone felt it. That is the position in Townsville and some other cities: the economy is already worse than it was during the pilots strike.

The community of Townsville has historically relied on secure Government pay packets, even though they may not have been large pay packets. People have been terrified about the potential loss of their family income ever since the State coalition Government and the Federal Howard Government came to power. The terror in the community over the shaky financial security of wage earners has small businesses going downwards in a very big way. They have been hit flat. That is why not only car sales and housing commencements have suffered but also small businesses have been hit for a six. They cannot sell furniture; they cannot sell paint; hairdressers are closing their doors or reducing their staff; they cannot even sell training programs because people say, "Why should we spend money on training for jobs that are non-existent?" We should be looking not at eroding existing jobs but at doing something to try to create more jobs. There is mass panic in that community, but the community will fight back. Mark my words: it will happen soon.

It gives me no great pleasure or satisfaction to voice these alarming facts, but the chickens have come home to roost in a big way. People might ask, "What does this have to do with the axing of 25 per cent of jobs in the electricity industry?" It means the loss of our regional authority; it means the loss of tariff equalisation, which in turn means higher costs and fewer opportunities outside of

the south-east corner; it means that local people who want to be employed will have to move from their home town——

Time expired.

Hon. T. J. G. GILMORE (Tablelands—Minister for Mines and Energy) (6.48 p.m.): What more can I say? I honestly do not think the Opposition has hit the high notes tonight with this little lot. What we have seen tonight is the previous Minister of the Crown howling into the wind—his pathetic, miserable, regressive attitude. He has slipped beautifully into Opposition. That is his natural place: sitting in Opposition.

This motion has wasted the time of this Parliament in a miserable attack that has gone nowhere, because the whole of the proposition was based on a false premise. I will go through some of those details. First of all, let me say to the honourable member for Mount Isa that the QTSC does not set the agenda in the electricity industry in this State. I said that this morning, and I would have hoped that the member would have heard the message, but clearly he did not. Firstly, he claimed that we have abandoned the planned increase in electricity prices. Let me just say that our policy was to freeze electricity prices until 1996, which we have done, and we have honoured that by further freezing electricity prices. That was clearly done by this Government.

Mr McGrady: What did we do?

Mr GILMORE: The former Government froze electricity prices, but, as was pointed out a while ago, it also claimed to have limited increases to half the CPI. The previous Government did that.

Dismantling of tariff equalisation is simply not on. Professor Anderson was instructed in his terms of reference to address that matter quite specifically and that matter has been dealt with. We heard about the continued importance of regional boards. Of course they are recognised and we will continue to accept their position in this State. We also heard about the downsizing of the work force. There is no target for downsizing of the work force in this State. The only targets this Government has are for better efficiency, better productivity, reduced prices and better competition; those are this Government's targets. Do honourable members opposite honestly believe that we should stick with the status quo of the third least efficient electricity industry in this country, thanks to their efforts? Should we stay with the status quo? Of course we should not, and the people of Queensland would be outraged if we did so. Indeed, the headlines tomorrow morning should read not that we are attempting to reduce the electricity industry in any way, but that the Queensland electricity industry is once again headed for the high notes. Under our tutelage, the electricity industry is going to once again be the best in this country.

I am very disappointed that I have only five minutes to respond to some of the garbage that was just spoken by a number of people in this place. The member for Nudgee sought to decry the National Competition Policy; he sought to distance the Opposition from National Competition Policy. He said that we are going along with it and that it is dreadful. It was the Goss Labor Government that signed off at COAG in 1993; it was the Goss Labor Government that sent us down the road to competition in the electricity industry. I believe it was one of the proper decisions that was taken by that Government. This Government is following down that track and it is doing it quite properly and it is doing it well, and the electricity industry in Queensland will benefit because of it. The member could not accept an interjection in respect of that; he stood and listened and looked dumb, equal to his previous best, and then continued because he could not stand it.

On many occasions, the previous Minister has accused me, both inside this Parliament and outside, of in some way or another putting our competition payments in jeopardy because he considered that I was doing something that may not well fit in with the National Competition Policy, and now he seeks to distance himself from it. He seeks to distance the Opposition from National Competition Policy by this miserable debate that he has called on in the Parliament tonight.

I would like to go on for the next hour, but time does not permit me. I support the amendment of the honourable member for Gladstone. As was stated by the member for Cunningham, the honourable member has brought some commonsense to this debate. For the first time today we have seen some real commonsense in a debate in this House and I believe that members of the Opposition stand condemned because they simply cannot accept a commonsense amendment to a ridiculous proposition. The Government will be supporting the amendments put forward by the member for Gladstone.

Time expired.

Question—That the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 44—Ardill, Barton, Beattie, Bird, Bligh, Braddy, Bredhauer, Briskey, Campbell, D'Arcy, De Lacy, Dollin, Edmond, Elder, Foley, Fouras, Gibbs, Goss W. K., Hamill, Hayward, Hollis, Lucas, McElligott, McGrady, Mackenroth, Milliner, Mulherin, Nunn, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Purcell, Roberts, Robertson, Rose, Schwarten, Smith, Spence, Sullivan J. H., Welford, Wells, Woodgate *Tellers:* Livingstone, Sullivan T. B.

NOES, 44—Baumann, Beanland, Borbidge, Connor, Cooper, Cunningham, Davidson, Elliott, FitzGerald, Gamin, Gilmore, Goss J. N., Grice, Harper, Healy, Hegarty, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Laming, Lester, Lingard, Littleproud, McCauley, Malone, Mitchell, Perrett, Quinn, Radke, Rowell, Santoro, Sheldon, Simpson, Slack, Stephan, Stoneman, Tanti, Veivers, Warwick, Watson, Wilson, Woolmer *Tellers:* Springborg, Carroll

The numbers being equal, Mr Speaker cast his vote with the Noes.

Resolved in the **negative**.

Amendment agreed to.

Question—That the motion, as amended, be agreed to—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 44—Baumann, Beanland, Borbidge, Connor, Cooper, Cunningham, Davidson, Elliott, FitzGerald, Gamin, Gilmore, Goss J. N., Grice, Harper, Healy, Hegarty, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Laming, Lester, Lingard, Littleproud, McCauley, Malone, Mitchell, Perrett, Quinn, Radke, Rowell, Santoro, Sheldon, Simpson, Slack, Stephan, Stoneman, Tanti, Veivers, Warwick, Watson, Wilson, Woolmer *Tellers:* Springborg, Carroll

NOES, 44—Ardill, Barton, Beattie, Bird, Bligh, Braddy, Bredhauer, Briskey, Campbell, D'Arcy, De Lacy, Dollin, Edmond, Elder, Foley, Fouras, Gibbs, Goss W. K., Hamill, Hayward, Hollis, Lucas, McElligott, McGrady, Mackenroth, Milliner, Mulherin, Nunn, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Purcell, Roberts, Robertson, Rose, Schwarten, Smith, Spence, Sullivan J. H., Welford, Wells, Woodgate *Tellers:* Livingstone, Sullivan T. B.

The numbers being equal, Mr Speaker cast his vote with the Ayes.

Resolved in the **affirmative**.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr FITZGERALD (Lockyer—Leader of Government Business) (7.04 p.m.): I move—

"That the House do now adjourn."

Gold Coast Hospital

Mrs ROSE (Currumbin) (7.04 p.m.): This morning, I detailed the chronic understaffing problems at the Gold Coast Hospital. Tonight, I wish to highlight the underresourcing of the hospital. This year's Budget will give the hospital only four high-dependency beds when it needs at least 12. I cannot understand why patients at the Gold Coast Hospital have to do without these much-needed resources, especially when this Government can find $5m to fund its multitude of inquiries.

Because of the low number of high-dependency beds at the Gold Coast, there are lots of patients who come out of intensive care too early because of the pressure on beds in the intensive care unit. There are insufficient nurses to cater for this and, as I pointed out this morning, there are not enough registrars to help the staff. As an example, I draw the attention of this House to two cases which I have encountered recently in which desperate people were in need of treatment at the Gold Coast Hospital.

At the beginning of September, I was approached by a young lady on behalf of her mother, who had been diagnosed in March as suffering from a brain aneurism. Her doctor advised her to have surgery as soon as possible as there was a distinct possibility that the aneurism could burst, killing the woman. She was booked into the Gold Coast Hospital in August to have the surgery. Her children's grandparents travelled from interstate for the operation, and other family members made arrangements to have time off work to be together while surgery took place. Two hours before being admitted to the hospital, the family was shattered when they were called and told the operation had been cancelled. Again, the lady was booked in for the operation at the beginning of September. But it was not to be. The operation was postponed, and family members were left waiting in the lurch, fearing for the life of their wife and mother.

It was at this time that the Minister for Health had the hide to say that waiting lists for emergency treatment at the Gold Coast Hospital had been drastically cut. How does he think that family felt when they read in the *Gold Coast Bulletin* that there were no waiting lists, knowing that surgery had been postponed twice, putting their loved one's life at risk? I am pleased to inform the House that it was third time lucky for that lady and that she underwent her operation last Monday. However, it is not good enough for the Minister to go around and make these claims about waiting lists when they are clearly not true.

Further to this terrible story is another case which makes the Minister's statements look plain silly. A gentleman who lives in Elanora approached me recently about his desperate need to have a hip replacement operation. He is 56 years of age, has a family

and has been on extended sick leave from his job awaiting an operation. He has been told that he may have to wait until 1998 for treatment.

Mrs Bird: Off work?

Mrs ROSE: Yes, he has been off work, and he has to wait until 1998 for treatment.

Mrs Bird: That is shameful.

Mrs ROSE: Yes, it is shameful.

In the meantime, that gentleman is in great pain and unable to work. He read the Minister's comments in the newspaper about big cuts in waiting lists and wants to know why he has to wait so long if that is the case. Clearly, this shows that the Health Minister's claims about reducing waiting lists are just rubbish. How can they do more surgery when there is a shortage of high-dependency beds and a shortage of nurses to look after the patients in intensive care? I have been told that on Friday and Saturday nights at the hospital there is no night medical registrar, so the registrar has to work round the clock—24 hours on one shift.

Those are the appalling working conditions faced by some staff at the Gold Coast Hospital. How can people perform professional, demanding work without making mistakes when they are simply physically exhausted? Health professionals have told me that no night resident doctor has been officially appointed. As a result of the enormous workload carried out by those hardworking professionals, very few patients are seen in the wards on Friday and Saturday nights—the two busiest nights of the week. As a result, many patients receive less than adequate assessment on those nights. This is a completely scandalous situation for one of the largest cities in Queensland.

As if these problems were not enough, it appears that the overworked staff at the Gold Coast Hospital will have to contend with a drain in resources. Health care and the lives of people should not be squandered because Mr Horan will not allocate the finite dollars in the health system to bring the Gold Coast Hospital up to scratch before he proceeds with further fully funded projects. The Health Minister has to start listening to the experts who agree that, at the moment, Robina should have a day surgery unit and a community health centre while the problems at Southport are fixed up. This Government can find $600,000 to do up Mr Lingard's ministerial office and $800,000——

Time expired.

Coowonga State School

Hon. V. P. LESTER (Keppel) (7.09 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I report this evening on what was a very pleasant ceremony last Friday in the electorate of Keppel. I had the great pleasure of officially opening the Coowonga school total renovations and rebuilding. That little school of between 40 and 45 students—as the time of the year dictates—is situated between Rockhampton and Emu Park, slightly towards Keppel Sands. It has an outstanding P & C association. It also has great community support. Under the leadership of the principal, Mrs Jo Reid-Speirs, it works very well.

I do not think that I have ever seen such a pleasant occasion as that one last Friday. Believe it or not, representations started in 1980 to try to rebuild the school, through a variation of National Governments and the Labor Government. Ultimately, it all came to a head about 18 months ago, when the then principal asked me to go out and look at the situation of the school. It was leaking. It was condemned. It really was in a terrible mess.

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr LESTER: Both parties were involved in that school and neither's record was all that good prior to——

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr LESTER: Yes, that is right. There is no doubt about that.

We had to rebuild the school. That has been done very well and we obtained a house for the teacher into the bargain. That is a nice modern schoolhouse. Representatives from the Education Department attended the opening. A lot of singing was organised by the principal, Jo Reid-Speirs, who can play the guitar very, very well. She led the ceremony in a most magnificent manner. Recently, the students have compiled their own song for the Coowonga school.

Mr T. B. Sullivan: Sing it for us.

Mr LESTER: Being a former teacher—and a very good teacher, I am led to believe—I suggest to the honourable member that we treat this occasion with the importance that it does deserve in the Parliament. My singing would not help that.

All of the children recited poems that they had written about the history of the school. To sit and listen to those various students reciting different poems made up by them all about the same subject was an awe-inspiring experience. The opening was very well attended by all members of the P & C. It was

an absolutely outstanding occasion. I do not think I have been to such a happy occasion for a long, long time. I thank all those responsible. I think the work probably started about four years ago and ultimately it has happened.

In addition, the P & C has done a lot of work in the garden of the school. They are building a tropical rainforest and that is coming along very well. All sorts of garden projects are being carried out. Those 40 young students are particularly good at all sports. They compete with much larger schools in an excellent manner.

Time expired.

Public Housing, Maryborough

Mr DOLLIN (Maryborough) (7.14 p.m.): I rise to point out to honourable members of this House the inconsistencies of the Honourable Minister for Public Works and Housing, Mr Connor, in media statements and in answers that he has given me in the past few months concerning public housing in Maryborough. The Honourable Minister was reported in the Maryborough *Chronicle* of 15 September under the heading "Housing on hold". The article stated—

> "A public housing project in North Street Maryborough has been put on hold due to low public demands in the area.
>
> State Public Works and Housing Minister Ray Connor said yesterday construction of eight units would not proceed during the 1996/97 financial year as originally planned."

And as financed by the Goss Labor Government. The article continued—

> "'This project has been put on hold because of the area's relatively low public housing waiting lists'," he said. The wait time for seniors units in the area is 26 months. The Minister said priority of construction had been given to areas with waiting lists in excess of 42 months.
>
> Mr Connor said the fact that the project had been put on hold at this stage, did not mean it would not continue in the future."

I will quote what the Honourable Minister said in answer to an interjection in this House from me regarding the public housing situation in Maryborough. It appears in *Hansard* on pages 2814 and 2815 of 12 September. The Minister stated—

> "What is the waiting list in Maryborough? That electorate and the electorate of Hervey Bay have been so pork-barrelled that they probably will not get any additional public housing for ages. In the past, so many have gone there."

The Honourable Minister also stated—

> "My electorate has received more public housing in the last four or five months—I think it has obtained about 25 under the Spot Purchase plan—than what the Labor Government had given it in the last three years. I might add that the area represented by the member for Currumbin has had about three or four more than my electorate. The electorate represented by the member for Broadwater has had a few more, and the electorate represented by the member for Southport has had a few more than my electorate. This Government is targeting needs—where the waiting lists are the longest."

That is a confession from this Minister that he is pork-barrelling his electorate in the south-east corner at the expense of Maryborough and other Labor-held electorates across Queensland.

I recently received from the Department of Public Works and Housing a list of approximate waiting times for public housing in Maryborough as at 1 September. That list showed the following: a wait time of 12 to 24 months for a one-bed senior unit, two to eight months for a two-bed townhouse, between 6 and 99 months for a two-bedroom duplex, between 28 and 99 months for a two-bedroom house, between 10 and 24 months for a three-bedroom house, up to 12 months for a three-bed townhouse, between 24 and 99 months for a four-bedroom house and 99 months wait time for a five to six-bed house in Maryborough. I table that document.

A press release in the Maryborough *Chronicle* on 17 October from the Minister's office stated—

> "Maryborough and Hervey Bay people are not waiting up to eight years for public housing as the maximum wait times are 36 and 40 months."

I must congratulate the Minister on that amazing reduction in the wait times for public housing in our region in just one month. He achieved that by not listing waiting times beyond 30 months. That is his process now. I table that document. What a fraud! This Minister has reduced the waiting time by simply not putting people on the waiting list beyond 30 months. Now we all know how to cut the wasting list: simply do not include

people on the list if it is longer than 30 months.

I am now wondering when Maryborough is going to get back what it lost: eight units in North Street, a duplex in Sussex and Tooley Streets and the upgrade of the Jupiter Street aged units that was planned and financed by the previous Goss Labor Government. The funds for that project were removed to the Minister's electorate in the south-east corner. In the Maryborough *Chronicle* of 17 October, Mr Connor stated—

> ". . . Mr Dollin obviously doesn't understand the public housing waiting lists and has misinterpreted the system."

I can assure the Minister that 99 months in anybody's language is eight years and a bit, but in the space of one month the 99-month wait times have miraculously disappeared and reappeared as 30 months. That is no miracle but a convenient juggling of the waiting list to hide the Minister's pork-barrelling of his own electorate at the expense of Maryborough and to hide the rapidly growing waiting list caused by the Minister's bungling of his portfolio. He is a lame-duck Minister if ever there was one, and Queensland's public housing is suffering for that.

The Colour Courage

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah) (7.19 p.m.): Last Wednesday evening, I had the pleasure of attending a series of vignettes called *The Colour Courage* by the Warren Street performance group at a place called The Warren. That performance coincided with national Mental Health Awareness Week. At that function, I had the pleasure to be joined by Her Excellency the Governor, the honourable member for Yeronga, Councillor David Hinchliffe and Professor Yellowlease from the Valley Mental Health Centre. I take this opportunity to congratulate the producer, Mr Terry Maguire; the artistic director, Stephen Rowan; all the performers and the supporting staff of that function.

The object of initiatives such as *The Colour Courage* is to reduce the cultural marginalisation of those afflicted with mental illness by their involvement in the arts. It is not simply a matter of involvement in arts; these people actually portray some of the tragedies in their own life on the stage. They are to be commended for the way in which they do that and for their courage to actually portray their own lives.

The series of vignettes which we witnessed evolved from an eight-week workshop rehearsal process. The producer began by asking the participants to share with him their personal experiences of psychiatric disability. The directors were entrusted with the stories of personal courage which we saw on that night. It was the producer's job to put those stories into dramatic form. The production which eventually ensued was a dichotomy. It portrayed the vast difference between the reality of mental illness and the social stigma which is too often associated with this illness. The reality is that too many of us associate mental illness with crazy or psychopathic behaviour. This perception is wrong. *The Colour Courage* showed the difference between the mythology and the truth.

Many of the cast have had to overcome fears and anxieties of epic proportions to perform in this way. It is their courage, their dedication and their determination to generate the understanding that made this show a powerful theatrical experience and we were fortunate enough to share it on that evening.

Some of the points that were covered in this series of vignettes included the hospital situation that they endure from time to time, the doctors with whom they come in contact and the voices that they hear in their heads. There was another skit on everybody laughing and continuing laughter, a skit about the boredom that they sometimes experience in their lives and also skits about silence, of loneliness and hunger. Another skit was called "Without Consent". "Everybody Hurts" was a humorous skit about how the life of a person with a mental illness revolved around his ability to get a supply of cigarettes. Another skit was called "Mummy/Daddy", which portrayed the disappointments that many people had in their home life with their mother or their father and, in some cases, in both. Another skit titled "Mr Politician" was very striking.

The show was entertaining. At times it was humorous. It was provocative and it was extremely challenging because it made all of us in the audience think about the challenges that these people face in their everyday lives.

I recommend all members to get along to a performance. There will be another one in March or April next year at the Warren Theatre. I will read the telephone number, 383 26769, into *Hansard*. If members want to go along to one of those shows, I thoroughly recommend it.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LAMING: Members can bring their *Hansard* with them. I also won the raffle for the

evening. It is a wonderful show and I commend it to all members.

Carruthers Inquiry

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba) (7.24 p.m.): Today marks the death of open Government in Queensland. It marks the death of open Government in Queensland because it marks the hamstringing of that body which guaranteed open Government in Queensland. While there existed in Queensland an independent commission which had the capacity on its own initiative to investigate any act of Executive Government in this State, then all decisions of the Government would have to be made in the clear light of day. Today, we have had a situation in which that independent commission is no longer capable of acting with the independence it had previously.

The real authors of the destruction of the Carruthers inquiry are people who sit in this House. The real authors of the destruction of that inquiry are the members of the Cabinet who, by bringing in legislation to empower a commission of inquiry to investigate the CJC and thus undo a recommendation of the Fitzgerald commission of inquiry, have caused the events which have tolled so heavily on our democratic system today. They are the real authors because as soon as they created the power in the Connolly/Ryan commission of inquiry, they created a situation in which what happened today was always going to be possible—indeed, was always going to be likely.

In his statement, Mr Carruthers made it very clear that his independence had been compromised as a result of the fact that there was another body capable of investigating him. He stated—

> "Mr Sofronoff and Mr Newton concluded that the actual independence of my inquiry which could not hitherto be questioned had been fatally compromised; the perception of independence which had been critical had been irretrievably lost; and my own position had become untenable."

He was in the same position as a judge who was conducting an investigation; for example, who was dealing with a criminal charge and who was at the same time being investigated by a commission of inquiry which was set up to check out among other things whether that judge was conducting the criminal trial in an appropriate way. His situation had become intolerable; his independence on which so much rested had been taken from him. Were he to come down with a decision in favour of the Ministers he was investigating, he would have been seen, at least by some people, to have possibly been influenced by the threat. If he had come down with a decision against the Ministers he was investigating, he would have been seen, at least by some people, to have been reacting to the threat and therefore his impartiality could no longer be sustained.

That was the opinion of Sofronoff, QC, and Mr Newton of counsel. They have a view on another subject which will be of interest to this House. They were of the view that, in an attempt to interfere with the proper discharge by Mr Carruthers of his duty under the Act by requiring him to preserve even his personal documents and notes with a view to a later examination of them and of him, it is an interference in the discharge of the functions of the CJC such that if those requirements had been directed towards a judge of a court, they would constitute a contempt of court. The position of Mr Carruthers, having regard to his present functions, is no different. In other words, they are saying that there was a contempt committed by the Connolly/Ryan commission of inquiry.

That is the view of two eminent legal counsel. The fact that that is their view is one which echoes with legal consequences. It was their view which led the commissioner to resign. However, there were other legal consequences as well. I refer to *Judicial Ethics in Australia*, which was written by Mr Justice Thomas of our own Supreme Court. On page 67 he states—

> "Acceptance of judicial office is a lifetime commitment. That is not a stricture against early retirement; it is merely to say that when one does retire, the former judge remains under certain ethical duties the basis of which has been described above."

Therefore, that surely applies to the Connolly/Ryan commission. I ask honourable members: what do they think would be the appropriate ethical position if a judge were to be placed in a position where two eminent counsel were delivering opinions, which received wide publicity, that he had been a party to an action which was unlawful?

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 7.30 p.m.