WEDNESDAY, 31 MAY 2000

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

PETITIONS

The Clerk announced the receipt of the following petitions—

School Administrative Officers

From **Mrs Attwood** (10,315 petitioners) requesting the House to immediately secure funding (a) to convert AO2 administrative officers in small schools to the AO3 level and (b) for the conversion of long term, casual school administrative employees to permanent part-time employment.

Petford Training Farm

From **Mr Beanland** (469 petitioners) requesting the House to support the reinstatement of funds for Mr Geoff Guest and the operation of Petford Training Farm that has seen outstanding success in the rehabilitation and support of hundreds of disadvantaged youth in north Queensland.

Marshall Ski Lakes, Forest Glen

From **Mr Borbidge** (3,403 petitioners) requesting the House to instruct the Minister for Transport and his department to undertake as a matter of urgency such remedial works as are necessary to alleviate the flooding of the Marshall Ski Lakes at Forest Glen.

Gold Coast, Place Names

From **Mr Borbidge** (1,398 petitioners) requesting the House to call on the Government not to proceed with the proposals to abolish suburb and locality names within the boundaries of the City of the Gold Coast which will cause inconvenience to residents and visitors, impact on property values and undermine the historical development of the city.

Baffle Creek, Trawlers

From **Mrs Nita Cunningham** (251 petitioners) requesting the House to close Baffle Creek and its tributaries to beam trawlers for a trial period of five years to allow fish stocks to replenish and for the future of this pristine creek to be evaluated.

Vegetation Management Legislation

From **Mrs Gamin** (10 petitioners) requesting the House to rescind the Vegetation Management Bill 1999 immediately.

Life Education Centres

From **Mr Littleproud** (13 petitioners) requesting the House to restore funding for the Life Education Centres for their positive health and anti-drug abuse program for Queensland children effective 1 July 1999.

Petitions received.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

South Burnett Meatworks

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.33 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland Government has secured an agreement that will allow the South Burnett Meatworks to reopen in October. The Government has reached agreement with meat processors Bindaree Beef, a well-established operator in New South Wales with a significant output from its two plants in Orange and Inverell bound for export markets. Our announcement last week came after months of work behind the scenes to save the jobs of the 230 people who worked at the meatworks. This is a great relief to the community of Murgon. Indeed, it saves the community of Murgon in its current form.

I always said that my Government would try to assist, but I was equally adamant that the answer to this situation was not a Government takeover. The answer was always going to be for the Government to find a buyer. And that is what we have done. The deal involves four departments and assistance in areas such as training and value adding, which provides us with the assurance that Bindaree Beef is here for the long haul and is determined to make this a success. The net result is that the abattoir, which is the largest employer in Murgon, will remain viable and continue to employ people. I know that a lot of the seasonal work force has already left town, but having the abattoir reopening will mean either that they will return or that some people who would otherwise be out of work will now have a job.

A major element of the Government's assistance relates to help with the water supply for the meatworks. The State Government is providing $1.7m to the Murgon Shire Council to upgrade the town's water supply and provide enough water for the abattoir. In

addition, the Government will also provide assistance in training for staff, environmental upgrades of the abattoir, refund of stamp duty on the sale of the abattoir, and assistance for specialised machinery to further promote value adding to the raw product of the meatworks.

Having the South Burnett Meatworks reopen means that local farmers who want their kill at Murgon can retain that, while Queensland cattle currently being processed in New South Wales by Bindaree will now be processed in Murgon. This morning the Deputy Premier and I have been discussing this matter. From the meeting I had with the owners of Bindaree it was clear that they were keen to slaughter New South Wales beef here rather than the other way around, with Queensland beef going to New South Wales. This demonstrates our long-term commitment to Queensland's meat processing sector, which employs more than 15,000 people. The State Government wants to encourage the private sector to explore new opportunities, such as value adding and servicing niche markets.

When we came to office, we were presented with a report from the Borbidge administration warning that 17 abattoirs would close and 5,000 jobs would be lost if the Government did not put in place a plan to revive the industry. We acted quickly and in October 1998 we established the $20m Queensland Meat Processing Development Initiative and formed a task force to work with industry to identify opportunities, facilitate new investment and reinvestment in the industry, identifying and coordinating market development missions. The Deputy Premier, the Minister for Primary Industries and I will continue to deliver to ensure that this State has a solid meat industry.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Job Creation; Floriculture Industry

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (Premier) (9.37 a.m.), by leave: My can-do Government was elected on the promise to deliver jobs, jobs, jobs and the vision of making Queensland the Smart State. During the past two years, we have implemented policies and initiatives to achieve both of these goals. We have delivered jobs. In fact, we have generated more than 110 new jobs every day of the week—seven days a week. But, as the unacceptably high unemployment rate continues to remind all Governments in this country, much more needs to be done. And that is why my Government has worked hard, and continues to work hard, to attract new investments and encourage and nurture local companies. Part of the reason for my Government's success in attracting new investments is the increasing skills of Queensland's workers.

Last week I had the privilege to open the $4.35m Built Environment Technology Centre at the Nambour campus of the Cooloola Sunshine Institute of TAFE. While I officially opened the centre with the member for Fairfax, Alex Somlyay, I am pleased to acknowledge the presence at the ceremony of my Cabinet colleague the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Paul Braddy, and the member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington. Both of these honourable members are well regarded for their commitment to jobs and skills training.

As I said, this new facility on the Sunshine Coast will play a vital role in delivering jobs to Queenslanders by making them more highly skilled. The centre is one of the most sophisticated trade-based training facilities in Australia, providing high-quality training in courses such as carpentry, plumbing, bricklaying, and painting and decorating for the equivalent of 600 full-time students this year. Through this new facility, the construction industry in the Sunshine Coast region will have ready access to a growing pool of highly talented tradesmen and women, designers and planners—something that is crucial for the future. Indeed, the new facility has already had a positive impact on the region's economic and skills development, with 26 local suppliers and subcontractors involved in the design and construction of the facility. That is a clear example of using our Smart State strategy to deliver jobs.

While on the Sunshine Coast, I took part in another official ceremony that demonstrated my Government's Smart State strategy, and I am proud to say that this came about as a direct result of the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement. I note that the agreement is still derided by members opposite despite the fact that it works. Here is some additional proof that it works.

Under an agreement signed between Cedar Hill Orchids of Woombye and the Rainforest Conservation Society, a new industry will blossom and new jobs will be generated. When I announced the SEQ Regional Forest Agreement on behalf of the Government, with the Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, and other Ministers, I said we would continue to consult with the wildflower and foliage harvesting industry in south-east Queensland in regard to the development of a

proactive and positive wildflower and foliage industry strategy.

This industry has the potential to be one of the true success stories of the State. The export potential for this industry is enormous, particularly with industry champions like Cedar Hill leading the charge. Anyone who doubts the validity of this statement should ponder these facts. The total world consumption of cut flowers and foliage is valued at $34 billion. And the total value of potted plants sold around the world is another $27 billion. We are just scratching the surface at present, with total Australian exports of just $34m. With the resurgence of interest in wildflowers now occurring worldwide, we have the potential to capitalise on Queensland's great natural genetic wealth—the highest in Australia. I should say that at this plant, which I visited, they are using biotechnologies so that their exports will last longer, and that applies particularly to markets in Germany and other European countries. They have significant markets in those countries.

In keeping with our acknowledgment of the tremendous potential of floriculture, my Government has initiated a number of programs that will lead to enhanced development opportunities. These include—

Redeveloping the Redlands Research Centre into the premier horticulture research and development facility in Australia.

Developing a national approach, through the Queensland Horticultural Institute and the Centre for Australian Plants, for the commercialisation of native flora.

Examining a proposal involving the University of Queensland to provide the necessary research and development support critical to the growth of the Queensland floriculture industry.

Initiating negotiations with other floriculture industries to benefit from their research and development efforts to help expand the Queensland floriculture industry through targeted species development and marketing/business opportunities.

This is an exciting new development, an exciting new addition to our export catalogue. Given our small domestic market, it is vital that we continue to expand our exports of existing and new products. My Government is playing a positive role in encouraging exporters, not the least of which is the Premier's Export Awards. As honourable members would be aware, my Government has declared this to be the Year of Export, so the export awards this year take on special significance. I urge any company that has not tried exporting its goods or services to seek the help of the Department of State Development and Trade and take the plunge.

Queensland already exports goods and services worth more than $20 billion a year. It has been estimated that every $100m earned in exports creates about 1,000 jobs. So an increase in exports of just 1% would create about 2,000 new jobs. Export award applicants in 1998-99 generated 35,446 jobs, an increase of 775 employees on the previous year. I am confident that this year's export award applicants and winners, who will be named on 12 October—can at least match that effort.

In closing, I wish to digress slightly and bring to the attention of honourable members one other major export, and that is health services. As a former Minister for Health, I can assure the people of Queensland that the first priority of my Government has been—and will always be—the provision of world-class health services in world-class facilities. These services and facilities, particularly those started under the Hospitals Rebuilding Program, continue to improve and continue to attract international interest. This interest includes patients, researchers and medical practitioners.

Last week, along with the Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond, I was proud to officially open the new $34.75m Royal Children's Hospital. The Royal Children's Hospital is the largest paediatric tertiary referral hospital in Queensland and provides services not only in Queensland but throughout northern New South Wales, the Northern Territory and countries in the south-west Pacific, with some children even being referred from Japan and other parts of Asia. The redevelopment of the hospital has given Queensland a modern paediatric hospital tailored to community needs now and into the future. The largest component of the redevelopment has been the construction of a five-storey building, to be named the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation Building. The naming of the building recognises the tremendous work that the Royal Children's Hospital Foundation performs to ensure the highest quality health care is available throughout the State and beyond.

I want to place on record the thanks of all Queenslanders to the individuals, families, corporations, unions and special interest groups who have all contributed through the foundation, which has donated $5.4m to

Queensland Health for this redevelopment. I also wish to place on record the thanks of all Queenslanders to others who have contributed to this magnificent hospital. They include the University of Queensland; BBC Hardware; the staff of Coles and Pick'n Pay supermarkets; Woolworths staff, customers and suppliers; and Keidanren, Japan's association of leading national and multinational companies.

The involvement of the Japanese association stems from the strong relationship built between our State and that country through the successful liver transplant services provided to Japanese children. These transplants have been important in the development of closer social and economic ties between our State and Japan, and other Asian countries as well. As honourable members would be aware, Queensland has strong social ties with many countries that have often developed into strong economic relationships.

My Government is determined to strengthen existing ties and develop new ties with countries around the world. Yesterday, in fact, I met with the Governor of the State of Nebraska, Mr Johanns. Governor Johanns is visiting Queensland with some of his most senior bureaucrats, including the Director of the Department of Agriculture and the Director of the Department of Economic Development. It is early days yet, but I am confident that the relationship between Nebraska and Queensland will develop and deliver jobs, jobs, jobs for Queenslanders, as have our relationships with Texas and South Carolina.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Olympic Games

Hon. J. P. ELDER (Capalaba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade) (9.46 a.m.), by leave: One of the first acts of this Government on coming to office was to open an office in Sydney to liaise directly with the organisers of the Sydney Olympic Games with the object of securing as much business for Queensland companies from the Games as possible. The original target, which was set when Sydney was first selected, was to secure $50m worth of business for Queensland. That target was achieved in late 1998. A subsequent target of $80m was set. This was achieved in October last year. A new target of $100m was set. I am pleased to be able to inform the House that we have reached the target of obtaining $100m worth of business out of the Olympic Games. This makes Queensland the most successful State outside the home State of New South Wales in attracting Olympic business.

The further good news is that most of the business has been through the State's small and medium sized businesses, which have been able to provide the quality products that the Olympic Games demands. Over 100 firms from all over Queensland have been involved in Olympic contracts. Companies from as far north as Port Douglas, out west to Biloela and south to the Gold Coast have all won Olympic business. Contracts have been awarded in a wide range of industries including construction, metal fabrication, signage, kitchen design, catering supplies, tree and landscaping supplies, furniture, architectural design, electrical accessories, labour and sport venue services.

Key project sectors currently targeted by the project, that is our project, are construction fit-out, food and labour supply, security, general contracting and regional business. The project is also assisting regional development by leveraging businesses for the Olympic torch relay, the Olympic football tournament, the Paralympics, pre and post Olympics touring, and business matching of corporate guests with Queensland companies. Regional seminars are being run to promote existing business opportunities under the banner "the Games are not over yet", and business opportunities arising from the refit of the Olympic site after the Games period are being explored as well. Seminars have already been conducted in Cairns, Ipswich and the Gold Coast and will conclude in Townsville in June.

I can also tell the House that over the past few days the master caterers for the Sydney Olympic Games, Sydney SuperDome, have been in Brisbane and on the Gold Coast recruiting 200 Queensland hospitality staff to work in Sydney during the Games. This follows an approach from the Sydney office of my department of the Government to the SuperDome itself. In that approach we expressed that Queensland had a strong tourism industry, especially at the top end of the scale. We also have the infrastructure to provide personnel to work in that industry, and we have been able to prove that over the past few days to Sydney SuperDome. In short, it is another example of where this Government has been proactive in seeking out opportunities for Queensland business and chasing up what ultimately are job opportunities for Queenslanders.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Law Reform Commission Report on Justices of the Peace

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeronga—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for The Arts) (9.49 a.m.), by leave: I draw to the attention of the House proposed changes and improvements to the role of justice of the peace and commissioner for declarations. The origins of the role of justice of the peace date from 14th century England. However, it is essential that this important office retain its relevance in modern society. Today in Queensland more than 64,000 men and women from a multitude of backgrounds voluntarily give their time to address the demands for their services required by modern life. I pay tribute to the dedication with which those Queenslanders serve their communities.

As part of this Government's New Directions Statement supporting indigenous participation in the administration of justice, my department is working closely with the indigenous communities of north Queensland to improve access to justice for the members of those communities. An initial week-long indigenous JP training course is currently being conducted by my department in response to a request by the Gumba Gumba Cairns and District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for elders. I acknowledge the work done in this area by the previous Government. Gumba Gumba elders nominated 15 candidates drawn from within the Kuranda, Malanda, Mossman, Mareeba, Yarrabah and Cairns indigenous communities. The training program will cover a wide range of matters including domestic violence, police powers, court processes, power of attorney legislation, records of police interviews and other areas associated with the processes of law. Once the training is completed, the trainees will have a better understanding of how courts and police operate, which will assist other local indigenous community members who may become involved in the justice process in the future. I congratulate those trainees on the important role they are undertaking.

Equally groundbreaking is the report I table here today by the Queensland Law Reform Commission. In February 1998 the Queensland Law Reform Commission published an issues paper on the role of justices of the peace in Queensland. A total of 182 submissions to the initial issues paper and subsequent discussion paper were received. I should like to outline to the House this morning some of the report's recommendations. In relation to the appointment of JPs and commissioners for declarations, the commission recommends the abolition of the current system where an applicant must be nominated by a member of Parliament or a company general manager or departmental chief executive. Instead, the commission recommends that applicants should meet specified training requirements—compulsory training and passing an exam for justices of the peace (Qualified), passing an examination for commissioners for declarations and, in the case of lawyers seeking appointment as justices of the peace (Qualified) or (Magistrates Court), the passing of an examination. In addition, terms of appointment should be fixed at seven years for a justice of the peace (Magistrates Court) or (Qualified) and 10 years for commissioners for declarations.

The commission also recommended that the Department of Justice and Attorney-General should provide ongoing training for justices of the peace and commissioners for declaration as the need arises. The commission's recommendations cover a range of issues, from issuing of summonses and warrants to court and coronial powers. It is an important document for the many thousands of Queenslanders who voluntarily take on the responsibilities of justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations. In June and July, I will be holding a series of forums in regional Queensland at centres from Cairns to Brisbane to enable interested parties to discuss the report. I table a schedule of the places and dates of these forums. I urge all interested parties to obtain a copy of the report and to make submissions to my department over the next three months, that is, by the end of August.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Cleaner Energy Strategy

Hon. T. McGRADY (Mount Isa—ALP) (Minister for Mines and Energy and Minister Assisting the Deputy Premier on Regional Development) (9.52 a.m.), by leave: The Cleaner Energy Strategy, which was announced last week by the Premier, marks a turning point for Queensland. The energy policy contains a framework—a structure—representing a fundamental shift in how we view our energy future. For the first time in this country there is a policy that is providing real directions and real solutions for issues that have to be addressed if we are to continue to generate long-term economic growth, attract new sustainable industries and meet our environmental obligations. The contribution to be made by renewable energy is formally

recognised in this policy. The renewable energy sector will play an increasing part in Australia's future, and Queensland is leading the way with development of some major projects.

Some of the important initiatives contained in this policy include increased rebates for people who purchase energy efficient solar hot water systems. The rebate will be increased by 50% to a maximum of $750 for Queenslanders who install these systems. The scheme will also be extended until the year 2005. The rebate means that solar hot water systems will become increasingly economic for householders to install them. It will also assist people to overcome the shocking impact of the GST, an extra tax which will be a disincentive for people trying to make a decision on these systems.

An election commitment of this Government was that we would purchase 2% of the electricity we use as green energy. That was achieved some time ago. It is now time to up the ante. From 1 July, the Government will lift its green energy purchases to 5% of total electricity purchases, making the Queensland Government the largest purchaser of green energy in Australia. This significant level of support helps to drive the practical, economic development of new renewable energy projects throughout our State.

The Government will also jointly support two major collaborative research projects with the Sugar Research Institute, the University of Queensland and the electricity industry. The new technology coming from these projects will allow the more efficient use of biomass to generate renewable energy. By utilising the waste materials from places such as sugarmills, there is a potential for large-scale production of renewable energy. This type of proposal could also provide a new economic basis for the sugar industry, breathing fresh life into the viability of sugarmills and providing more jobs in our regional areas.

The policy also recognises that waste gas emissions from coalmines represent a potential resource. If they are not properly managed, these waste gas emissions contribute to the greenhouse problem. If they can be successfully captured and utilised for electricity generation or other uses, there will be significant benefits. For example, there will be substantial greenhouse dividends and there will also be new employment opportunity, new skills and new income for the coalmines. Critically, the measure will assist the coal industry in reducing its exposure to the possible introduction of emission trading and hence maintain international competitiveness.

These are the types of initiatives contained in this policy. On a practical basis, I point to the very successful initiatives of the Government owned Stanwell Corporation, which even now is carving a very successful place for itself in the brave new world of renewable energy production. Stanwell is developing the largest wind farms in Australia. It is already working with sugarmills to implement biomass technology. It is utilising solar thermal technology to provide extra efficiency at its coal-fired power station. The potential is unlimited. The Government's policy places us at the leading edge of this broad new horizon for renewable technologies. In the future, it will be our children and their children who will reap the benefits.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Learning and Development Foundation

Hon. D. M. WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Education) (9.57 a.m.), by leave: To become the Smart State, we need a smart work force. Yesterday I launched Education Queensland's new Learning and Development Foundation. Its aim is to ensure that our work force has every opportunity to renew and enhance their skills. At this stage, the foundation is aimed at the 1,600 public servants in district offices and in central office. These are the people who support our teachers in delivering the best possible educational outcomes in our schools. In the future, the foundation will also include the State's 32,000 teachers. However, the Queensland Teachers Union's current industrial action has precluded the involvement of teachers from progressing at this stage. However, as the honourable members for Tablelands and Barambah would no doubt tell us, there is no use crying over spilt milk. Once the teachers' enterprise bargaining dispute is concluded, they will be able to become active participants in learning and development opportunities provided by the foundation.

The foundation, which initially has $1.5m in funds, will train staff to deliver the objectives of the Education Queensland 2010 strategic plan. The foundation has established a web site and will create a foundation on line by September/October 2000. Both these information technology tools will allow programs, modules and services to be accessed at a local level via a learning laboratory approach. This virtual capability will ensure equity of access throughout the State

and complement the more traditional face-to-face programs.

The most important feature of the foundation is that it will represent the vesting of a new entitlement to employees. Every employee will have an annual entitlement to professional development. Professional development and training will cease to be a favour bestowed at the whim of the employer and become part of the rights of workers employed in Education Queensland.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Home Equity Associates

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading) (9.59 a.m.), by leave: I rise today to warn Queenslanders about a dubious home loan scheme. Home Equity Associates purports to solve everyone's mortgage worries, but like so many schemes that look too good to be true it is.

Home Equity Associates trades out of an office in Maroochydore, but it is actually a registered business in Western Australia that lures customers through the unregulated environment of the Internet. Fair trading agencies in Victoria and Western Australia have recently issued warnings about this organisation to consumers in those States. Fair Trading Western Australia is considering whether to prosecute over claims that the Western Australian Government endorses the scheme or the organisation. The Western Australian Government makes no such endorsement.

I would strongly urge Queenslanders to show extreme caution when dealing with this organisation. Home Equity Associates makes spectacular claims about being able to help low income earners, pensioners, bankrupts and sole parent families obtain a home loan at a 3% interest rate. The sting is that consumers have to pay a joining fee of around $300 with an annual subscription of $160 into a loan fund without any guarantee of getting a loan. This could go on for years without any loans being provided. This is a recipe for disaster. It could take years for the fund to build up enough money to finance even the most modest of home loans. All risks appear to be borne by the subscriber. To my knowledge no loans have been forthcoming to date, but many consumers have made what could well be a permanent separation from their money.

Contrary to the level of disclosure required for mainstream home lenders, there are far too many unanswered questions such as: how does a person qualify for a home loan; how long will it take to get a loan; and, after a loan cannot be secured, are the joining and ongoing fees returned to the subscriber?

I have asked the Office of Fair Trading to conduct an urgent investigation into whether any legislation administered by my department has been breached. Members will be aware that I have little sympathy for businesses that prey on those in our community who can least afford to be ripped off, and I would expect the full force of the law to be applied if breaches have occurred in this instance. In the interim, I warn all prospective home buyers in the strongest possible terms to seek independent advice before sinking any of their hard-earned money into this scheme.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

World Heritage Conference

Hon. R. J. WELFORD (Everton—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources) (10.02 a.m.), by leave: Recently representatives of several nations, including Australia, the United States and China, gathered in Japan for the 2000 World Heritage Conference. The conference was held in Kagoshima, the site of one of Japan's world natural heritage areas. The conference was designed to look at the conservation of world natural heritage areas in the Asia-Pacific region and their relationships to regional economic development.

I am delighted to inform the House that the major development out of this conference was the announcement that Queensland won the right to host the next World Heritage Conference in 2003.

Mr Borbidge: It's a good thing you stayed at home this time. You would have missed out.

Mr WELFORD: My spiritual energy spanned half the globe to achieve that success.

This is yet another coup for Queensland in terms of international events. Queensland was chosen over 13 other countries, including the United States and China. Hosting this conference will bring enormous tourism benefits and inject thousands of tourism dollars into the economy. It will be a wonderful opportunity to highlight our World Heritage credentials and showcase our magnificent natural areas to the world.

The aim of the summit is to exchange information and develop a more practical and long-term approach to the successful management of World Heritage areas. Queensland was seen as a unique place to host this event because we boast five of Australia's 13 World Heritage listed regions. With more than 20 years' experience in World Heritage area management, we are considered a world leader in the field.

Nations that have significant World Heritage areas will be invited to attend the Queensland World Heritage Conference. Those represented at this year's conference include the United States, China, Indonesia, India, Nepal, New Zealand, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan, with observer status to UNESCO.

Until now, summits on world natural heritage have primarily involved national Governments. The Kagoshima summit brought together Governments that carry the most responsibility for the management of World Heritage areas and for regional development. In Australia that responsibility primarily lies with the States. This conference was a great opportunity for our level of Government to share information and to develop relationships with other administrations for the practical and long-term management of world natural heritage areas. The Queensland Government will work with the Commonwealth and the States to implement the commitments of the Yakushima Summit Declaration.

Hosting the 2003 World Heritage Conference will strengthen our ties with many Asia-Pacific nations—ties that have been formed through a commitment to conserving World Heritage areas as special places for future generations. I table the text of the Yakushima Summit Declaration on World Natural Heritage and a list of the participating Governments. This Government will continue to work to promote Queensland's World Heritage credentials to the world. I look forward to welcoming delegates to this important international event in Queensland in 2003.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Dairy Industry

Hon. H. PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities) (10.05 a.m.), by leave: I want to reiterate the State Government's position regarding the Federal Government's national dairy deregulation plan. Our dairy farmers are angry. I am angry, too.

Mr ROWELL: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. There is legislation before the House regarding this issue. I would like you to adjudicate on the matter.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Minister is not referring to legislation.

Mr ROWELL: He is talking about the deregulation—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am listening carefully. The Minister is not referring to legislation.

Mr ROWELL: Make sure that you listen very carefully.

Mr SPEAKER: The member will resume his seat. I will listen to the Minister's statement.

Mr PALASZCZUK: The honourable member is correct. However, Mr Speaker, you allowed two questions on this very issue to go through this House yesterday.

Mr ROWELL: Mr Speaker, he has made the admission that the Bill is before the House. I ask you to rule that his speech is out of order.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I have not heard the statement yet, so I can hardly rule it out of order.

Mr ROWELL: He has started on the speech and he is talking about deregulation.

Mr SPEAKER: I call the Minister. I will listen carefully.

Mr PALASZCZUK: All the Opposition wants to do at this stage is censor the Government, because it knows that it is in trouble over dairy deregulation. Those opposite know that they are in trouble with dairy deregulation and they do not know what to do.

I refer to a proposal that was put forward by the Australian Milk Producers Association late last week in relation to the situation that our dairy farmers are faced with now. As Minister I have looked at all of the options that are available to Government to assist our dairy farmers to withstand the steamrolling effects of Victoria with dairy deregulation. I have looked at the last-ditch proposal put forward by the Australian Milk Producers Association. I took the unprecedented step of tabling our Crown Law advice in the House yesterday, which proves that that proposal is unconstitutional.

As all honourable members should know, Victoria is steamrolling its legislation through the Victorian Upper House this week and is completely unmoved by the devastation that it is going to cause to other States. At a national meeting of Ministers, the Victorian Minister said quite bluntly—honourable members

should listen to this—that he would deregulate the Victorian industry with or without the package. That is what we as a Government are up against. The Victorians are ruthless in breaking down the deregulation barriers so that their surplus product can flood the markets.

I must say that I am concerned about reports that processors are slashing the milk prices that they are offering dairy farmers in this deregulated climate. Farmers have told us that processors are cutting the farm gate price by a third and offering producers as little as 40c a litre, compared with the 58.9c a litre that they get now. You see, Mr Speaker, at the end of the day it is the supermarkets and the processors who will be the big winners from deregulation because it opens the market to aggressive competition. These are the sorts of commercial realities that are forcing the Queensland Government's hand.

All honourable members will agree that we cannot stop deregulation, but we are taking the responsible measures that will help our dairy farmers adjust. I cannot gamble with the $232m Federal Government restructure package that is linked to all States having deregulation legislation in place by 1 July. The coalition agrees that the sheer size of the Victorian industry and the aggressive nature of the major processors and retailers will drive down the price that farmers receive for milk. The member for Crows Nest called on the Beattie Government to show bipartisan support for the restructure package. The member for Crows Nest knows that the restructure package is non-negotiable when Victoria deregulates.

Yesterday the Premier and I listened to the dairy farmers, but timing is critical now. For this assistance package to get up, every State has to have legislation in place by 1 July. Like all dairy farmers, the State Government wants a healthy, productive, viable industry. This will be best achieved if our farmers face the deregulation challenge as a strong, united voice taking the industry through this period of change and refinement. This will be best achieved if we ensure that the package is secured.

Mr Veivers: You'll be known as the Minister for poverty after this.

Mr PALASZCZUK: I take the interjection from the honourable member for Southport. What is his answer? He should outline his answer to this House. He has absolutely no answer at all. He is playing with the lives of our dairy farmers, as are the rest of the members opposite, and their families will suffer because of his nonsense.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Barometer 2000

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Racing) (10.11 a.m.), by leave: The Queensland Barometer 2000 has again highlighted consumer concern about the impact of the Federal Government's GST. Three successive surveys conducted for the Queensland Barometer 2000 have shown heightened concern and uncertainty within the tourism industry. GST-prompted consumer intentions revealed in the latest survey are of enormous concern—

> 33% of survey respondents believed they would be financially worse off and more Australians said the GST would affect their holiday plans;
>
> 31% said they thought they would take shorter holidays due to price rises once the GST is introduced from 1 July;
>
> 29% said they would stay in cheaper accommodation;
>
> 24% said they thought they would holiday closer to home to avoid transport costs; and
>
> 17% said they would be more likely to holiday overseas because, relative to domestic holidays, overseas holidays would be cheaper.

Considering price is the No. 1 factor determining holiday decision making, the trend is alarming.

The Tourism Council Australia Queensland Branch has estimated the GST will force up prices between 4% and 9%. For the benefit of those opposite who support the GST, I quote directly from the Barometer—

> "Overall, the GST is the largest concern for Queensland tourist product suppliers in 2000."

And again—

> "Prices are expected to increase by 8-9%."

And this comment from a supplier—

> "It (the GST) will be a nightmare."

Yet the Federal Government and the Queensland Opposition refuse to concede that the GST will harm this State's second-biggest industry. The Opposition might like to consider this Barometer feedback from regional tourist associations. From the Gold Coast—and this should be of particular concern to the Leader of the Opposition, himself a former tourism operator—

> "The GST is expected to result in moderate to significant slowdown in tourist numbers in the second half of 2000."

A moderate to significant slowdown. From Cairns—

> "It is estimated that average prices in the Cairns region will increase by 7-8% as a result of the GST."

The bottom line is inescapable: the GST is bad for tourism and bad for tourists. It will cost the Queensland industry dearly in terms of tourist numbers and tourism dollars, thanks to the Federal Government and all those who support this tax. The Queensland Barometer 2000 has been warning of industry and consumer concern since last year.

The Queensland Government is not willing to sit back and do nothing. Tourism Queensland has been working hard to minimise the impact of the GST with aggressive national and international marketing campaigns. We have pulled out all stops to insulate Queensland tourism, the industry with the most potential to create jobs. We must maintain the momentum which has gathered and we must maximise our chances to boost visitation by working to minimise the adverse impact of this Federal Government tax on tourism. We will continue to give high priority to growing tourism in this State.

LEGAL, CONSTITUTIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Report and Submissions

Mr FENLON (Greenslopes—ALP) (10.15 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee's Report No. 23 on issues of Queensland electoral reform arising from the 1998 State election and amendments to the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918. I also table three submissions received by the committee in relation to this inquiry. I move that the committee's report be printed.

Ordered to be printed.

Mr FENLON: I further table those submissions to the committee's current review of the Queensland Constitutional Review Commission's recommendation regarding four-year parliamentary terms which the committee has authorised for publication.

OVERSEAS VISIT

Report

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (10.15 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House a report on a trip to Indonesia I made from Monday, 27 March 2000 to Monday, 3 April 2000.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Needle Exchange Programs

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (10.16 a.m.): I give notice that I shall move—

> "That this House calls on the Federal Government, and particularly the Federal Health Minister, to recognise the current inequity across Australia where those dependent on illicit drugs access free syringes through needle exchange programs yet others with diagnosed medical conditions—for example, diabetes—are required to purchase their syringes from Government or private suppliers.
>
> Further, this Parliament seeks an assurance from the Federal Health Minister that access to free syringes for medically dependent individuals is made available during this budget period."

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

National Competition Policy; Deregulation

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (10.16 a.m.): We have heard Mr Beattie state on many occasions that the State of Queensland is moving forward under this Government's leadership. Well, Mr Beattie is right on one thing, that is, the State is on the move, and most of it is moving against this Parliament. We have seen more people marching the streets of Brisbane during protests against this Government than has ever been seen before. We have seen the timber industry, which opposed the RFA; the rural property owners, who oppose the vegetation legislation; the steel workers, who lost hundreds and hundreds of jobs; the transport industry took to the road to protest against this Government; the miners; the pork industry; the students; and, yesterday, the dairy farmers. The teachers are not happy with this Government's performance either, so it will not be long until they are on the move. So Mr Beattie is right: this State is on the move, but for many it is backwards.

Industries across-the-board are being decimated by this Government. On Friday, 3 March, Mr Beattie was quoted as saying—

> "State Governments need to band together to stop the trend of deregulation. We've got to face up to the fact that the so-called benefits from deregulation have not happened. We've got to revisit the

economic dogma and simply ask: where is the benefit? No State can do it alone."

These were Mr Beattie's own words, and he is right: no State can do it alone, but one State has to start. I am asking Mr Beattie on behalf of Queensland industries to stand up and say, "Not now. Let's slow down. Let's look at this again." Would Mr Beattie accept a reduction in his income of $80,000 plus per annum and not fight to keep it? Don't allow the flawed ideology of NCP and deregulation to pauperise the State's farmers and other industries.

No Government should put the people in the position that the dairy farmers found themselves in yesterday, a position where violence looked like the only alternative to get the Premier to talk to them. This Government continually gloats about the number of jobs it has created but never says——

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks offensive. They are untrue. Yesterday I met two delegations of dairy farmers, and I will continue to talk with them. I seek the withdrawal of those remarks.

Mrs PRATT: This Government continually gloats about the number of jobs it has created but never says how many it has lost.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr Beattie: Did she withdraw?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Premier asks the member to withdraw the words he found offensive.

Mr BORBIDGE: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, I refer you to your ruling of last week in respect of the member for Clayfield.

Mr SPEAKER: I will finish this point of order first. If a member is asked to withdraw something offensive, that member has to withdraw it.

Mr BORBIDGE: I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, I refer to your ruling in this place relative to the member for——

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am talking to the member for Barambah. The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The member for Barambah named the Premier.

Mrs PRATT: I withdraw, but the truth is the truth.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! You cannot say that. You just withdraw unequivocally.

Mrs PRATT: I withdraw the truth.

Fireworks Tragedy

Hon. K. W. HAYWARD (Kallangur—ALP) (10.20 a.m.): Two weekends ago Queenslanders in general, and the Pine Rivers community in particular, were shocked and saddened by the fireworks disaster at the Holy Spirit school. As the member for Kurwongbah said previously in this Parliament, this dreadful explosion has brought all of the Bray Park community, if not the Pine Rivers community, together.

All Queenslanders know how horrifying the event was. When it was revealed that, during the chaos that followed the explosion, 10 cartons of beer were stolen, we were all stunned and many wondered aloud: how could anyone be so brazen—so awful. But when residents read the local Northern Times newspaper which circulates in the Pine Rivers and Caboolture areas, we were introduced to something much worse—something so distasteful that it was unbelievably crass and disgusting.

On page 25 of the Friday, 26 May, edition of the Northern Times there was an advertisement that reaches a new low in ambulance chasing by the legal profession. A half-page advertisement was headed, "Injured from fireworks?" The advertisement suggests that people affected should contact "Trilby Misso—Solicitors".

What has gone through the heads of the partners of this usually upright legal firm? It beggars belief. It is sheer madness. This is a trashy, offensive advertisement which is insensitive to the feelings of the community of Pine Rivers. Worse still, what motivated the Northern Times—my local newspaper—to take such an advertisement and print it?

Fuel Subsidy Scheme

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.22 a.m.): We have now reached the stage at which the only people in Queensland who seem to be supporting the Beattie plan to abolish the fuel subsidy scheme are the big oil companies. We have a situation in which the RACQ says that it will not work; that it is fatally flawed. We have a situation in which small couriers and independent transport operators are saying that they will be forced out of business if the Beattie plan goes ahead.

The only people, aside from the Labor Party, championing the abolition of this scheme that Mr Beattie, when in Opposition, demanded, are the big oil companies. We have a representative of Mobil saying that the

tax distorted the market and was unfair to service stations that were just on the New South Wales side of the border.

That is Bob Carr's problem. That is not our problem; that is the problem of the Labor Government in New South Wales which imposes a fuel tax. We have a BP representative saying that the subsidy led to distortions across the market. Well, that is right, because it is designed to protect Queensland motorists. It is designed to protect Queensland's competitive advantage.

What did Mr Beattie say when he was Leader of the Opposition? He said—

> "The average Queensland family would be almost $400 a year worse off if the threatened 8c a litre fuel price went ahead."

He went on to say that if the Government of the day did not act and introduce this scheme, which he now wants to abolish, "It could lead or contribute to a rise in unemployment. I mean, this is not just 8.1c a litre; this is the most serious economic problem confronting the State." The Premier said that as Leader of the Opposition on an ABC program on 13 October 1997.

Let no one misunderstand the seriousness of what this Government is proposing. If the fuel subsidy scheme is abolished in Queensland we will have a State fuel tax.

Time expired.

Mobile Telephones

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—IND) (10.24 a.m.): Mobile phones—we all have them. Thousands of Queenslanders use them every day, but what do we know about the health effects of using these phones or living close to mobile phone base stations? We know very little.

Just over a month ago, a United Kingdom independent expert group formed to investigate the use of mobile phones released its findings. It stated—

> "We conclude therefore that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to radiation even at levels below national guidelines is totally without potential adverse health effects and that the gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach."

I am informed that the Sydney North Shore Hospital has issued a directive that staff needing a mobile phone as part of their employment are to be issued with a hands-free kit to avoid the possible concentration of radiation near vital or sensitive organs. If staff use a mobile phone they should hold it at least three to four centimetres away from their heads.

The British Consumers Association's finding on the use of hands-free kits is that the earpiece wire can act as an aerial and channel the microwave signal into the earpiece. The Wireless Technology Research Association said that rates of death from brain tumours was higher among mobile phone users. The Lund University in Sweden has published some alarming findings on the effects on humans of microwave exposure.

A Federal Senate committee is now undertaking an inquiry into electromagnetic radiation. Submissions to this inquiry close in just over a fortnight. I urge the Minister for Health and other Ministers to make submissions to this inquiry. The submission may simply be in the form of a list of questions about the effects of electromagnetic radiation. I believe that sufficient evidence has been produced to support this Government adopting a precautionary approach to the use of mobile phones and the siting of mobile phone towers in our communities. In the interests of the health of Queenslanders I urge the Government and its Ministers to take a precautionary approach in their submissions.

Goods and Services Tax

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (10.26 a.m.): There is a word that describes the position adopted by the Treasurer, the Premier and that group of hypocrites on the other side of the Chamber, especially where the GST is concerned, and that word is duplicitous. Despite the mock protests and crocodile tears of members opposite, when it comes to the GST that is all they are.

When it comes to the levelling of stamp duty on the transactions of ordinary Queenslanders, the Beattie Labor Government has adopted the position of imposing stamp duty on top of the value of the premium, plus—and this is important—the associated GST component. This is a tax on a tax. It is a blatant money grab by a financially inept Government with the intent of blaming it all on the GST. By making the calculations of stamp duties in this way, the Government is in effect introducing stamp duty charges across the State of up to 10%.

But that is the modus operandi of the Beattie Government. One has only to look at

the failed attempt last week by the Treasurer and the Minister for Mines and Energy to try to disguise power price rises by attempting to withhold their announcement until nearer 1 July this year in order to blame the rises on the GST.

This supposedly open and accountable Government was going to hide its power price rises from the electricity consumers of Queensland by waiting until the commencement of the GST in order to blame it for the price rises rather than the Government's own money grab.

The Beattie Government did the same thing with payroll tax. It expanded the payroll tax base without giving a corresponding reduction in the payroll tax rate sufficient to ensure that the measure was revenue neutral. Those opposite know that what I am saying is correct. Every business person and every person paying payroll tax is aware of what this Government did.

Let us return to the duplicitous stance adopted by this Government when it comes to stamp duty. In a conscious decision to rip money out of the pockets of ordinary Queenslanders, this Government has chosen to impose stamp duty on top of the premium and the associated GST component. That is the bottom line. It is deceitful and dishonest, but that is what Queenslanders have come to expect from this dishonest Government.

Time expired.

Baffle Creek, Trawlers

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (10.28 a.m.): I rise in support of a petition tabled this morning from 282 people in the Baffle Creek area requesting that beam trawling be closed for a trial period of five years to allow fish stocks to replenish and for the future of this pristine creek to be evaluated.

There are widespread and serious concerns about the depletion of fish, crabs and prawns in Baffle Creek, and people living in that area firmly believe that the operations of the six beam trawlers that work in the creek and in its tributaries are having a disastrous impact on traditional fish breeding areas.

Baffle Creek is unique in that it does not have any dams, weirs or barrages on it to inhibit tidal flow or fish migration and, in the past, it has been a prime venue for district and State amateur fishing competitions and as a holiday venue for recreational fishermen and their wives and families. The people who live in this area, and those who holiday there, are alarmed at the drastic depletion of fish stock in recent years and, in particular, the last 18 months. They sincerely request that some action be taken to preserve this area for our generation and for future generations.

I am aware that work is currently being undertaken on this issue, as it has been raised through the Regional Communities Forum. I hope that a compromise can be reached that will satisfy both professional and amateur fishermen in this area.

Department of Families, Youth and Community Care

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (10.29 a.m.): I note with some concern that up to 500 Department of Families, Youth and Community Care officers will take industrial action today in protest at a lack of funding and resources for child protection in Queensland. It is my understanding that this is the first large scale industrial action in the department since 1994. This strike action is an indictment of the Beattie Labor Government, and Minister Bligh must take full responsibility. This department lurches from crisis to crisis as Labor's broken promises pile up and up. That is what we are seeing: the piling up of Labor's broken promises.

This week the Minister was caught out by departmental employees and by the victims of abuse in children's homes. But these are not the only people upset with the poor performance of Minister Bligh.

Time expired.

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

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr I. McGaw

Mr BORBIDGE (10.29 a.m.): Mr Speaker—

Mr Elder interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: If the Deputy Premier can contain himself

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr BORBIDGE: It would be unusual. I direct a question to the Premier, and I preface my question by saying that I am not seeking to pre-empt the outcome of the review process that is currently under way in respect of this matter. I refer to stood-down senior public servant Mr Ian McGaw's assertion that mind-affecting medication was responsible for certain behaviour that led to his suspension—certain behaviour that he says he cannot recall because of the medication that

he was taking—and I ask the Premier: given that Mr McGaw may have made major decisions relating to the career prospects and the reputation of other public servants while allegedly on this medication, will the Premier give an undertaking to set aside any decisions made by Mr McGaw while on this medication—pending the review?

Mr BEATTIE: Thank the honourable member for his question. The acting Public Service Commissioner, and that is Dr Glyn Davis, received a Criminal Justice Commission report on 22 May 2000 in relation to allegations made against Mr Ian McGaw of the Office of the Public Service Commissioner. As acting Public Service Commissioner, Dr Davis is responsible for considering disciplinary matters in relation to Mr McGaw, who was provided with a number of days to respond, as he is entitled to as part of his natural justice requirements at law. The honourable member would be aware that at the same time I received a confidential report from the Criminal Justice Commission concerning allegations made against Dr Brian Head, the Public Service Commissioner. The terms of the report provide that if certain evidentiary matters are satisfied, disciplinary action may be taken. It would be manifestly inappropriate and unfairly prejudicial of me to deal with these matters prior to giving Dr Head the opportunity to respond under the law.

Mr Borbidge: What about all the decisions he has made during that period that impact on other public servants? Answer the question.

Mr BEATTIE: As I indicated, at law it is the responsibility of the acting Public Service Commissioner, Dr Glyn Davis, to deal with the matters involving Mr McGaw. Once the issues are determined in accordance with the law and in accordance with natural justice principles in relation to Mr McGaw and also Dr Head, those issues will be released publicly and I will be making an appropriate public statement.

Let me make it absolutely clear that, in relation to the disciplinary matters involving Mr McGaw, they are entirely a matter for Dr Davis as the acting commissioner; they are not matters for me. My responsibility relates directly to Dr Head.

In terms of any administrative decisions that may have been made by anybody involving the Public Service Commissioner during this period—since these alleged events took place and the subsequent report—obviously, they will be matters relevant to us that we as a Government will examine. Those issues that pertain to the behaviour of other people such as Mr McGaw are matters that will be examined by the acting Public Service Commissioner, who in this case is Dr Davis.

So I am saying to the Leader of the Opposition very clearly that there is a proper process to be followed here and we will follow that proper process. I will make certain that that proper process is followed in accordance with the law. In terms of any administrative matters that may have come up or been decided during this time, they will be examined at the appropriate time.

Public Servants; Teachers

Mr BORBIDGE: I refer the Premier to today's demand by the Queensland Public Sector Union that he match his without prejudice offer of a 3% pay rise for teachers by tomorrow to their members, and I ask: does the Premier intend to extend his so-called peace offering to teachers across the public sector in order to avert strike action or will he reject the demand of the QPSU?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for his question. I have received a communication from the Public Service Union, and it is a matter that I will be discussing with Paul Braddy, the relevant Minister, and we will advise the union at the appropriate time.

Let me deal with the issues surrounding this matter. As the Minister for Education and I have indicated publicly, and he has indicated in this House, very simply we are prepared to offer to the teachers union that from 1 June they be paid the Government offer of 3%. Those in bands 4 to 7 will be paid an additional 2%. That will be from 1 June this year.

By making this offer in response to the teachers' position, we are seeking that the teachers do not take any industrial action on this matter until it is arbitrated by the independent umpire. Basically, in good faith we are prepared to say to the teachers, "We will pay you our offer of 3%", which is actually 9% over three years, "but we will pay you that 3% from 1 June"—for bands 4 to 7 that will be, in fact, 5% from 1 June—"provided there is no industrial action until this matter is arbitrated by the independent umpire."

We have indicated to the teachers union that they will be paid for that hour of the stop-work meeting on 6 June. I urge teachers across the State to attend that meeting and to examine and, hopefully, support the offer that the Government has put on the table. We are

offering to the teachers 9% over three years. For those in bands 4 to 7, it is 11% over three years.

I want to highlight to the House that in recent times there was a decision—and the Minister for Education has dealt with this—in relation to an offer made by the New South Wales Government to teachers in that State. We are not seeking anything from the teachers in Queensland; we are seeking simply to pay them an appropriate amount of money. However, the New South Wales Government sought three major concessions from the teachers in that State, as the previous Queensland Government was seeking when EB negotiations were on during its time in office. The big difference between Queensland's position, New South Wales' position and the previous Queensland Government's position is very simple: we are not asking for anything back. We are asking for nothing. There is a clear difference.

As the Minister pointed out yesterday, in New South Wales all teachers will have to go through annual assessments of their teacher documentation; there will be annual performance reviews, which may restrict progression through the pay scale; and working hours will be extended to from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. We are not asking for anything like that. The New South Wales' position is similar to what happened during the time of the Borbidge Government. They wanted something that we do not.

Fuel Subsidy Scheme

Mr SULLIVAN: I refer the Premier to recent reports of Queensland petrol prices approximating those of New South Wales when Queensland motorists should be benefiting from an 8.3c per litre fuel subsidy. I ask the Premier: how do petrol prices in regional Queensland compare with those in regional New South Wales and regional Victoria?

Mr BEATTIE: I thank the honourable member for his question, because this Government is prepared to take on the oil companies. Tomorrow afternoon there will be a meeting involving the Treasurer, the Minister for Fair Trading and me at which I will be making it very clear to the oil companies that we are not going to allow Queensland motorists to be treated like mugs. It is that simple.

Let me refer to the subsidy scheme and how it works. This morning, one of my staff members rang BP stations in a number of towns in regional Queensland and regional New South Wales and asked for the price of unleaded petrol. In Moree in New South Wales, the price of petrol was 94.9c per litre. There is nowhere more remote than the back of Bourke, so let us look at the price of petrol this morning in Bourke—95.8c a litre. At Dubbo, it is 94.9c a litre. So while we have those figures in our head, I turn now to Queensland petrol prices. BP unleaded petrol at Roma was 92.9c a litre, Charleville, 94.9c a litre and Longreach, 94.9c a litre. So the prices are virtually identical.

We have to ask: where is the 8c under this great scheme that the Leader of the Opposition introduced? Dubbo drivers, with a fuel tax, are paying 94.9c. Longreach motorists are also paying 94.9c. They are paying the equivalent of the 8c tax to the Federal Government and also paying 8c more than they should be for their fuel. What are they doing? They are paying twice. This is double dipping. They are paying for the subsidy and when they turn up at the service station they are also paying the extra 8c again on the fuel. They are being hit twice. When we look at those figures, we see there is no advantage to Queensland motorists. Yes, we will be meeting with the oil companies tomorrow and I will be making every one of those figures very clear to them. They show that the Borbidge subsidy plan is not working. Where is the difference? Where is the 8c? The Opposition comes in here and supports the oil companies. It is supporting the oil companies.

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. On the public record the oil companies are supporting the course of action proposed by the Premier. They are not supporting me. He is the oil companies' friend.

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

Mr BEATTIE: That was a frivolous point of order.

A Government member: "BP Bob".

Mr BEATTIE: "BP Bob", the oil companies' friend! Why are they objecting to us? Mr Speaker, do you know what we want to do? We want to make sure that the money raised under the Borbidge petrol tax goes not to the oil companies but to the motorists. We want to make certain that the Borbidge petrol tax money goes to motorists, and that is why we are looking at halving rego.

Mr W. T. D'Arcy

Dr WATSON: I refer the Premier to his outrageous decision to approve a dodgy tax

break on the $700,000 superannuation payout to former Labor member Bill D'Arcy. I refer also to his belated decision to withdraw the approval after this dodgy backroom deal was made public.

Mr BEATTIE: I rise to a point of order. Those allegations are untrue. I find them offensive and ask that they be withdrawn.

Dr WATSON: Which part? That it was dodgy or that he approved it?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That it was a "dodgy backroom deal" by Mr Beattie, I would assume. He has asked for a withdrawal of that.

Dr WATSON: I withdraw whatever he found offensive. Can he confirm that the value of the tax break given to Mr D'Arcy was approximately $14,000 and can he inform the House why he has made no effort to recover the money improperly paid to Mr D'Arcy?

Mr BEATTIE: This is the usual effort we get from the Leader of the Liberal Party, the man who was double-dipping with his own super. He took one lot of super out of the Federal parliamentary scheme and then lined up again.

Mr Elder: The biggest double dipper in this Parliament.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Double Dipper comes in here and talks about superannuation. "Double Dipper" Watson has to be kidding. The bottom line is this: this man has no credibility when it comes to superannuation. If he asked the people in his electorate, "Should I have two superannuation entitlements?", I know what they would tell him. They would say, "No." The Double Dipper comes in here and makes allegations about all of this. Let me inform the Double Dipper about what happened. I am happy to tell Double Dipper what happened. Double Dipper needs to understand what happened.

This is not normally a matter that I would raise in the House; it is a matter for the trustees. But bearing in mind that Double Dipper has asked me the question, I will tell the House. We have communicated with the Australian Tax Office. We have made it clear that the trustees do not support Mr D'Arcy receiving this benefit. We do not support his being treated as retiring from this House on medical grounds.

Dr Watson: You signed off.

Mr BEATTIE: Double Dipper knows that we do not support that. We have advised the Tax Office and it will make any adjustment and recover any funds inappropriately obtained or obtained in any other way by Mr D'Arcy with respect to any tax arrangements, whether it be superannuation or any other form of income that he gets. Let the people of Queensland know that the answer to Double Dipper's question is this: the Australian Tax Office will ensure that there is no money paid to Mr D'Arcy to which he is not entitled and, through our communication to the Australian Tax Office, we have not authorised his being taxed on the basis that he was retiring from this House because of ill health.

Fuel Subsidy Scheme

Mr PURCELL: I refer the Premier to arguments that motorists in rural and remote Queensland will be worse off if the Government withdraws its fuel subsidy scheme and instead directs every cent of that subsidy to Queensland motorists in other ways, and I ask: is there any evidence that the 8.3c per litre Government fuel subsidy is actually being passed on to motorists in rural and remote Queensland?

Mr BEATTIE: The information is very simply that, no, there is not. I repeat what I said before: as of this morning, when my office contacted those cities and towns I mentioned before, we found that Longreach motorists are paying 94.9c and Dubbo drivers, with the fuel tax, are paying 94.9c. They are both paying the same—94.9c. Where is the difference?

Mr Mackenroth: Where's the 8c?

Mr BEATTIE: Where is the 8c? Mr Speaker, if you lived in Longreach, why wouldn't you be cranky? Where is the 8c? Tomorrow I will be asking the oil companies where the 8c is. There is no advantage under the current scheme for regional and country people. If they are paying the same in Dubbo as they are paying in Longreach and there is no subsidy effect, where is the benefit?

Mr Speaker, let me tell you this: country people are being treated as mugs by the oil companies and the Opposition. But we are prepared to stand up to the oil companies. Let me make this clear to the friends of the oil companies on the other side of the House: we will be telling both them and the oil companies that we want the motorists in this State to benefit. I do not want to see the oil companies lining their pockets because the money from the Borbidge petrol tax is going to the oil companies and not to Queensland motorists. I put all of them on notice that this money—the Borbidge tax—is going to go to motorists. If it means that we have to halve rego, we will halve rego. This Borbidge tax, started when he was Premier, is going to go into the pockets of

motorists and not into the pockets of the oil companies. If motorists have a budget and part of that budget goes to petrol and another part of it goes to rego and we can halve their rego, they will get a direct benefit.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Opposition members object and protest because they do not want to see the oil companies losing millions of dollars. The Opposition wants $500m to go into the pockets of the oil companies. Mr Speaker, if you lived in Longreach and you were paying 94.9c, the same as your family friends, if you have them, in Dubbo, and there was supposed to be a subsidy, would you want the money in your pocket or in the pocket of the oil companies? I can tell you what the people of Longreach will say. They will say that they want the benefit in their pockets. One of the ways in which we can guarantee that is by halving rego. But what does the Leader of the Opposition want? He wants an inquiry. He wants to waste more millions of dollars on an inquiry.

Recreational Use of Forests

Mr LESTER: I refer the Minister for Environment and Heritage and Minister for Natural Resources to his promise to recreational forest users at the Rocklea rally last year that he would ensure no net loss of access to forest reserves for recreational activities under his Government's regional forest agreement. On behalf of these people, I ask: why is he now preparing to break that promise by imposing a five-year sunset clause on the proposed forest reserve tenure?

Mr WELFORD: The premise of the question is mistaken and misconceived. My departmental officers and ministerial staff met with the recreational users only in the last couple of weeks. I have indicated to them my reassurance that as part of the planning process for the transition for the roughly 425,000 hectares that will be incorporated in reserves of one form of another the recreational users will be involved integrally in the consultation process to ensure that the full range of recreational uses currently available continues to be available. There will be a process whereby the values and principles for assessing the values of various forest areas will be worked through with the forest users. The recreational users will play a part in designing the way in which those areas of highest conservation value are preserved, as indeed in forests currently areas are protected from certain intense recreational uses that create the risk of damage being done to those areas.

As is currently the case, areas will be defined or zoned appropriate for recreational use, and I stand by the commitment that this Government gave to those users that we will make sure that the full range of recreational uses available at the start of this process will still be available at the end of it. There may be some areas which go into higher conservation tenure, such as national parks. There will be other areas that will be in other tenures that enable the recreational uses to continue. There may be some areas currently used for some kinds of recreation which will need to identify adjacent, less sensitive areas for their use, but the end result will be the same, namely, we will protect the conservation values of the great south-eastern forests and ensure that the recreational use is still available to recreational users.

Meat Industry

Mr LUCAS: I ask the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Minister for Trade: can he advise the House of developments in the meat industry, one of the largest employers in regional Queensland?

Mr ELDER: I certainly can. I thank the member for the question. I note the spectacular lack of interest from the members opposite and the member for Barambah in resolving the problem of the Murgon meatworks and the Government's action in proactively fixing it. There was speech after speech after speech in this House calling on the Government to help, but there was no contribution from a member opposite in terms of what it should be. He talked up a storm, he went out there trawling for votes; we went trawling for jobs, and we have delivered them for the people of Murgon.

The Leader of the Opposition had a report which said that 17 abattoirs would close and 5,000 jobs would go. He had about as much sympathy for the meat industry as a standard vegetarian. That is about as much interest as he had. The only fellow opposite who would have some interest in the meat industry is the member for Southport; he has single-handedly tried to help the industry by conspicuous consumption during the time he has been in this place! I thank Michael for that.

In all seriousness, the Leader of the Opposition did nothing for the meat industry, and it has been this Government that has resolved that problem. It has resolved the problem in Murgon, but the problem is not

confined just to Murgon. Out of the $20m package that the Primary Industries Minister and I put in place, we have now assisted companies to the tune of $8m. Companies in Charleville, Wallangarra, Oakey, Mackay and Biloela have all benefited from the work of the task force.

We are working with small abattoir operators to get them accredited. The member for Logan was out at Chinchilla last weekend working with those smaller abattoirs to help them get accreditation to keep them in business. These are all things that the members opposite should have been doing for the meat industry when they were in Government, but they deserted that industry. The only consistency that I have seen from the Opposition—and it was evident again yesterday—was when the Leader of the Opposition stood in front of a group of dairy farmers and told them how terrible National Competition Policy was. There was speech after speech from the National Party members on the Bill saying how terrible National Competition Policy was.

Mr Seeney: I didn't see you out there; you were hiding under the desk.

Mr ELDER: As members would be aware, I have a penchant for trawling the web. I trawled the web and I found the National Party of Australia—Queensland Policies web site. Then I went looking for its view on National Competition Policy. I actually found what the National Party says about National Competition Policy.

A Government member: What did they say?

Mr ELDER: It states—

> "Committing the National Party to the National Competition Policy "—

the National Party—

> "... recognises that the National Competition Policy offers a sensible and pragmatic policy tool for improving the State's competitiveness while protecting the legitimate provision of social services."

What a bunch of frauds! They are out there talking to the dairy farmers, but they should go to their own web site and read their own policy. They are a bunch of hypocrites, a bunch of frauds and they will always be big frauds.

Adult Entertainment

Mr KNUTH: I refer the Minister for Tourism and Racing to applications for new permits for nightclubs and other venues showing adult entertainment for performances from 1 July, and I ask: could she clear up once and for all the confusion that surrounds the public right to object to sleazy sex shows in nightclubs that wish to convene such shows? It has been reported in the Townsville Bulletin that a spokesperson for the Liquor Licensing Division has said that the grounds for objection did not include show content, no matter how pornographic. I ask the Minister: do the new permits give the public the right to object to the content of sex shows?

Mrs ROSE: I thank the member for the question. I am aware of the article, which was published in the paper last week and which appeared to contain some conflicting advice. But there is no confusion; the legislation is very clear in its intent. Indeed, the issues that were raised in the newspaper have been misconstrued, and they do not recognise the difference between the lodgment of an objection to an application for a permit and the submission of a complaint about the operation of a venue.

The Prostitution Act was passed in Parliament late in 1999. That Act amended the Liquor Act to ensure that sexually explicit entertainment will be regulated under the Liquor Act. It will take effect from 1 July 2000 after which adult entertainment will be able to occur only on licensed premises or premises to which a liquor permit relates. The extent of the activities that will be allowed to take place under the new adult entertainment permits will be published in a code, the Adult Entertainment Code. A breach of the code will result in possible prosecution and loss of permit.

For the first time the public will have the ability to object to venues providing adult entertainment on the grounds that undue offence, annoyance, disturbance or inconvenience will be caused, or that the amenity, quiet or good order of the locality will be lessened in some way. The grounds for objection to the permit application do not allow the public to object in relation to the type of entertainment provided because that is controlled by the Adult Entertainment Code.

There is a consultation process. That will involve local government and police, who may lodge complaints or objections. Of course, members of the public are entitled to object if they consider that the entertainment is, in effect, prostitution. If substantiated, any activities that are outside the code may lead to prosecution by police as an indecent act under the Criminal Code or as prostitution under the Prostitution Act.

Fuel Subsidy Scheme

Mr WILSON: I draw the attention of the Treasurer to claims made by the Leader of the Opposition that the Government could abolish motor vehicle registration with the money that it receives from the Federal Government's fuel excise surcharge, and I ask: do his sums add up?

Mr HAMILL: For many years Queensland's education system has been recognised for its strength in mathematics. I think it shows that the Leader of the Opposition did not have the privilege of studying in Queensland primary schools.

This year we received some $511m from the Commonwealth through the extra fuel tax that was negotiated by the Leader of the Opposition. We passed every cent of that into the fuel subsidy scheme. From 1 July the Commonwealth is reducing the amount of money that Queensland will receive because the Commonwealth will take responsibility for the off-road diesel excise component. In other words, that is $177m that will be taken off us, and the Commonwealth will distribute that. So from 1 July we will actually receive some $330m.

Mr Borbidge: You said 500 in your ministerial statement.

Mr HAMILL: The Leader of the Opposition should listen. From 1 July we will receive about $330m.

Mr BORBIDGE: I rise to a point of order. I draw the Treasurer's attention to the fact that in his ministerial statement yesterday he referred to $500m, not $300m. Another day, another story, another excuse.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will allow the Treasurer to answer the question.

Mrs Sheldon: Read Hansard.

Mr HAMILL: The Leader of the Opposition can read the answer to the question. In fact, next year, through the traffic improvement levy and motor vehicle registration fees, we will collect around $660m. Even the Leader of the Opposition cannot make 330 equal 660. He cannot do it. He might be able to halve rego fees, but he is not able to abolish them. What we can do—and the Leader of the Opposition does not like it—is guarantee that every cent of that $330m from 1 July this year goes into the hands of Queensland motorists. We can do that by looking at an alternative. We can do it by reducing their car rego.

If the Leader of the Opposition is so wedded to a scheme which seems to be lining the pockets of the oil companies, I refer him to the comments by the ACCC at the Senate hearing yesterday on the Federal fuel subsidy scheme for rural and regional Queenslanders and Australians. What did the ACCC tell the Senate? It said that the Federal Government cannot guarantee that the new fuel subsidies will be passed on to consumers in full. That is what the ACCC are saying about the Federal Government's scheme. That is what we are saying about the Queensland Government's scheme. That is what we are saying about the Borbidge fuel tax. Let me reiterate the point: we will get $511m this year before the Federal Government takes out $177m for the off-road diesel excise. That leaves $330m—not the $660m, which would cover the cost of motor vehicle registration.

Forde Inquiry Recommendations

Mr BEANLAND: My question is to the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services. I refer to the Government's response to recommendation 40 of the Forde inquiry in which the Minister endorses the need for a comprehensive one-stop shop for victims of abuse in institutions. I ask: when will the Minister table the guidelines in relation to the comprehensive services available? Apart from counselling, what other support have victims received?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for his question. I am very pleased to advise the House that, in August this year, as I committed to last year, I will provide a comprehensive written response detailing the action that has been taken to date on all of the recommendations of the Forde inquiry that the Government agreed to support. In the nine months since the report's response was tabled in the Parliament, we have moved swiftly on a number of recommendations and about six or seven requiring legislative change have actually been implemented. Others have required some long-term planning, and that is in progress.

In relation to counselling services for victims of past abuse, $300,000 has been made available to Relationships Australia to operate a service for people who require counselling. That service not only provides face-to-face counselling in Brisbane but has discretionary funds available to provide referrals to people to take up individual counselling in their own towns and regional

areas, whether they are in Cairns or Charleville. It has provided funds for those people.

In relation to the idea of a one-stop shop, I have had a number of discussions with representatives of former residents. Everybody in this House would understand that a one-stop shop in Brisbane will only provide services to a very limited number of people. I think it is important for us to read the recommendation in the spirit of Mrs Forde's recommendations. Clearly, the spirit of that recommendation is that all people who have been affected in the past in this regard should have access to the services that might be available. We are working with ex-residents to develop an appropriate model that will allow people to access the services they need. That will potentially involve the better use of technology, as well as some of the services relating to the upkeep of records, counselling, etc.

I am also pleased to advise the House that we are in the process of establishing the Forde trust fund. Mrs Forde has agreed to chair that trust fund. We are awaiting final approval from the Australian Taxation Office which will allow the fund to operate. The first meeting of the board of advice headed by Mrs Forde is actually meeting this morning at 10 o'clock. That board of advice will make recommendations to me about appropriate representatives of ex-residents to be on that board of advice. I look forward to making those appointments as soon as possible.

Honourable members will recall that the member for Indooroopilly has done nothing but try to obstruct, in the first instance, the formation of the Forde inquiry, the processing of records from my department to the Forde inquiry and the appointment of commissioners to the Forde inquiry. He is now seeking to question the implementation of its recommendations. This Government stands by those recommendations. We will continue to implement them. As far as I know, this is the fastest any Government has implemented the recommendations of any inquiry. Our record stands on its own and speaks for itself. It is something of which we are very proud.

Small Business; Goods and Services Tax

Ms BOYLE: I refer the Treasurer to business surveys which reveal widespread concern amongst small business operators that the GST will be bad for their business. I ask: how will this new tax impact on the viability of small business?

Mr HAMILL: The honourable member for Cairns represents an area in which a large number of small businesses are facing the prospect of the GST with great trepidation. As we all know, the tourist industry in particular will be adversely affected by the impact of the GST. A lot of small businesses in Cairns are drawing their concerns from the fact that from 1 July they will have to operate under two tax systems. They will have to complete their tax return under the system now applying and from 1 July will have to immediately embrace the new GST pay as you go arrangements. That is causing a lot of small businesses a considerable degree of anxiety because of the impact that will have on their cashflow. The pay as you go system will impact significantly upon the viability of many small businesses.

In fact, it is little wonder small business confidence is at record low levels. It is little wonder small business is reporting through the likes of the Yellow Pages survey that their prospects are very bleak indeed. In fact, business confidence across Australia is at the lowest level it has been for several years. Small business in Queensland is reflecting those national figures. In fact, small business is not only having to contend with the cashflow problems that the GST will impose upon them; they are also having to contend with successive interest rate rises. It is destroying confidence in small business. It is causing small business to withdraw investment. It is leading to small business putting off decisions about employment. It is causing small business to close their doors. As I illustrated in the Parliament a couple of weeks ago, even the Australian Taxation Office is going around telling small business to close their doors because they are not going to be viable.

Frankly, this would have to be the most devastating policy that could ever have been forced on small business, and it has come from a coalition Government. It has come from the Liberal Party and the National Party. They are the people who get to their feet in this place day after day justifying the GST. They are the ones who are writing the death warrant for small business across the length and breadth of Queensland. If it is not the GST and the interest rate hikes, do not forget the compliance costs for small business. Small business facing $20,000 or more in compliance costs get a lousy $200 from the Federal Government. Not even 10% of their costs are being provided by the Federal Government. No wonder small business hate those opposite.

Fuel Subsidy Scheme

Mr JOHNSON: I ask the Honourable the Premier: does he reject the five-month study—not a one-day study—by independent researcher Fueltrac which shows that the full 8.3c a litre subsidy was being passed on to Queensland motorists? Does he also reject the RACQ's endorsement of the result of this five-month study?

Mr BEATTIE: The honourable member represents Longreach. This morning Longreach motorists are paying 94.9c a litre. They are paying the equivalent of the 8c tax to the Federal Government and also paying 8c more than they should for their fuel. I would have thought the member for Gregory would have come into this place arguing to give the motorists of Longreach a fair go. My Government will give them a fair go. I am sick and tired of the motorists of Longreach, Roma and Charleville being treated like mugs by the oil companies. I am not prepared to allow that to happen.

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. I remind the Premier that, under the coalition Government, they were getting the subsidy. It is under this Government that the subsidy has ceased.

Mr BEATTIE: I take the point about the Borbidge fuel tax. The Borbidge fuel tax is not being passed on to the people in Longreach. The reason it is not being passed on—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: Let me make it clear—

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the fact that my name has been associated with a tax that was never introduced by my Government to be offensive and, in view of your several rulings this morning, for the sake of consistency I ask that the remark be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am sure the Premier will withdraw.

Mr BEATTIE: I am happy to withdraw it. When did this excise arrangement come in? It was 1997. Under whose Government? It was under the Government of Mr Borbidge. I am happy to say that the Premier of Queensland in 1997 was not Rob Borbidge.

Mr Mackenroth interjected.

Mr BEATTIE: He did nothing in 1996, 1997 or 1998. We are not talking about the poor performance—

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I remind the Premier that under our Government this scheme worked. He is wrecking it to justify the implementation of a Beattie fuel tax in this State, which is a policy objective he has long cherished.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is not a debate. If you are going to continue with frivolous points of order, I will warn you. I call the Premier.

Mr BEATTIE: We have to say to ourselves—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The Opposition will allow the Premier to answer the question.

Mr BEATTIE: Nothing has changed in terms of the policy since the Leader of the Opposition as Premier introduced it. What has happened? The only thing that has changed since that time is the Government. It has been ripping off Queensland motorists since the Borbidge fuel tax was introduced in 1997. I say to the member for Gregory: I will go out and fight for his motorists because his side of politics is in the pocket of the oil companies. The Opposition is in the pocket of the oil companies.

Mr JOHNSON: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. This is a very contentious issue and I ask the Premier to tell the people of Queensland the honest truth. He should tell us the truth.

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

Mr BEATTIE: I am. Opposition members are all in the pocket of the oil companies. That is exactly what is going on. You bet I am telling the truth—

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Those remarks I find offensive and I ask that they be withdrawn. The oil companies are supporting the Beattie Labor Government. They are supporting Premier Beattie's plans. They are the only people backing him up.

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

Mr BEATTIE: What do we have here? We have a case where the local member is objecting because I and my Government are trying to return this excise to motorists. Every cent of this will go to the motorists. The Borbidge petrol tax is going to go to the motorists. It is not going to go to the oil companies. Every member opposite is in here arguing for the oil companies.

Mrs SHELDON: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I take personal offence at the Premier saying that I as a member of the Opposition am supportive of this. The Premier is on record, in print, when he was in

Opposition as saying that he supported a fuel tax.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mrs SHELDON: I can present it, too.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member for Caloundra!

Mr BEATTIE: I stand corrected. It is the Borbidge/Sheldon petrol tax. Let me make it clear, the Borbidge/Sheldon petrol tax—

Mrs SHELDON: Point of order, Mr Speaker. I take personal offence at any suggestion that I supported a petrol tax. I ask the Premier to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: What was that? I could not hear it because of the noise.

Mrs SHELDON: The Premier specifically mentioned my name with regard to a fuel tax. It is untrue and offensive. I ask him to unreservedly withdraw. He is on record in Opposition as saying that he supported a fuel tax. I ask him to withdraw.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will resume her seat.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I withdraw whatever she finds offensive, but in 1997, when the member for Surfers Paradise was Premier and the member for Caloundra was Treasurer, they did this deal. Who was in Government then? It was a Borbidge/Sheldon fuel tax, and they know it.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the honourable member for Kurwongbah.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order!

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The remarks made by the Premier are untrue and offensive in regard to a Borbidge petrol tax. My Government never introduced such a tax. We rejected such a proposal when he was advocating the introduction of a fuel tax in this State.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The member will not debate the matter. He will resume his seat.

Mr BORBIDGE: I find the remarks offensive and I ask the Premier to do the decent thing.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The Leader of the Opposition is misleading the House. When he was Premier and Joan Sheldon was Treasurer, they did the deal with the Howard Government to introduce this excise arrangement. It is their mess.

Mrs SHELDON: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find the suggestion that I as Treasurer did a deal with the Howard Government offensive. I ask for it to be withdrawn. The reason we saw the Howard Government was that the High Court made a ruling that all petrol excise was—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Resume your seat. I call the honourable member for Kurwongbah.

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The previous Government introduced a subsidy. A subsidy is not a tax.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! This is turning into a debate. Resume your seat. I call the member for Kurwongbah.

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Speaker, I move that the Leader of the Opposition be heard.

Mr SPEAKER: I call the member for Kurwongbah.

Mr BORBIDGE: I move that the Leader of the Opposition be heard.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Kurwongbah. This is question time.

TAFE Partnerships

Mrs LAVARCH: Can the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations inform the House of any recent initiatives of TAFE institutes in developing partnership arrangements with industry in the information technology field?

Mr BRADDY: I thank the honourable member for the question. One of the benefits of the Beattie Government is that we have got on with the business of revitalising TAFE, an institution which had degenerated and lost morale and confidence under the previous coalition Government. In fact, a recent report commissioned by my department highlighted a shortage of skilled IT graduates in a number of key areas, including software engineering, networking and electronic sectors. These skills shortages regrettably were occurring at a time when the turnover for Queensland's IT & T industry is estimated to be more than $8 billion a year and growing at a rate of 12% per year. It is therefore with great pleasure that I am able to inform the House that Queensland TAFE is at the forefront of exciting developments in the information technology field.

The revitalised Moreton Institute of TAFE—revitalised by our Government and by our policies—has entered into a three-year partnering agreement with Microsoft and UNISYS. Under this agreement, students and staff at Moreton TAFE will have the latest computer technology and software at their fingertips, and the three-year agreement

between the institute, Microsoft and UNISYS will give Moreton Institute leading edge technology.

Under the agreement, access to the latest Microsoft desktop software will be available to all staff and students enrolled in any certificate 1 to advanced diploma course at the TAFE. A Microsoft facilitated professional development program will also be available to all staff through universal access to the Microsoft electronic books. Microsoft will provide teacher and lecturer training programs to prepare teachers and tutors to teach the authorised technology training program. This will also be at a cost saving to Moreton TAFE of $9m over the three-year agreement period.

The agreement represents a world first. It is one of the most innovative and exciting developments in the State Government's Smart State strategy. It is also an indication of the Government's willingness to work with industry partners to ensure that we keep abreast of information technology developments.

In terms of the future, the agreement is aimed at tackling the problems by equipping our teachers and students with knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of industry. A significant feature of the program is a trial mentor program to be conducted across three TAFE institutes in Australia.

Chinchilla-Tarong Powerhouse Railway Line

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I refer the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development and Trade to the proposal by Tarong Energy to build a railway line from Chinchilla to the Tarong powerhouse. The original proposal developed by SUDAW took the line across the environmentally sensitive brigalow flood plain. The Minister is on record as stating that that proposal can be thrown in the rubbish bin. I ask: has Tarong Energy been told that it cannot build a railway line across the flood plain, as proposed, and if so, what instructions has the Minister given Tarong Energy in relation to the siting of the railway line?

Mr ELDER: It is quite easy to tell the member. The fact of the matter is that SUDAW has withdrawn from the proposal. Tarong has bought the intellectual property in relation to that proposal. We have been instructed by Crown Law that Tarong has the ability to complete the process. I have asked them to do that quickly. I have asked them to move into the process and do it so that the State Government, through the Co-ordinator General, can make an assessment of it, and that information has also been given to the groups that have been concerned with it.

Mr Littleproud: What about the direction of the line across the flood plain?

Mr ELDER: The member should listen to what I have just said. SUDAW themselves have withdrawn. The intellectual property has been bought by Tarong, which has the ability to complete that process. I have asked them to do that as quickly as they possibly can. We then make an assessment of it.

GST Payments to States

Mr ROBERTS: I refer the Treasurer to comments on ABC Radio by the Federal Treasurer this morning. In that interview he sought to imply that Queensland had accepted the Federal Government's dodgy accounting for GST payments to the States which had been used to prop up the recent Federal Budget. I ask: is this an accurate representation of Queensland's position?

Mr HAMILL: Everyone knows that the Federal Government has sought to try to conceal a major deficit in its recent Federal Budget through two measures: on the one hand trying to grab money out of thin air through the sale of a mobile phone spectrum and, on the other hand, by quite falsely and deceptively representing payments to the States which the Federal Government has described as loans in order to cover up the operating deficit in the Federal Budget.

The Auditors-General in both New South Wales and Victoria provided advice to their State Governments that those sums of money which were being described or represented as loans by the Commonwealth were not loans at all but, rather, revenue—grants—and, consequently, must be added to the operating outlays in the Federal Budget. Upon hearing of that advice from those State Auditors-General, I asked the Under Treasurer to seek a ruling from the Queensland Auditor-General in relation to this matter. I wish to table for the information of the House the advice which has been received by the Queensland Under Treasurer from the Auditor-General of Queensland, Mr Len Scanlan, who writes—

> "Thank you for your response dated 3 May 2000 in which you provided Queensland Treasury's view on the accounting treatment for certain 'loans' received from the Commonwealth to offset any shortfall in funding as a result of the implementation of GST.
>
> I note your arguments in support of the 'substance' of these arrangements

> and based on the premise that the funding will be repaid by the Commonwealth there is in substance no loan from the State's viewpoint and moneys received will be recognised as revenue."

Consequently, the Auditor-General states—

> "I concur with your conclusions and note that other States have adopted a similar position which will result in a consistent accounting treatment across States."

Quite clearly the Federal Treasurer continues to try to mislead the people of Australia with respect to his dodgy Budget outcome, and I think this correspondence will reveal once and for all the fact that the Federal Government simply cannot be trusted when it comes to accounting and has continually tried to deceive the public with respect to its dodgy Budget, delivered in the Federal Parliament only a few weeks ago.

Impact of GST on Farmers

Mr FELDMAN: I refer the Premier to the statement by NFF spokesman Bob Douglas, reported in today's Australian, that the GST will provide extra profit of about $7,000 per farm, and I ask: does the Premier believe it? Does the Premier think that this news will gladden the hearts of the thousands of Queenslanders who are facing financial ruin due to his Government's reluctance to provide financial assistance to ameliorate the impact of dairy deregulation, or does the Premier, like the City Country Alliance, believe that it is just another inane ranting of another peak industry body which has lost touch with its grassroots and reality?

Mr BEATTIE: There are two questions there. One relates to the GST. I believe that the GST is against the national interest. I think it will have a significant impact on the Australian economy and, in particular, the Queensland economy. I think small business will be devastated by it, and the Yellow Pages survey which has just been released confirms that there is a loss of confidence. Indeed, the Yellow Pages survey, if I recall it correctly, says that only a tiny percentage of business now supports the GST. There are all sorts of costs, including the introduction costs. All those costs are very significant.

In terms of dairy deregulation, let me make the point that when we came to office this Government introduced protection of the dairy industry through protection of the farm gate price. What happened was simply this: the Victorians, as the member knows, are going down the path of deregulation. Their industry is hell-bent on deregulating. The National and Liberal Parties in Canberra decided to embark on deregulation and to pursue it. As I said to the two dairy groups I met yesterday——

Mr Seeney: Untrue!

Mr BEATTIE: They do not believe members opposite; they think they are a bit suss, but they are going to believe the member for Caboolture before they believe the National Party. The Deputy Premier today set out very clearly what the National Party policy is, and let us have a look at what it is. I hope the member will go out and tell every farmer this, because the National Party policy says this—

> "Committing the National Party to the National Competition Policy, which was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments in April 1995; recognises that the National Competition Policy offers a sensible"—

I would love to see that—

> "and pragmatic policy tool for improving the State's competitiveness while protecting the legitimate provision of social services."

As the honourable member for Caboolture can see, that is what the National Party believes in; that is what the Liberal Party believes in. It is little wonder that they are out there embracing deregulation.

We had a choice. We either accepted the $220m plan from the National and Liberal Parties federally to give some money to dairy farmers or they all went broke as the Victorian industry dumped milk in Queensland with or without support for that package from the Federal Government. We have done everything we can to assist dairy farmers. They have been betrayed by the National Party; they have been betrayed by the Liberal Party. When the Leader of the National Party went out there yesterday to talk to the dairy farmers, I would have thought they should have tarred and feathered him. If only I had seen this document earlier; I would have given it to every dairy farmer yesterday, and they would have tarred and feathered the Leader of the Opposition. He would have come back in here looking more like Richard Nixon than he does today.

Mr FELDMAN: But isn't there another $98m somewhere there as well that we can help the farmers with?

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

Mr BEATTIE: All the money from the Federal Liberal and National Parties under their plan goes directly to the farmers; it does not go to the Government. Indeed, the Minister for Primary Industries went back and argued with the Liberal Party to get an extra $12m for restructuring. If the member wants to know who is behind the dairy deregulation, I can tell him that it is the National and Liberal Parties. It is all their work, and I hope they are proud of themselves.

Excellence in State Schools

Mr HAYWARD: I ask the Minister for Education: what is being done to showcase excellence in Queensland State schools?

Mr WELLS: The honourable member for Kallangur is a good friend of education in his own electorate and elsewhere. He will be very pleased to hear that next week I am hosting a gala presentation for the first Showcasing Excellence Awards. There are 12 finalists in the Showcasing Excellence Awards, and they were selected from 500 entries across Queensland. The top six will win $40,000 to ensure that they can show off their successful programs to other schools. We want to spread these new and innovative kinds of programs with a view to ensuring that right across the State we get the benefit of this kind of imaginative approach.

Honourable members will be interested to hear the 12 schools that are the finalists. They are: Mansfield State High School for its instrumental, choral and class music programs; Mornington Island State School for a program that allows students to progress through the early years of schooling at rates that best suit their individual needs; Mountain Creek State High School for its Dynamic Lifelong Learning program; Inala Special School for a program to provide students with practical knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that will enable them to make the transition from school to work; the MacGregor State High School for Mac Build, its pseudo building, construction and engineering company, which enables students to have realistic experience in those fields; Mackay West State School for its Boys and Literacy program; Weir State School for its Literacy and Numeracy for Indigenous Students program; Nanango State High School for its Pathways to Success program, which includes reform of middle school teaching methods and virtual schooling; Palm Beach Currumbin State High School for its Sports Excellence program; Thuringowa State High School for its theatre restaurant project; Goondiwindi State High School for its Multiple Pathways program; and Banana State School for its early childhood storybook.

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

MEMBERS' ETHICS AND PARLIAMENTARY PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Report

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (11.30 a.m.): I lay upon the table of the House Report No. 41 of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee titled "Report on a matter of privilege—Matter concerning disorderly conduct of members of Parliament within the parliamentary precinct", and I move that the report be printed.

Ordered to be printed.

Mr MICKEL: This report concerns a matter of privilege referred to the committee by the House involving an incident which occurred within the parliamentary precincts yesterday.

The committee has found that the member for Tablelands, Mr Nelson, and the member for Barambah, Mrs Pratt, committed a contempt of the Parliament by engaging in disorderly and disrespectful conduct in the precincts of the Parliament whilst it was in session, and behaving in a manner not befitting members of Parliament.

Accordingly, the committee had no alternative but to recommend that the members be suspended from the services and the precincts of the House for 28 days. Further, the committee has recommended that both members not be permitted to take their seats in the House until such time as they undertake to Mr Speaker that they are prepared to unreservedly apologise to the House at the earliest possible occasion for their conduct, and that they actually do so.

The committee has also recommended that the House discharge Mr Nelson from the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee. In this respect, the committee has serious doubts about the ability of the member to continue as part of the committee.

I wish to make the following additional comments with regard to this matter. Firstly, in making its findings, the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee is in no way criticising the actions of members of the dairying community. The members of the dairying community attending to express their views, as is their right as citizens of the State, were peacefully assembled.

Secondly, the committee is conscious that there is a great deal of concern within the community about damage to, and defacement of, property. Parliament House is frequented by international and interstate visitors, the general public of Queensland and schoolchildren on a regular basis. What message does the defilement of Parliament House by members of the House itself send to the young people of our State?

Thirdly, it is vital that this House takes strong action against its own members in circumstances where members of the public would have been severely dealt with.

In commending the report to the House, I want to thank the support staff to the committee for working tirelessly into the night to have this report presented to the Parliament for its deliberations in accordance with the timetable set by the Parliament.

MOTOR ACCIDENT INSURANCE AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 16 May (see p. 1041).

Dr WATSON (Moggill—LP) (Leader of the Liberal Party) (11.34 a.m.): I rise to speak on the Motor Accident Insurance Amendment Bill. In doing so, I inform the House that the Opposition will not be opposing the Bill. As I have indicated to the Treasurer, I have a number of concerns with some of the aspects of this Bill. I will raise these matters during this second-reading speech and during the Committee stage. Knowing the Treasurer as I do, I suspect that he probably has similar concerns with respect to certain aspects of the Bill.

I would like to thank the Treasurer for his cooperation earlier in the process when he provided me with a copy of the review of compulsory third-party insurance which was undertaken by the appropriate committee. Even though the review occurred some time ago, I appreciated the early receipt of it from the Treasurer's office. It was helpful in assisting my overall understanding of the issue.

The Queensland compulsory third-party motor vehicle insurance scheme has operated under the principles of common law since about 1936. This Bill comes before the House as a result of a rather extensive review process. Firstly, a paper was issued for discussion purposes. That was followed by a report which allowed those concerned to respond to the recommendations.

As the Treasurer said in his second-reading speech, the purpose of the review was to examine the operations of the scheme and to assess the Government's involvement in the whole process. I would like to refer to a few aspects of that process.

One of the major recommendations of the review was that an affordability index would be created as a mechanism for judging the fairness of any third-party premium. Clause 5 of the Bill defines the affordability index as 45% of average weekly earnings. The ABS report of February this year referred to a survey of average weekly earnings in Queensland. The average weekly earnings of a full-time working male is $698.60. The premium allowed under 45% of average weekly earnings for Class 1 vehicles, as defined in the regulations, is about $315. There have been some recent changes and I believe it could increase by about $2 in the near future.

I discussed some aspects of this Bill with the commissioner and Treasury staff. It was recommended that the premium for a Class 1 vehicle should be $286. In effect, this means that the premium could rise by about another $30 before the Treasurer is required to make a decision on the structure of the premium-setting process. Whether or not that occurs in the future will depend on the costs associated with third-party insurance and changes in average weekly earnings.

The affordability index is somewhat arbitrary in the sense that a figure of 45% has been chosen. I do not know that there is any particular rationale in choosing that figure. No logical argument has been advanced for choosing 45% rather than 50%, or whatever. It seems to me that the real issue of affordability depends upon the choices available to those who are going to have to take out compulsory third-party insurance. Matters to be taken into consideration would include the availability of public transport. Such issues will affect the necessity of people having to own private vehicles, thus necessitating their taking out third-party insurance.

I find that the affordability index is somewhat outside the premium-setting process. It is used as a mechanism for judging the outcome of the premium-setting process. However, the premium-setting process has quite significant and appropriate constraints imposed upon it. When one goes through the premium-setting process it is not clear why the affordability index should be considered.

For example, in the third-party process there have to be actuarial evaluations of the cost structure and an understanding of

accidents—information about their severity and a prediction of the number of claims that are likely to be made in the future. That actuarial process is to make sure that the third-party process and the funds available are financially sound. It seems to me that, for people who are going to be covered by third-party insurance, financial soundness and the ability of the companies to meet payments when they fall due is a particularly important aspect. Given that the premium-setting process involves limits by which the companies will be able to set their premiums—and I will come back to that in a moment—it is not clear to me what happens if the higher limit suddenly goes above the affordability index. Although that may trigger a review, it still seems to me that the overriding concern should be that the companies who are supplying the third-party insurance are financially viable.

So on the one hand we have a process that has to be financially sound to provide the insurance coverage that motorists deserve, yet on the other hand we have this affordability index, which I regard as exogenous to that process and, in essence, a somewhat arbitrary setting. I am sure that the review committee, the Government and the Treasurer are committed to trying to ensure affordability—that the people who are going to own cars and drive them can afford to pay the premiums, which is a laudable objective—but the issue of financial soundness is also a laudable objective.

Mr Hamill: Always, always.

Dr WATSON: It is always a laudable objective. I am uncertain about the construction of this affordability index. It is so arbitrary. What happens when those two things conflict? It would seem to me that the Government would want the scheme to be financially sound, particularly when it is compared with what I said was an arbitrary affordability index. I understand the concept. I understand what the Treasurer is trying to achieve but, in a practical way, I am not quite sure what it means in the final analysis. What would happen if the upper limit was above the affordability index? Other than triggering a review, it is not quite clear to me what would happen. For example, I do not think that the Government would sacrifice the financial viability of the companies and the funding process. It might restrict further people's ability to access that limit. That is my concern, and it was something that I discussed with the commissioner. As I said, I read the report and I understand what they are trying to get at, but the affordability index is still somewhat exogenous to the compulsory third-party premium process and the companies. I find it difficult to see precisely where it would go if there were a problem.

The second point that I want to make relates to clause 10 of the Bill, which refers to the premium. First of all, the premium goes to the insurer, and it consists of the statutory insurance scheme levy, the hospital and emergency services levy, the Nominal Defendant levy and the administration fee. Those elements also have to be taken into account. Basically, they are Government-imposed levies. It would seem to me that, if the final premium is dependent upon Government policy decisions and if Government policy decisions have been made with regard to particular aspects that drive the premium outside the range of the affordability index, it could then trigger issues not only with respect to the insurance companies but also with respect to Government policy. One then could have a potential conflict between Government policy being set in each of these three or four areas and this somewhat arbitrary, exogenous affordability index.

When the report from the Insurance Commissioner is given to the Treasurer, he has to lay the report before the House as soon as practicable after receiving it. I am a little bit concerned that there is no statutory time in which that has to be done. At the moment, I think that it is a maximum of two months. I have some difficulty with the phrase "as soon as practicable" if Parliament does not sit for some time.

Mr Hamill: It can always be given to the Speaker.

Dr WATSON: If the intention is that when the report is received it goes to the Speaker, then there is not any problem. If "as soon as practicable" is interpreted to be as soon as Parliament resumes, then I find that not acceptable.

I am concerned about a number of matters with respect to clause 32, which contains proposed new sections 55A through to 55F. I discussed these issues with the Treasurer's staff and I notice in the Alert Digest that they were picked up by the parliamentary committee. I will mention them now, and refer again to a couple of them during the Committee stage. I draw the Parliament's attention to a couple of them that cause me more concern than others. Proposed new section 55A in clause 32—which has been mentioned by the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee—refers to the capped awards to be three times the average weekly earnings. By the way, I understand that all of these

subsections to this new section inserted by this clause are trying to make sure that the premiums are kept affordable in the sense that they restrict the number and the amount of the claims that can be made on the funds. However, in terms of proposed new section 55A, I think that the Treasurer runs the risk of introducing some anomalies into the system, and some individuals may feel quite put out about that. Although three times average weekly earnings probably covers the bulk of the population—and I am sure the standard deviation is—

Mr Hamill: For whom are you pleading?

Dr WATSON: I am just saying that there are some potential anomalies that could be resolved by the court. For example, take a younger person who has put a lot of effort into his training. We have a number of such people here, but I will pick as an example somebody who is not a lawyer. I will pick as an example a young surgeon.

Mr Lucas: What have you got against lawyers?

Dr WATSON: Nothing; I just said that I will stay away from individuals here. I acknowledge that the member is an individual who put a lot of effort into his training. A young surgeon who has been through medical school does not usually earn a lot until he completes his fellowship. At the stage when he is going through the registrar process and so on, he does not have a particularly high income. For example, what if he has a car accident and loses his hands? It would destroy his potential future in his chosen field. But at that stage he will not be in a position, firstly, to have shown a history of high earnings, although the potential will be there, having just completed his fellowship. In addition, he will not even be in a position to go to an insurance company. One of the things mentioned in the review was that people on higher incomes should take out income protection insurance and should not be using the compulsory third-party process as a mechanism for receiving a higher income. My understanding of income protection insurance is that one has to have some sort of earnings history and not just a potential for earnings. In that situation, someone who might very well have made a major contribution to society in the longer term would have had his income potential cut short and yet he would have no redress.

Mr Lucas: The courts do that all the time. They assess people's future earning capacity.

Dr WATSON: I understand that, but my understanding of this is that it is restricted to three times average weekly earnings. I might be wrong. My understanding is that people can still go to court. But under clause 55A damages are capped at three times average weekly earnings. If it is the case that people can get around that provision, that is fine; that is precisely what should happen. I agree with the honourable member who interjected; the courts are the appropriate place to resolve these matters, and they do look at potential future earnings. But it is of concern that the amount is capped at three times average weekly earnings, because there will be individuals who are on the threshold. In all probability they would have earned a higher income in the future. However, their future earnings potential is cut short, for example, because they lose a limb in an accident. In such situations there ought to be a mechanism to allow that to be assessed. The Treasurer may want to answer this question at the Committee stage.

Other issues have also been highlighted. Proposed new subsection 55D addresses damages for gratuitous services. I understand the issue that is trying to be addressed. If someone is contributing gratuitous services to another person and that person is involved in a car accident and requires even greater services, the gratuitous services that are already being received should not be included by the claimant in the claim. I understand the reason for that, but it may also lead to some unfortunate outcomes. For example, unless I have misinterpreted this, it seems that, if a claimant involved in a car accident has been contributing gratuitous services to a member of the family who was not in the immediate household, there will be a problem with their claiming those gratuitous services. A substantial number of people may be caught. For example, a person not in the immediate household of a claimant, say a grandmother or a cousin, might be receiving services as part of an extended household. The definition of "household" may create problems. Perhaps a broader definition would overcome some of those issues.

Under this regime, panels of specialists will be established to evaluate medical claims before the courts made by claimants. Again, I understand the rationale for this, but it is another restriction on choice. People can go outside of this system, but they will incur the financial costs associated with that. An incentive system is set up such that there is a financial incentive for claimants to use the panel. Given that the panel members are to be paid by the insurance companies and so on, over time this would perhaps raise questions about the independence of panel

members. The financial incentive is against the claimant proceeding outside of the system. However, once this system is set up, over the longer term one might say that the broader incentives are not necessarily biased in favour of the claimants. Again, I understand the rationale; it is an attempt to try to make sure that claims are reasonable so that the whole thing remains affordable. But that comes at a cost to individual claimants and, in some cases, those costs may, with the effluxion of time, become greater for claimants than is obvious at the moment.

As I said, the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee has outlined its concerns in the Alert Digest. I picked out a couple of issues that were of greater concern to me. It has to be understood that each of those restrictions, which are applied in the name of affordability and making sure that the compulsory third-party process—the premiums and the insurance structure—remains affordable, comes at a significant cost to the flexibility that claimants have. At the moment, the final cost is not immediately obvious. There are also other aspects about which I could speak.

As I said at the beginning, the Opposition believes that this process should be given a chance to be successful. Having said that and having said that we will not be opposing the Bill and that we understand some of the issues driving it, I do not think the Parliament should be under any misapprehension that we are not concerned about how some of these things will operate. As I said earlier, I would be surprised if the Treasurer does not share some of those concerns. It behoves this Parliament to make sure that those concerns do not blow out in the future to become major concerns. We should all understand that by adopting this process we restrict individual rights in particular circumstances. As I said at the beginning, the index of affordability has been set arbitrarily. We should be careful that, in the name of affordability, we do not cause some individual rights to be so severely disadvantaged as to be a problem for people. I will follow up these issues at the Committee stage.

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12 p.m.): I want to briefly address some of the reasons why the Government has acted to reform compulsory third-party insurance in Queensland. Essentially, the Government announced a major overhaul of the scheme because of our concerns about the effect of the significant increases that were taking place in insurance premiums and, in particular, their effect on average Queenslanders. It was clear to the Government that the current trend in compulsory third-party insurance premiums was unsustainable. Additionally, the viability of the scheme was being threatened by the current level of claims activity which resulted in significant increases being imposed on the average Queensland motorist.

There also were strong concerns that the increased level of claims activity was being driven by the entrepreneurial activities of some—not all—members of the legal profession. There were reports of some lawyers seeking to promote their business through commercial relationships with tow truck operators and offering to litigate on a no win, no fee basis. That is one of the reasons why the Government introduced the anti-touting reforms that were passed in this Parliament in December last year. Those reforms meant that the inappropriate activities of some lawyers—and I stress "some"—would be prevented. Some of the initiatives in that Act addressed the issue of drumming up business by approaching road accident victims with promises that minor injuries could lead to generous compensation.

Another disgraceful example of that sort of touting was highlighted today by the member for Kallangur in relation to the recent tragic events at Bray Park. Additionally, that Act addresses the issue of using tow truck drivers and panel beaters to solicit businesses on behalf of some legal practitioners. The Government successfully introduced reforms to rein in touting and there were fines of up to $18,000 for persons convicted of it.

The greatest concern of the Government was that, if compulsory third-party insurance premiums were too high, that would make the scheme unaffordable for low income earners, which may have resulted in a significant increase in the number of unregistered vehicles as people sought to avoid those substantial increases. It is for these reasons that the Government established a comprehensive review of the scheme. The review considered all of the fundamental elements of the scheme, including its design, affordability and the appropriate role for Government in regulating it. The committee was chaired by former Suncorp Chief Executive, Bernard Rowley, and its members included former Under Treasurer, Henry Smerdon; Brisbane lawyer Walter Tutt; and former RACQ Director, Noel Mason.

The review was instigated due to significant increases in the number and size of compulsory third-party claims in recent years. For instance, the number of claims per 1,000 policies had risen from 3.13 in 1995-96 to a projected 4.39 in 1999-2000. Over the same

period the average claim size increased from $34,000 to a projected $42,000. The terms of reference of the review included scheme design, affordability and the appropriate role of Government, as I have already outlined, and the committee sought submissions from all interested stakeholders and the general public.

The Government has remained committed to ensuring that we have a stable and affordable compulsory third-party insurance scheme in Queensland which provides fair compensation to those people who are unfortunately injured on our roads and, accordingly, I commend the Bill to the House.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (12.05 p.m.): In rising to speak to this Bill, I think all of us—me in particular—would acknowledge the need to maintain an affordable compulsory third-party scheme. Often people who are injured in motor vehicle accidents suffer significant loss not only of mobility but also of the ability to earn an income and to be able to enjoy life as they had prior to the accident. Additionally, there are often instances—and the Nominal Defendant's office comes into play here—in which injured parties have no access to recompense other than through the Nominal Defendant's office. I think we all should ensure that that office not only continues to exist but is viable.

There are, however, a couple of issues that I want to comment on in relation to this Bill and perhaps get a response from the Minister in his reply. One particular issue—and I know that the Scrutiny of Legislation Committee asked a question about this—concerns the sustainability of a clause of the Bill which requires a court to regard any limits on liability as substantive law, that is, that it will apply across Australia, and overseas where possible. I wonder how sustainable that clause is and whether information has been gained to date—

Mr Hamill: This is clause 34?

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: That would be right.

It appears that across jurisdictions one State's law generally does not have precedent interstate or, particularly, overseas. I have some concerns about the principle of putting a cap on the compensation available to a person, mainly on the basis of its impartiality. People are injured in different ways and degrees of severity. Also, the impact on an individual, their family and their environment differs from person to person. There is no easy pigeonhole to place people in. There may be general bands that we can put people in, but to put a cap on a person's eligibility for compensation fails to take into account that, in exceptional circumstances, that limit will significantly disadvantage them. I would be interested to see how sustainable that substantive law proposal is.

I would put the same principle in relation to proposals to cap economic loss and loss of consortium payments. Again, I do not have a problem with trying to rein in costs. I understand why the Minister is doing it, but I do worry about its inflexibility because it fails to take into account all of the available options. I do not recall—and I could be in error here—that the Bill allows the Minister or another person—perhaps the commission—to alter those limits in exceptional circumstances. Because the Bill was tabled only a week ago, I have certainly not done all the work on it that I would have liked. I wonder whether there will be an opportunity when exceptional circumstances present themselves for some flexibility to be allowed.

I will give honourable members an example. It has nothing to do with motor vehicle insurance, but it has to do with transport. I commend the Minister for Transport for being prepared to show some flexibility in relation to this incident. A young person in my electorate had lost both his legs because of a work related incident. He had significant infection in both legs, one of those after only 24 hours, and he had both legs amputated.

The inflexibility of the transport rules were such that, according to a guideline, he was unable to drive a manual vehicle; he had to drive an automatic vehicle with hand controls. He was very mobile and very capable and resented the fact that he could not even prove his ability to drive a manual vehicle. Nobody would step out of the chain of responsibility to say, "Let's give this young fellow a go." The Minister did. He went for a standard driving test in a standard vehicle and passed with flying colours. If both the system and the Minister were so inflexible, he would have been unable to even show whether he was capable or incapable. When there is no flexibility available outside arbitrary limits, that inflexibility can significantly disadvantage a person who is in a unique situation or who has suffered a unique set of circumstances or loss. I would be interested to hear from the Minister if there is an opportunity within the Bill for some flexibility in special circumstances.

Another issue I want to raise with the Minister relates to the setting of premiums. It is

interesting to note that there are going to be upper and lower limits for the premium but that the flexibility will be given to the insurance companies involved in this scheme to decide their level of commission. With the greatest of respect, they will pick as much as they can. I stand to be corrected on that, but I remember a debate in this Chamber about the deregulation of commissions for people like real estate agents. Those who supported the proposal said that real estate agents would do the right thing, that is, they would negotiate with their potential sellers and they would set a reasonable commission on a sale. It might be unparliamentary language, but all I can say is: in a pig's eye they would. They would take as much as they could, especially from people who may buy one house a year.

The framework is going to set a maximum and a minimum fee to be charged and the insurance company will determine the amount of commission they accept from that premium. Time will tell. My concern is that they will all choose the highest possible amount of commission and take the highest possible premium. If they all do that, there will not be competition. The Minister may have a response to that. I look forward to the Minister's comments on that topic.

Another issue I seek some clarification on relates to the proposal to limit the recoverable legal costs where damages are $30,000 or less, when no legal costs are recoverable. If an award is greater than $30,000 but not greater than $50,000, the limit on legal costs is $2,500. If a person—either through an established link with a solicitor or without realising the implications of this legislation—takes with them to court a solicitor who charges more than that set amount, I take it that the claimant will be responsible to pay all the legal fees.

If that is the case, I question the Minister on this point. The legislation effectively says that people who are paid $30,000 or less in damages are less entitled to be awarded costs, irrespective of their circumstances. If their claim is between $30,000 and $50,000, they will need to shop around for a lawyer who will charge them only $2,500. That appears to me to disadvantage people who may have incurred physical damages that attract an award of less than $30,000. They will have to pay the lot. Other than to limit the costs on this fund, why were those discriminatory levels set? Was there a rationale behind it not contained in the notes I have received?

The other issue I want to raise with the Minister, and it is of significant concern, is the power given to the commission to gain information on the criminal history of claimants to the fund where the claimant is suspected to be abusing the fund or claiming inappropriately. The power given to the commission in that regard is significant. I certainly do not support the breadth of it. The commission can request from the superintendent of police the criminal history of that person. It is all inclusive in that it covers charges, convictions and even reports or complaints made either by that person or about that person. I do not intend to slight the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel unjustly, but it appears to me that we have started to insert clauses like this in family services legislation. I support them without reserve as far as family services Bills are concerned. Charges against child molesters, alleged paedophiles or people purported to do things of a similar nature against other individuals, particularly minors, are difficult to prove in court.

When the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and her department look at employing a person, it is important that they get information which not only shows convictions but also shows a list of tendencies towards certain actions after complaints have been made in various places and at various times. These complaints may remain unproven because of their difficulty to prove, but it certainly shows potential or propensity. However, we are talking about motor vehicle claims. I cannot support the notion that the commissioner should have access to such information as complaints made by or about a person or charges against a person. The limit I would be prepared to support relates to access to convictions and perhaps charges, but certainly not complaints. This is not as intrusive an area as the family services area. It is not intrusive on the safety of minors or other people; it relates to an insurance company trying to prove that a person is trying to rort the system. I do not believe that that warrants a clause which is as intrusive into a person's background as is intended. It is my intention to not support that clause.

Generally, people need to feel confident that, if they are involved in an accident, there will be some recourse for them to enable them to afford to live as a family and provide for a family. On that basis, I think this House will continue to support the Bill. As indicated earlier, I will be interested in the Minister's response. I will be interested, too, in debate on that clause that proposes to give such intrusive powers to the commission.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (12.17 p.m.): It is my pleasure to speak in support of the Motor Accident Insurance Amendment Bill 2000. I particularly want to focus on the concept of limited competition which will be introduced by significant elements of this Bill. The compulsory third party review committee concluded that the Queensland community is not well served by the Government regulated premium regime. Currently, premium calculations are based upon industry-wide averages which can provide increased profit margins for insurers with economies of scale and reduced margins for insurers with a small Queensland CTP market share and limited business of a similar type elsewhere.

The regulated premium-setting process does not allow revisiting the premium for any excess profit or funding shortfalls related to past years premium assessments. A major concern with the regulated premium process is that it can be a cost-plus exercise which can lead to accelerating claim payments and overall scheme inefficiencies. In the current Queensland scheme, lack of price competition is a major barrier to insurers gaining market share. This is compounded by the impediments currently affecting the motor vehicle owner's ability to nominate a change of insurer. The National Competition Policy review indicated that the existing scheme does not meet the requirements of the NCP public benefit test, a most important test that it is.

The review committee closely assessed the various CTP insurance models operating in Australia and also considered some overseas models. In most States the product is delivered by a Government-run monopoly, with a single private insurer monopoly in the ACT. Queensland and New South Wales are the only States with multiple insurers. The committee considered various options, including the New South Wales green slip model and the linking of CTP insurance with major vehicle damage insurance, as both systems are well placed to provide rewards for good driving. Analysis by the review committee of the New South Wales "file and write" model, which includes some provision for individual rating, indicated that such a scheme has the potential to result in large premium increases for some motorists, particularly younger drivers and those with poor driving records.

The committee was of the view that Queensland motor vehicle owners would benefit most by the introduction of a limited price competitive model, which maintains the lower delivery cost and convenience achievable through the Queensland Transport registration system and retains community rating of policies. The model requires each licensed insurer to file a premium for each class of vehicle every three months within a floor and ceiling range determined by the Motor Accident Insurance Commission. The commission must seek submissions from the licensed insurers and major motoring organisations and obtain actuarial advice on the effect of current trends on the financial soundness of the scheme before fixing the floors and ceilings. The Government recognises that there is an element of uncertainty in respect of scheme stability if premium rates and market share fluctuate widely. The role of the Motor Accident Insurance Commission will be crucial in maintaining an appropriate level of stability through the setting of well-chosen floor and ceiling ranges.

The Government is confident that the vehicle class filing model will bring a greater level of competition into the scheme and will further develop marketing relationships of insurers, for example, other products, such as a no-fault insurance option, which will benefit the motor vehicle owner. For these reasons and the others that have been submitted by my colleagues on the Government side, it is my great pleasure to commend this legislation to the House.

Mr DALGLEISH (Hervey Bay—CCAQ) (12.22 p.m.): The City Country Alliance will support the Motor Accident Insurance Amendment Bill. However, we do have a few reservations about some of the clauses, such as proposed section 87V(1). The Bill focuses on the Queensland compulsory third-party insurance scheme, in particular on ensuring the affordability, efficiency and stability of the scheme.

Section 87V(1) is too broad. The commissioner has access to a wide range of information, not just information about actual convictions. The commissioner can have access to documentation about a person's criminal history, evidence compiled by the Queensland Police Service and any complaint made by or against a person.

Section 87V(3) excludes the operation of the Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1996. The rehabilitation of offenders Act was designed to give people who may have made an error in early life a second chance, without carrying the stigma of a minor conviction forever. Surely a person could not be seen to be a repeat offender if an offence occurred over 10 years prior. After 10 years without committing an offence, I think a person

has established their right to be treated equally under the law. The worst part of this section is that the information the Police Service may be required to provide to the Insurance Commissioner includes unproven facts and hearsay—any evidence that may be collected by the Police Service, no matter how minor or irrelevant. This information may be then used in a court of law to support an otherwise very flimsy prosecution case.

I went through a third-party claim and I see the other side of the argument as well. I do not know how many members have ever been seriously injured—serious enough to have died and been brought back to life—but I have. I have been in the surgery of a doctor representing the insurance company, whose main aim is to reduce your claim. When they poke you with a needle and say, "Did you feel that?" and it hurts and you say, "Yes", and their report states that it did not, you come to understand that the rights of victims of accidents also have to be seriously considered.

Sure, there are people out there who rip off the system. It does not matter what we talk about; there will always be people ripping off the system—not just in relation to insurance. So we must never forget and never lose focus of the genuine cases. People who may have been greatly affected by an accident could then also be suffering at the hands of the insurance companies, whose main aim is to reduce the claims. At the end of the day, certain people make a living out of keeping those claims down, whether they are genuine claims or not.

The City Country Alliance will be supporting the Bill, but I hope that the Minister considers my comments, especially those relating to a person's criminal history. After 10 years without committing an offence I think people should be entitled to a fair go and not have their background dragged up and thrown around. They should not be re-convicted for something that happened a long time ago.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (12.26 p.m.): I support some of the latter comments made by the member for Hervey Bay. I have, in my previous position as a psychologist involved in assessing victims of road accidents, seen insurance companies play such dreadful games with the lives of people who have been genuinely injured in accidents. I have seen them draw out the claims so that people's lives are made the more terrible and the more uncertain by waiting year in, year out for the claims to eventually be brought to either court or some negotiated resolution.

At the same time, I am aware of solicitors in Cairns who really do tout for business. In fact, honourable members of this House heard this morning about solicitors touting for business, looking for cases where people may wish to sue in an inappropriate fashion. I have certainly seen that in Cairns with motor accident claims where the injury was minor. Yes, there was some shock and there was probably a night's sleep disrupted, but there was no serious or continuing disruption to a person's life, let alone to their general healthy functioning. But some solicitor gets hold of them and says, "But you're entitled to something for that. Let me have a go for you. I guarantee we will get an answer within six months." That builds up hopes of some kind of financial recompense and causes, in effect, a kind of preoccupation with the level of shock or disruption that did occur and, maybe even accidentally then, as the months pass, an exaggeration of the amount of shock or disruption that was actually experienced. So it is a matter of balance for us in our role in Government.

Today I am also reminded of concerned people in Cairns who contacted me when we announced that we would be reviewing the CTP scheme. A number of them were pensioners who were concerned that the premiums were already too high for them to manage and that skyrocketing premiums were not reasonable, particularly when many of them drive in limited circumstances and for limited numbers of kilometres per week. Many of them are very cautious drivers and have a very fine history of not having been involved in accidents. It seemed to them that their paying a premium the same as those who drive long distances, often and maybe not so carefully and with not such fine records, was not quite equitable.

I particularly compliment the Minister for the inclusion of the affordability index in the Motor Accident Insurance Amendment Bill 2000. Through the affordability index we are aiming to maintain affordability that is acceptable to the general motoring public. This is critical to the long-term viability of the scheme.

Affordable premiums are also essential to maintaining a high proportion of registered and insured vehicles, without which the scheme itself would falter. The CTP review committee gave a good deal of consideration to this aspect and judged that premium levels were approaching the limits of affordability as a result of the 1999-2000 premium rise, and I have no doubt that they were correct in this conclusion. The committee proposed an

affordability index based on the proportion that the Class 1 premium is of Queensland average weekly earnings. Whether or not this is a correct measure of affordability, I do not know. Affordability is not a precise concept. We do not have any guidance from other areas of Government activity on exactly how one can calculate what really is affordability, and so it is the committee's best recommendation as to the approach to take in this first instance.

As an outcome of the committee's deliberations, the Bill makes provision for an affordability index of 45% of average weekly earnings, that is, the Class 1 premium will be no more than 45% of the gross average earnings over a week. The Bill deems that this affordability index must not be exceeded, but when it is—when the highest filed Class 1 premium filed by an insurer becomes greater than 45%—it will automatically result in a report that must be made by the commission to the Minister on the effect of current trends on the affordability of the scheme. This means that we have not only a limit that we believe represents affordability but that any attempt to move beyond affordability will immediately trigger a close review by the commission and a report to the Minister. At that point the commission may also recommend changes if it considers changes to the scheme are necessary to counter any undesirable trends. The Minister is required to lay a copy of the commission's report before Parliament as soon as practicable after receiving it.

The premium exceeding the affordability index is a trigger for review of the scheme's operation and recommendations on future action. While I am sure other honourable members of this House would agree with me that we do not expect or hope that that will happen in the short term, nonetheless, when the time comes, for whatever reason, at least there are quick and immediate triggers for responsive action by the commission, by the Minister and by the Parliament.

I give recognition to the good sense spoken by the honourable member for Moggill. Nonetheless, we have to ensure the continued financial soundness of the scheme, and the Bill makes it clear that the index in that sense is not a cap on the ceiling set by the Motor Accident Insurance Commission, which should continue to rely on actuarial advice on the financial soundness of the scheme. This provision will come into play in any transitional period between the index being exceeded and action to amend the scheme which may result from the report from the commission to the Minister.

It is therefore a reasonable balance between that affordability index being mindful of the real costs of this to people on limited incomes, the importance of their being able to have insurance and to travel according to their needs in areas of the State that are often not well served by other transport choices, and at the same time maintaining the financial soundness of the scheme. There are clear roles in the Bill for the commission, the Minister and the Parliament in ensuring that the scheme functions effectively within the bounds of affordability and that these are provided for by the recommended process.

A further significance of the affordability index is its benefit in providing to lawyers and insurers involved with the scheme a clear signal of the need for its continued sustainability and their need to participate in measures to correct any future emerging imbalance. I am, to that extent, more optimistic than the member for Gladstone. I believe that insurance companies, and lawyers particularly, will recognise that a balance here is essential for their continued long-term benefit from being involved in this business, rather than be encouraged to push up prices, the cost of such schemes or legal claims unnecessarily.

I am pleased, therefore, on behalf of Cairns pensioners and others who are concerned about the affordability of insurance premiums to support the Bill.

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (12.34 p.m.), in reply: Over the years I have been a participant in quite a number of debates in this place about compulsory third-party insurance. This would have to be the quietest of all of those that I can recall, which I think demonstrates that all members in the House recognise the very good work that was done by the review committee in analysing the features of the Queensland compulsory third-party insurance scheme and recognise that the reforms that are being proposed in this Bill are reforms which have the public interest as the No. 1 priority.

The honourable member for Cairns mentioned the words "reasonable balance" in the context of the affordability index. Reasonable balance is a concept which runs right through these reforms. I know that there have been some issues raised by honourable members regarding matters to do with awards and limits on economic costs and issues to do with the payment of legal fees and so on. I want to remind all honourable members of this point: Queensland's compulsory third-party

insurance scheme does not deny access to common law. It is a scheme which provides very substantial cover to injured parties in Queensland. Certainly we want to see a greater share of the moneys that are actually collected through premiums going to injured parties; that was one of the objectives that came from the review. But in order to have those goals achieved, there does indeed need to be reasonable balance, and the measures in the Bill seek to establish a reasonable balance; a reasonable balance in terms of affordability, a reasonable balance in terms of individuals' rights, a reasonable balance in terms of the level of premiums paid and the access that people have to justice in relation to their claims.

In response to an issue raised by the member for Gladstone in relation to legal costs, I might say that there are in fact a number of measures here which are really designed to minimise legal costs, to try to seek the resolution of claims before they get to the court. I have always said that, once you get to the court, it is not a case of whether you lose an arm and a leg; it is a question of whether you lose two arms or two legs. It is not a question of whether you win or not. Litigants generally are going to be losers. So if we can have the resolution of claims before getting to the stage where people are amassing considerable expense in the court, then I think that is a good thing. It means that there is a greater likelihood that injured parties will receive a greater quantum of damages and be able to address their particular needs and also that those needs will be addressed in a more timely fashion.

There were a number of specific issues raised on clauses. I do not intend at this juncture to try to deal with all of them, but I will try to deal with those which recurred. There were issues raised by the member for Gladstone and the member for Hervey Bay in relation to clause 40 of the Bill, which relates to access to information. I know that the member for Gladstone said that in other circumstances she would support this sort of provision, but not in this case. I remind the honourable member that the provisions here reflect provisions which were inserted into the WorkCover legislation back in 1996 by the former Government. There are parallels, because this is an insurance scheme, as is WorkCover, and they were deemed to be measures appropriate in relation to WorkCover to deal with the same sorts of problems of fraud that the Insurance Commissioner has to deal with regarding the compulsory third-party insurance scheme. So there is in fact a public interest imperative in relation to that provision.

I would like to comment on another point that was raised by the member. I know this was a heartfelt plea. She commented on whether there would be some discretion on the part of the Minister to step outside of the strict provisions in the case of exceptional circumstances. I say to the honourable member: no, there is no such provision. Indeed, I would suggest to her that it would be wellnigh impossible to have such a scheme in place were there such a provision, because after all, who bears the risk here? This scheme is administered by private insurers. The State is not bearing the risk. How would one calculate the risk for the insurer if, even with the best of intent, the Minister simply said, "Yes, this claim can be allowed and you, the insurer, shall pick up the cost."? It would mean that the whole basis of the scheme would fall apart.

The issue of commissions was raised. It was said that maybe everyone will go for broke to try to maximise their commissions. The pricing mechanism—the floor and the ceiling—prevents us having a totally unregulated compulsory third-party insurance scheme in Queensland. We have a managed scheme. Obviously, the cost of any commissions will impact on the cost of premiums. So competitive tension is being provided in the scheme in relation to commission because that commission is obviously part of the premium. If there is competition on premium, there is effectively competition on its component parts.

We did not wish to go down the road that had been trod in New South Wales when the scheme was deregulated. In New South Wales we saw quite dramatic movements in premiums and destructive activity in the market for compulsory third-party insurance.

We see this as a measured reform. As the Leader of the Liberal Party said, I, too, will be watching it very closely. Our motor accident insurance legislation regularly troops along to the Parliament. Since the legislation was first introduced in 1936 the Parliament has from time to time amended the legislation. I have no doubt that there will be further amendments in the future to refine the provisions with which we are dealing today. After all, that is the task of the Parliament.

We should continue to strive to improve what we have in terms of our legislation. We should continue to strive to improve the efficacy of our motor accident insurance legislation. With those words, I thank members

for their support of the legislation. I trust that we will see the same degree of support as we work through the clauses.

Motion agreed to.

Committee

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) in charge of the Bill.

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.

Clause 5—

Mr HAMILL (12.43 p.m.): I move the following amendments—

"At page 8, line 20, after 'definitions'—

insert—

' "claimant",'.

At page 9, after line 9—

insert—

' "claimant" means a person by whom, or on whose behalf, a claim is made.

Examples of claimants—

1. An attorney acts under an enduring power of attorney under the Powers of Attorney Act 1998 for a person injured in a motor vehicle accident. In this case, both the attorney (in the attorney's representative capacity) and the person for whom the attorney acts are regarded as claimants.
2. A guardian or an administrator acts under the Guardianship and Administration Act 2000 for a person injured in a motor vehicle accident. In this case, the guardian or administrator (in his or her representative capacity) and the injured person are regarded as claimants.'."

I wish to offer the House a brief explanation in relation to these amendments. This legislation is the result of extensive consultation, not only in terms of the review committee's work but also across agencies. I am indebted to the input of my ministerial colleague, the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, who raised the very real issue of those persons who cannot act legally on their own behalf and whose interests are protected under the Powers of Attorney Act and the Guardianship and Administration Act. These two amendments to clause 5 ensure that the rights of those people are properly protected in this legislation.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 5, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 6 to 17, as read, agreed to.

Clause 18—

Mr HAMILL (12.45 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"At page 25, lines 5 to 7—

omit, insert—

' '34.(1) A person who proposes to make a motor vehicle accident claim (including a person acting in a representative capacity) must ensure that appropriate notice of the accident has been given to a police officer.'.:

This is a fairly simple amendment. It flows from the amendments that the Parliament has just accepted in relation to people who cannot act on their own behalf and who have, under law, a power of attorney or who are subject to guardianship.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 18, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 19 to 31, as read, agreed to.

Clause 32—

Dr WATSON (12.46 p.m.): I have a few questions in respect of this particular clause. In relation to clause 55A(1), the Treasurer might recall that I discussed the issue of younger people who do not yet receive higher incomes against which they might very well have been able to insure. These people have put in the hard work in terms of their study or their professions. Unless I misunderstand the Bill, this legislation seems to take away any assessment of damage for people who are on the verge of receiving higher incomes but who, for a variety of reasons, are not quite there. I believe that that matter ought to be addressed.

I will go through the rest of my concerns. I refer to Clause 55B. It always worries me when we put an absolute figure for discount rates in Bills because obviously discount rates vary. I spoke to the Insurance Commissioner and I was informed that usually the courts arbitrarily use 3%, 5% or 7%. In this case we have chosen 5%.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Dr WATSON: The Treasurer knows that he is not able to reflect upon the bench except in a substantive motion. We will not pursue that matter.

I would have preferred a discount rate that somehow related to the long-term bond rate or some other kinds of rates which vary from time to time in the market but which do reflect more appropriately the economic conditions at the time when the decision is

being made. An arbitrary 5% may be too low or it may be too high. Anyone who has looked at long-term interest rates in Australia and in the United States over the last century or so will have observed changes in rates. Sometimes a rate of 5% would be very favourable to a claimant and at other times it would be quite unfavourable.

I refer to new subsections 55D(2) and 55D(3), firstly 55D(3), which refers to a person's household. I can think of my own situation when I was somewhat younger and used to mow the lawn for my grandmother, who at that time was 89 years of age. That was a gratuitous service. It may very well be that, if something happened to me, I may not have been able to do that. My grandmother's daughter, who was my mother, had passed on years earlier, her other children lived in New South Wales, and I was here to provide the gratuitous service. If something had happened to me, that would have meant that my grandmother would have had to pick up the cost of getting her lawn mown.

It would seem to me that that would not be an unusual situation. It did not relate to my immediate household, in the sense that it did not relate to my wife or my sons, but clearly it related to a situation that is not unusual, particularly in terms of people with elderly parents or grandparents. These days, gratuitous services could very well be provided by siblings, or children or grandchildren of individuals. However, it seems to me that that subsection excludes that. I may be wrong about the definition of "household" in that subsection. It may be very difficult to extend my household situation, which comprises my sons and my wife, to my grandmother, who lived by herself, although in an extended sense, that would perhaps be the case.

I think somewhat more complex is new section 55D(2). To use the same type of example, say my grandmother was involved in a car accident. I may have been mowing her lawn, but she may have enjoyed gardening. It may very well be the case that, if my grandmother was in an accident, the gratuitous service that I was providing in terms of mowing the lawn is not compensated, but if she cannot do the gardening as well as the lawn, it may be practical to get a gardener in to do the whole lot rather than splitting up the tasks. I only mention those things because they are real circumstances, yet it seems to me that new subsections 55D(2) and 55D(3) remove that ability to get any damages. Unless I am reading it too restrictively, it does seem to me that those kinds of circumstances are taken out.

In relation to new section 55F(1)—and I referred to this matter when I was talking to the Insurance Commissioner—I raise what is only a minor drafting point. Subsections 55F(1) and 55F(2) refer to $50,000 and $30,000. At the moment, we do not have a high inflationary environment. However, it would seem to me that over time those figures will become less relevant and will have to be revised. It seems to me that those subsections should contain an index mechanism so that the figures are revised automatically.

In this particular case, although in some respects the figures favour claimants because they will receive above those cut-off figures owing to the rate of inflation, it seems to me that the $50,000 and $30,000 are arbitrary figures.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Dr WATSON: No, we do not want to call them penalty units. I think the Treasurer understands the situation. It seems to me that we should have some mechanism in the legislation that enables those figures to reflect economic conditions.

As the Treasurer said in his reply, we will probably revisit the Motor Accident Insurance Act many times. So in some respects, this issue is not critical, because these figures may be adjusted by the appropriate amounts on those occasions. However, when I am looking at the whole legislation, it seems to me that those things ought to be considered at least.

Mr HAMILL: I thank the honourable member. I actually addressed some of these points in my reply and I do not really want to travel across them again. Suffice to say that this is all about establishing that reasonable balance to which I referred. Perhaps the newer material relates to the discount rate issue. In relation to that, I advise that this stems from some inconsistencies that are currently arising in the Supreme Court. I am not reflecting on the judiciary, but apparently under the Supreme Court Act there is a requirement in relation to future economic loss in personal injury claims that the 5% discount rate tables are applied. Recently, there has been some change in that practice. In Queensland, there has been some use of the 3% tables for certain heads of damage leading to somewhat higher awards. This subsection is to actually specify that it ought to be the 5% table that is applied, which is what has been the practice. We are really saying that there ought to be consistency.

In relation to the gratuitous services issue, again, it is a difficulty. It is a question of where to draw the line. I might say that, in the

strictest application of the recommendations that came from the review, it would have been less extensive than what is provided for now. In this legislation we sought to focus on the provision of gratuitous services where they are being provided to the injured party. Obviously, where the injured party is to provide some services to others it may seem a bit arbitrary, but it has been defined in terms of the "household" because at what other point does one draw the line? What if it were to be outside of the household? What if it were to be a direct blood relation? What if it were to be an old, old friend? What if it were to be a person down the road with whom one had a friendship? Wherever one draws the line, one can always argue that it is fairly arbitrary. Therefore, it has been framed in an attempt at covering the majority of close relationships in terms of the household. Again, it is a case of striking that balance, because all of these issues in terms of what can be claimed and what can be awarded will impact directly on what will be paid and what can be afforded.

At the end of the day, we want a scheme to provide the maximum benefits to the majority of injured parties who have a just and reasonable claim. That should be the purpose of the scheme. I think that it would be a sad day if the affordability index were to be breached and if some future Government may have some cause to try to strike at the heart of the common law access that this scheme preserves. I hope that that does not happen. Certainly all of our efforts in this legislation have been directed to ensuring affordability and to continuing what I think is a scheme that provides one of the best outcomes for injured parties in Australia.

Dr WATSON: I agree totally with the issue of trying to maintain the common law access. I said that earlier. I also think that the idea of introducing some constrained competition by setting levels is an appropriate thing to do. My only concern, particularly with respect to new subsections 55D(2) and 55D(3), is that I believe the situation that I described is becoming more prevalent as people age and gratuitous services are provided to immediate blood relatives. I would have thought that there is a social reason for making sure that the elderly in our community can maintain some independent living. I think that that is an issue that we ought to address. I think that the term "household" is too restrictive. I understand the rationale for it, but I think we ought to be looking at making it a bit broader.

Sitting suspended from 1.01 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

Clause 32, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 33 to 39, as read, agreed to.

Clause 40—

Mr HAMILL (2.30 p.m.): I move the following amendments—

"At page 61, lines 24 and 25—

omit, insert—

'complaint of—

(a) the commissioner; or

(b) the Attorney-General; or

(c) a person authorised by the commissioner or the Attorney-General to take the proceeding.'.

At page 62, lines 2 and 3, 'to take the proceedings'—

omit, insert—

'or the Attorney-General to take the proceeding'."

These amendments are fairly simple measures. In the original drafting and consultation in relation to this Bill it had been proposed that any complaints could be pursued by the Insurance Commissioner. Following further consultation and also on the advice of Parliamentary Counsel, Cabinet decided that the existing formulation which allowed complaints to be pursued by the commissioner or the Attorney-General should be preserved and, consequently, I am moving these two amendments which will allow that position to be preserved.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I wish to acknowledge the comments that the Treasurer made in summing up the second-reading debate. During the luncheon recess, I was not able to find the specific part of the Workers Compensation Bill 1996 to which he referred. However, on the basis that the Bill will be agreed to by both sides, I wish to reiterate my concern—rather than dividing on this clause—about the extent of the obligation being placed on the Police Commissioner or one or two other designated people within the Police Service, the CJC and the Crime Commission to supply information to the Motor Accident Insurance Commission and the extent and intrusiveness of that information. If it concerned crimes of which the person had been convicted, I could understand this. However, to include in this Bill an obligation to report complaints and allegations made about the person is an intrusion on privacy. If it is to become the regular format for the Office to the Parliamentary Counsel to include that type of reporting requirement on the Police Service, I think it should be of concern to the community.

As I said, the Bill is being supported, but I wish to put on the record my concern about and objection to the intensity and intrusiveness of that obligation.

Mr HAMILL: I draw the honourable member's attention to that part of clause 40 which deals with the particular matter that is of concern to her. I remind the honourable member that we are dealing with information that may be provided by the Commissioner of the Police Service.

As I indicated in summing up the second-reading debate, this provision reflects a similar provision in the WorkCover Queensland Act of 1996, namely section 521. Fraud is obviously a real concern for the Motor Accident Insurance Commission, as it would be for any insurer or body that is overseeing an insurance scheme. No doubt that is why the Parliament agreed to a similar provision in the WorkCover Queensland Act four years ago. This provision gives the power to the police to provide information on criminal history or details about a complaint to the commission in its investigation of a possible fraud. By way of example, I point out that it is not too remote for an injured driver to allege that he or she was a passenger and, in such circumstances, could be the subject of investigation by the police relevant to the accident. To be cognisant of such an investigation by the police would be beneficial to the fraud investigation under the Act.

Yes, there are broad powers there, but as I said they are similar powers to those that exist under the WorkCover Act. Certainly, there are also provisions to ensure that in the event of any misuse of that power the officer who misuses that power would be subject to prosecution under section 92 of the Act. Clause 40 relates to section 87V(4)(b), which states that information given to the commission by the Commissioner of the Police Service under this section if not relevant to a suspected offence against this Act must be disregarded by the commission and thus not be used by the commission for any purpose. It circumscribes the use of any information that may be gleaned. Any information being sought must be relevant to a particular case under investigation and it cannot be retained. If it is not relevant, it cannot be retained and it cannot be used for any other purpose. As I said, it is a provision which reflects section 521 of the WorkCover Act 1996, which I believe we all supported at that time.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: I was not arguing about whether I supported it at the time. I appreciate the Treasurer's comments. I wish to raise two matters in relation to the Treasurer's comments. Subsection (4)(b) puts the obligation on the commission to disregard any information that is not relevant to the suspected offence. Could the Treasurer clarify why that option was not given to the inspector of police so that a lot of ancillary information does not end up being handed over from the QPS to the Insurance Commission? Also, subsection (4)(b) states that it must be disregarded. However, it does not say that it must be destroyed. Where in this Bill or in subsequent regulations will the obligation on the commission be placed to destroy the information so it is not held in its records?

Mr HAMILL: Information which is not relevant will be destroyed—shredded. The Motor Accident Insurance Commission is not seeking to be a new archival point for the Government or anybody else. Secondly, in relation to whether there is a discretion on the part of the police to determine what else might be relevant, the police did not want to be in a position of having to try to determine what they believed to be relevant to the inquiries being made by the Motor Accident Insurance Commission. Consequently, the power is one of request and then the provision of the information that is requested. Then it is a matter in any prosecution or litigation for the Insurance Commission to take this further, if there is a case to be taken further.

Amendments agreed to.

Clause 40, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 41 to 49, as read, agreed to.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Third Reading

Bill, on motion of Mr Hamill, by leave, read a third time.

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 13 April (see p. 896).

Mr SANTORO (Clayfield—LP) (2.40 p.m.): On behalf of the Opposition, I am pleased to be able to announce to the Minister and the House that we support in a general sense the Training and Employment Bill. The Opposition is pleased that the Minister has finally introduced this legislation into the Parliament for it represents legislative change which is needed to move what is recognised as an archaic Queensland system of training into the 21st century. However, the Opposition intends to express major reservations about the

contents of the Bill for it contains several legislative provisions which—

> will maintain an unacceptable level of bureaucracy within the training system of the State; and
>
> creates an advisory structure which, in our view, is laden with union influence which will not be welcomed by industry and small business in particular.

It is also a matter of some regret, however, that the Government has taken so long—nearly two years, in fact—to introduce a Bill which, as it stands today in this place, is substantially the result of very extensive consultation by the Opposition when in Government. In fact, it is fair to say that the training industry in Queensland recognises this, that what we are effectively debating here today is the previous coalition Government's blueprint for training in Queensland.

When in Government, in February 1997 we commenced the most radical overhaul of the vocational education and training system in the history of Queensland. We undertook an extensive program of consultations across the training industry, business and the small business sector in particular. We sought comments and suggestions from a wide range of stakeholders in an extensive consultation process about how the system needed to be changed where things were not working as effectively as they could be. We talked to employer associations, employer groups, unions, Government departments, industry training advisory bodies, group training schemes, TAFE institutes and colleges, agricultural colleges, training providers, student representatives and employee organisations.

We called for public submissions and held six public forums around Queensland. Following this we distributed over 9,000 copies of a position paper and held further information sessions in 14 locations across the State. This thorough consultation resulted in the release of consultation drafts of the Vocational Education and Training Bill and the TAFE Institutes Bill, and some 5,000 copies were distributed in November 1997. We received a further 53 submissions on the consultation drafts of the Bills. Stakeholder concerns were listened to and accommodated where possible. Often that was possible and we were happy to do so.

The legislative framework that we proposed was basically shaped by those it would serve. It was also shaped by a detailed examination of national policy reforms and agreements among Governments in Australia that were designed to create a national training framework—agreements that this Government, in part, appears not to have honoured. Despite those reservations, I congratulate the Minister on finally bringing this legislation forward, even though it did take him two years to make some insubstantial and, in a couple of cases, fairly superficial as well as several unnecessary and what I would consider totally "inappropriate" and counterproductive changes.

In its desire to put its own stamp on the legislative change rather than to progress the comprehensive and exhaustive industry and small business inspired work of a previous coalition Government, the Beattie Labor Government unnecessarily delayed the changes which were urgently needed and which were planned and arrived at by the coalition Government. When it came to training, for much of its first two years this Government was more interested in point scoring and blame than in acting responsibly and moving forward to put in place a quality system of vocational education and training. For two years, Queenslanders have had to wait while this Government wasted public money, orchestrating reviews of one kind or another to put its mark on these legislative changes.

Before talking about at least two of these reviews, I want to go briefly into the history of the main issue which we are considering today, this being the creation and the maintenance of a training culture in Queensland. Most honourable members will recall the findings of the 1996 State Commission of Audit, an independent commission, which found inadequate work force training in Queensland. In particular, the commission identified Queensland as having the least qualified work force of all States and Territories.

Subsequent to the findings of the Audit Commission in September 1996, as the Minister I commissioned Professor Ken Wiltshire, J. D. Storey, Professor of Public Administration at the University of Queensland, to conduct comprehensive consultation with the providers of vocational education and training throughout Queensland. I did so in order to obtain more detail in relation to the very disturbing conclusions of the Audit Commission as it related to training.

The report of Professor Wiltshire, Factors Affecting the Training Market in Queensland, clearly identified the issues impacting on the operation of the training market and future directions. Professor Wiltshire found poor understanding of the VET sector and difficulty

with acquiring information. His recommendations called for an immediate response in the form of legislative, structural and procedural change, as well as urgent attention to improving access to information for all stakeholders. Most significantly, he described the lack of a training culture in industry and in the community generally as the most pervasive element inhibiting the recognition of the importance of training.

In response to those findings, the coalition Government declared 1997 as the "Year of Training". In the lead-up to and during the Year of Training and indeed after the Year of Training into 1998, a list of initiatives and major policies were prepared and implemented addressing many of the Wiltshire recommendations. In addition, new vocational education and training legislation, reflecting a strong industry/small business focus, was developed and released for consultation and feedback and was introduced into this Parliament in early 1998. My objectives as the Minister for Training at that stage were primarily to help—

develop a training culture in Queensland;

lift the skills base of Queenslanders;

improve the competitiveness of Queensland industries; and

create greater future prosperity and opportunities for all Queenslanders.

To achieve these objectives, I pursued a strategy which was underpinned by several key elements, which were—

the nurturing of competitive principles within the Queensland training market, including the advancement of "user choice", which was introduced by the previous Goss Labor Government;

the revitalisation of the TAFE system of Queensland, the objective being to make it more competitive and more responsive to the demands of industry and small business in particular. I wanted to see a productive and efficient TAFE survive and prosper as a major provider of training in Queensland. In fact, I often stated in this place that I would like to see it remain the major provider of training in Queensland.

the introduction of many new initiatives;

a strong emphasis on and commitment to consultation and research;

the implementation of information strategies;

the complete overhaul of the VET legislation; and

the absolute overriding involvement of industry and small business in the development of a training culture.

I believe that I was successful in the implementation of most of the foregoing strategies, all of which had the overall objective of promoting, developing and cultivating a vibrant and progressive training culture. These strategies took on many forms, including—

the rewrite of the Queensland VET legislation;

the introduction of new apprenticeships;

the expansion of "user choice";

the introduction of national training packages;

the review of capital infrastructure;

the review and increase in the competitive funding of VET in Queensland;

the review of the development of the annual VET plan;

the review of the social justice policy;

the review of the Queensland adult English language, literacy and numeracy policy;

the separation of the purchaser/provider functions;

the development of the Australian recognition framework;

the implementation of the TAFE Working Better Together project;

the revitalisation of the TAFE Institute and College Advisory Councils;

the establishment of regional round tables;

the establishment of the Small Business Training Advisory Committee;

the establishment of the Rural Industry Training Task Force;

the establishment of the VET Disability Strategy Reference Group;

the development of the Queensland Women in VET Action Plan;

the TAFE VET forums;

the funding of several projects to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in VET;

the implementation of strategies to improve the interface within the tertiary sectors and the school sector, including the implementation of the Cumming Report, Coordinating Diversity of the VET in Schools Initiatives;

making available the State Government's VET database to an unprecedented extent to the public generally and in particular to RTOs;

the redefined and reviewed recognition of the role of the agricultural and pastoral colleges of this State and the consequent increase in their funding; and

the spectacular growth of the Queensland Training Awards and the redefinition of what constituted capital in terms of training.

I could go on and on, for there were many other achievements made possible by the dedication and commitment to the development of training in Queensland by many people, including the officers and staff of the department's division of training, TAFE Queensland, the private training providers of Queensland and the leadership of the then Department of Training and Industrial Relations. There was, however, one area of major failure which is obvious to most and, I am sure, to all honourable members—that is, my attempt to reform the TAFE system of this State. The Minister has said much about the TAFE system. Even though when he talks about the TAFE system he has an air of calm and an air of serenity about him, I am sure that deep down he feels the same frustrations as I do.

Because of the very strong influence which was able to prevail in the circumstances of a hung Parliament, TAFE was and still remains an organisation burdened by an antiquated award structure and consequent work practices which will see it remain—indeed become—even more increasingly uncompetitive. It will require the injection of ever-increasing Government funds in order to sustain or increase its activity levels. I notice the Minister shaking his head. We can do things with TAFE as long as we keep putting into it an ever-increasing level of Government funds in order to sustain and/or increase its activity levels. The Minister will be doing that, if he has not already done so, at the last round of negotiations with the Budget subcommittees.

In addition, TAFE will require and indeed demand preferential legislative and systems treatment. This will further undermine the competitive training agenda of this State and the cost-effectiveness of the total training dollars being spent in this State. Despite the above major failure, by the time the coalition left Government in June 1998 the VET system in Queensland was producing a record number of apprentices and trainees. It was experiencing an overall reduction in the average cost of a student contact hour of training and was regarded as Australia's leading-edge State when it came to training, despite the fact that we were being criticised constantly by the Minister opposite and particularly by the unions. All of the above initiatives and policies produced the goods for Queensland apprentices, trainees and small business.

The figures, which are independently arrived at statistics, clearly demonstrate this. In fact, as at 31 March 1998, Queensland led the nation in the creation of training places, generating almost one-quarter of all apprentice and trainee positions throughout Australia. This was only three months before the coalition lost office. These statistics were released by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research and showed that the coalition Government's commitment to the State's vocational education and training system was paying dividends. The Queensland population was then approximately 18% of the national total, yet our apprentice and trainee numbers made up 23.9% of the national total. Victoria, in which one-third of all Australians reside, generated only 25% of the nation's apprentices and trainees. I stress that these are somebody else's figures, not those of the Opposition, and an independent authority at that. The national apprentice and trainee figures showed that more than 183,000 individuals were in training at 31 March 1998, with Queensland accounting for more than 44,000 of the total.

Again, I could go on for much longer about the coalition's record in terms of the creation of apprenticeships and traineeship positions in Queensland between 1996 and 1998, but I will only outline a few more statistics to illustrate the point I am trying to make, that is, that we succeeded very well in increasing the level of trainees and apprentices during the coalition's term in Government. The official departmental statistics for the period June to November 1998, which I obtained under FOI, indicate quite clearly that a most dramatic growth in new approvals was occurring well before any of the Labor Government's employment and training initiatives had any chance of influencing the jobs and training prospects of apprentices and trainees.

New approvals from the FOI documents and the briefing notes with which the Minister was provided by his department showed that apprentices in mid July 1998 were up 12.6% on the previous year, whilst building industry new apprenticeship approvals were up by

32.5% and traineeships up by 68%. I stress particularly the figures in relation to the building industry. The current Government and this Minister have said a lot about how the coalition failed to assist the building industry. By mid August 1998, apprenticeship approvals were up 17.7% on the previous year, whilst building industry apprenticeship approvals were up 30.2% and traineeships were up 64.5%. Corresponding figures for mid September 1998 indicate the following increases: apprenticeship approvals were up 20%; building industry apprentice approvals were up 33.3%; and traineeships were up 57%. For subsequent months, the figures continued to show increases over the previous 12 months. I will not take up any more of the time of the House to show that, for 12 months after the then Government became the Opposition, those figures kept on increasing.

We can see from these figures—which I again stress are figures obtained from briefing documents provided to the current Minister, Mr Braddy—that the recovery which the Minister has been claiming as Labor's good work almost from the day he became Minister was actually well under way during the coalition's administration. I think it is important that we try to keep the training agenda in Queensland as bipartisan as possible, so I am very happy to acknowledge that that is continuing under this Labor Government. I would suggest to the Minister and to any intelligent, thinking member in this place—particularly the Deputy Speaker, Mr Fouras, who has an economics degree and understands the concepts of lags and long-term trends—that this is the wont of cyclical and economic phenomena. I might add that I believe that the efforts of the coalition Government in promoting the training culture contributed significantly to the cyclical upturn.

Before turning to the substance of the legislation, I wish to make some very specific comments about a number of reviews of the Queensland training system which the Minister indicated prior to the introduction of the legislation before us today. I wish to do so because, prior to the introduction of the legislation and then in his second-reading speech, the Minister made references to these reviews and used their findings as some justification—indeed, considerable justification—for the so-called legislative and administrative training reform of the Minister and his Government. One of the first actions of the new Government was to set up the Bannikoff review of TAFE and engage in goal setting by consultancy, not consensus. That report cost the taxpayers $167,600.

The House should note that I have quite a high regard for Mr Bannikoff as an individual and as a professional bureaucrat, but unfortunately I need to be critical of some aspects of his report. My main observation is that the Bannikoff report is comprised mainly of generalisations. My second observation is that these generalisations are not backed up by significant empirical evidence. My third observation is that the Bannikoff report is quite selective on what evidence it uses full stop. Let me explain that to the House. Through the freedom of information process, I attempted to obtain any actual evidence upon which the most significant of the report's generalisations may be based. The process was quite interesting but also quite time consuming because the department was obviously not inclined to make things simpler by asking its consultant to specify what items of evidence, if any, relate to specific generalisations.

For example, the material provided to me provided no real basis for the claim that TAFE had $30.8m in outstanding loans for VERs. It does not even give credence to the claim of $18m of VER loans. My FOI request states—

> "I ask for all of the documentary evidence underpinning the Minister's statement that $30.8 million was provided to TAFE as loans for VERs under the Coalition Government, including all briefing notes and correspondence provided to the Minister and Mr Bannikoff by any person in DETIR or from any other source in relation to this request."

The two-page print-out I received in response to this very clear but all-encompassing request shows a total of $6,647,881 worth of loans, repayable between 1998-99 and 2002-03. Only $293,300 of this loan money is indicated as a VER loan. If there is evidence of two VER loans totalling $30.8m, to this day I have not been provided with it.

I will look at another example and examine what Bannikoff had to say about ITABs. His report states—

> "The ITAB network has served to undermine the direct relationship between providers and their industry and enterprise clients. This has impeded the development of client service characteristics in Institutes, limited interaction with enterprises that would lead to greater flexibility and does not greatly help the development of a stronger 'training culture' in most Queensland enterprises."

In response to my FOI request for materials underpinning Bannikoff review

generalisations on ITABs, I was provided with four documents containing brief comments on ITABs. One of those comments attributed to union representatives was negative, claiming that ITABs represented big companies such as BHP. A second comment indicated that "ITABs aren't representing community needs". A third comment had both negative and positive connotations. It was—

> "ITABs are good, but the problem in having industry advice is that the end result is often not practical. The ITAB package for engineering is a nightmare."

The fourth comment about ITABs was from a TAFE institute, which described in glowing terms the professional assistance provided by ITABs to that particular institute. Nowhere in those comments could I find any justification for the incredibly negative claim made about ITABs in the Bannikoff report.

Another example of the lack of evidence underpinning claims made in the report is that a decline in quality is mentioned on several occasions but no specific quality-related recommendations are made. This did not escape Professor Viviani when she wrote her mini-report which comprises part of the Bannikoff report. In relation to the Bannikoff report her report states—

> "In reconstructing the policy process, there is one remaining gap in the lack of attention paid to quality issues, despite lip service to the ideal and a touching faith in national quality guidelines evident in the Report."

So, according not to me or the Opposition but to yet another of the department's consultants, the Bannikoff report, which has cost a total of in excess of $160,000, lacks attention to quality issues or at best pays lip service to them, and has an unrealistic faith in national quality guidelines. Professor Viviani further states—

> "It is not clear that the recommendations of this Report which envisage a virtual status quo in the structures of the department and in the department-TAFE relations can meet these evident problems in policymaking."

So much for one of the Minister's main reports, upon which he relies for inspiration in relation to his training reforms.

Another report relied upon by the Government to support its so-called reforms of the training system of Queensland is a report prepared by a senior departmental officer, Dr Larry Smith. Again, my major concern about this report relates to the methodology used by its author and the paucity of the statistical base relied upon by Dr Smith to support his findings. However, Dr Smith at least had the good sense to heavily qualify his findings. In fact, Dr Smith prefaces his report with a disclaimer as to the veracity of statistical evidence collected and cites the existence of pervasive problems with the consistency, validity and accessibility of statistical information relating to apprenticeships and traineeships. Similar disclaimers appearing elsewhere in the report include—

> "On almost every statistic collected for this report, there was significant variability across industry areas. Indeed, summating data into one overall training perspective frequently presented a picture that did not reflect the situation in most industries."

Another states—

> "The precision and scope of this report have been limited by difficulties in obtaining valid and reliable statistics that can be compared across time."

He also states—

> "Existing data relating to apprentice numbers attending TAFE Institutes is not sufficiently reliable to allow detailed analysis."

As Dr Smith was one of the most senior officers in TAFE Queensland for most of the years covered by his report, this is the first of several surprising admissions and/or omissions in this report. I will continue with Dr Smith's disclaimers relating to the data upon which he basis his report. He states—

> "Older data has been coded using a different set of criteria from that used for 'newer' data and this does not necessarily mean the same thing. A similar problem arises because of the introduction of the A VETMISS standards around 1995."

This date is critical, as the coalition came to power in Queensland in February 1996. Dr Smith goes on to state—

> "Inconsistencies exist across and within the three major data bases."

He goes on to say—

> "There are no up-to-date, readily available and comprehensive statistical reports on trade training which provide a single set of regularly updated and defensible information for policy developers and decision makers."

These admissions about the lack of rigour in the report's statistical database, when combined with the frequent use of anecdotal

evidence and reliance on informal findings of internal research projects, research by the department's own director-general and extensively quoted reports based on VET in Victoria rather than Queensland, lead to internal inconsistencies in the document and, I would respectfully suggest to the Minister and the House, greatly limit its credibility.

What is worrying about the points I have raised in relation to the Bannikoff and Smith reports is that the Government is relying in great part on them to fashion its policy development, which it has been announcing and part of which it is implementing via this legislation today. In the light of what I have outlined, honourable members can see why I believe we should be concerned about relying on these documents for statistical and empirical guidance.

The other consultant's report upon which the Minister relies heavily for support and advice is the Schofield report on the apprenticeship and traineeship system of Queensland. It has been touted by the Minister as a "comprehensive review" of the traineeship system in Queensland by a taskforce headed by an independent consultant. However, after any reasonable person with knowledge of the training system of Queensland reads it they cannot but conclude that it is largely an extremely repetitive document which uncritically accepts then regurgitates the findings of various DETIR in-house research projects which are regarded even within the department as being of dubious quality. The uncritical acceptance of unsubstantiated allegations, anecdotes and generalisations is no substitute for objective evidence, and Ms Schofield's report relies much on the findings and conclusions of the Bannikoff and Smith reports. Much more can be said critically about this report. Perhaps I will leave this to another time.

Before I turn to the specifics of the legislation, let me say that the department has undertaken some very good research. Via media release and I think in this House, I gave credence to the report that was commissioned by the department—I am not sure whether it was a leftover from a report I commissioned when I was Minister—into the skills needs for the engineering industries of this State. That report, unlike the three I have mentioned, was a very substantial, well-researched and thoroughly intellectually honest effort.

Another report which has been used and quoted by the Minister—he does so with my support—is the Cullen report, by Professor Cullen of the University of Queensland. That report is one that I think all people interested in advancing the interests of training should look at closely, because it is a report which is of high scholarly quality and which is intellectually and empirically statistically very sound indeed. Through this contribution I am not wishing to suggest that the department has not undertaken good research in all cases—I think it has—but the three pieces of research I have commented on have been used repeatedly by the Minister to attack the Opposition by building up spurious cases of abuse within the training system.

Before making this contribution today I considered whether I should outline to the House the cases of abuse we have uncovered in terms of the training system which has been administered by the Minister. For this debate I have decided not to bring to the attention of the Minister and the House the many instances of how the system has been abused under this Minister's administration. During the next two to three months I will bring them to the attention of the Minister.

The point I have made in previous debate is that, with a training budget of approximately $600m or $700m and with a great number of registered training providers, many of them private training providers, who are beginning to develop the administrative and management skills within a highly competitive training market—which was initiated by the Goss Labor Government, which we encouraged and for which the Minister has been criticising us, particularly in terms of the speed with which we encouraged the competitive market to develop—there are going to be some rorts and some abuses.

The Minister will learn to his political discomfort that we in Opposition also can come up with cases of abuse. I would like to see how he will react to the points that we will be making about the abuse occurring under his administration, two years after Labor won Government. The Minister has had plenty of time to put in the administrative checks and balances which I acknowledge were necessary in an expanding competitive training market and which this Bill, two and a half years after it was essentially introduced into this place by me as the then Minister, was seeking in part to address. Many of the solutions to the concerns which the Minister has been expressing are contained in this Bill. As I will state very formally in a moment, the accountability provisions within this Bill are the identical accountability mechanisms contained in the coalition's Bill.

I want to stress those points, because I have made a very conscious decision to stay away from the heavy politics of training. We will talk a lot over the next couple of months about the abuses of the system. I will seek to engage the Minister in that debate. Those private training providers who have made contact with me about infrequent and unjustified audits, often by unqualified auditors, need not worry about the fact that I am not taking up their specific cases in this place now, because I will be doing so over the next few months, and I am sure that the Minister will not have a good time of it.

There is no doubt in my mind that this is unwieldy and cumbersome legislation in some of its provisions. The cumbersome nature of some provisions has been brought about by the changes made by the Minister and his advisers. Many of the provisions are administrative matters that could more appropriately have been dealt with by the department administratively or by regulation. By comparison, the coalition's 1998 Bills were more succinct and manageable, with the bulk administrative matters contained in the regulation. On the issue of the regulation, when the coalition tabled its Bills in the House in 1998, such was our commitment to open and transparent processes that we took the unprecedented step of tabling, at the same time, the draft regulation so that members and all members of the training community in Queensland could provide their advice and input.

In November 1996, Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments reached agreement on the objective of a national training framework and endorsed the major features of the national approach, namely, the Australian recognition framework and training packages. These features ensure national recognition of skills and allow enterprises to recruit on a national basis. I congratulate the Government on ensuring that the nationally agreed principles for the registration of training organisations have been embodied in this legislation. The provisions are essentially the same as those we included in the 1998 Bill with the addition in this Bill of provisions of an administrative nature that were part of the 1998 draft regulation. One point I would make, however, is that the level of detail provided about procedures is inconsistently applied. I refer to the details of procedures applying to amending, suspending or cancelling registration in clause 29, a level of detail that is not applied also to the procedure for "renewing" registration in clause 26, thereby creating ambiguity about whether renewal is subject to a further application or some other process.

The clauses relating to course accreditation are consistent with nationally agreed accreditation principles under the Australian recognition framework, again substantially mirroring the arrangements in the 1998 Bill. Again I congratulate the Minister on having the wisdom and maturity to follow that lead.

The authority for approving both registration and accreditation in the Bill before the House is the new Training Recognition Council, a structure which will effectively amalgamate and perpetuate the moribund and increasingly irrelevant functions of the existing Accreditation Council and the State Training Council. The question that has to be asked at this stage is: do we really need this new council?

Our policy in 1998 was to streamline these committee structures and to have one authority, the Queensland training authority, which would have established guidelines for registration and accreditation. These guidelines would then have been administered through the department under the direction of the chief executive. This would have reflected the true circumstances under which these functions are managed on an everyday basis, that is, by public officials accountable to a chief executive.

Under the arrangements in the Bill we are debating today, the Training Recognition Council will, out of necessity, have to delegate its functions to departmental officers. So we will have departmental officers accountable to a committee for the exercise of the committee's executive powers. This arrangement purports to put the power in the hands of a committee of union and employer representatives. I respectfully suggest to the Minister that it is a pretence. Does the Government believe that chief executives need "watchdog" committees to assist in the administration of departments or to assist in the management of public resources? This committee's functions are predominantly executive and not advisory.

While the Opposition in principle supports the provision of advice to Government by such representative committees, we do not support giving over responsibility for public accountability for executive functions to such committees. Is there a committee licensing drivers in this State? Why do we need a committee to register training organisations, or to accredit courses, or to do any of its other myriad functions? For the information of

honourable members who may not have perused the Bill in detail, those functions are listed in clause 168. I will come back to these committee structures.

Suffice to say the Bill's treatment of apprentices and trainees, while it does have many of the features of the coalition's 1998 Bill, does overly complicate the system. The Minister has stated that the Bill will provide for more efficient regulation of the apprenticeship and traineeship system. He did so in a media release on 14 April 2000. If the following example is one of "efficient regulation", then the future of our vocational education and training system through the stewardship of this Government is under a very dark cloud. I refer to the complex arrangements surrounding the completion of the apprenticeship or traineeship, which is contained in Division 6 of Part 1, clauses 72 to 78.

I remind members that the national agreement by Governments states that there will be only three points of regulation for apprenticeships and traineeships. These are the signing of the training agreement/contract, the registration of the training organisation and the endorsement of the training package. In this Bill, the completion of the apprenticeship or traineeship triggers a veritable snowstorm of signed notices, written statements, completion agreements, qualifications, statements of attainment and completion certificates. The arrangements include—

a written statement to be signed by employer and apprentice/trainee within five days of their agreeing that the training is completed—clause 72(1);

a signed notice within 10 days after agreeing from the employer or apprentice/trainee to the supervising registered training organisation stating that the training is completed—clause 72(3);

the qualification or statement of attainment to be issued by the registered training organisation to the apprentice or trainee within 21 days of the signing of the completion agreement;

a signed notice from the registered training organisation after issuing the qualification or statement of attainment and within 14 days to the Training Recognition Council—clause 73(4);

a signed notice from the registered training organisation after issuing the qualification or statement of attainment and within 14 days to the employer—clause 73(4);

a completion certificate issued by the Training Recognition Council promptly upon the council's receiving notice from the supervising registered training organisation to the apprentice/trainee—clause 73(5); and

a completion agreement signed by the registered training organisation, an employer and the apprentice or trainee—clause 74(1).

This is overregulation at best and mind-boggling bureaucracy at its worst. How will these arrangements contribute to "efficient regulation" of an apprenticeship and traineeship system? If these clauses and the associated paper trail are intended to give administrative effect to the process of completion of the training agreement, why include all this in the principal Act? Should they not be administered through administrative guidelines?

I am heartened to see that the Government has followed our lead in setting out the obligations of employers in the same way as in our 1998 Bill—clauses 79 to 82. The heavy-handed means by which employers will be dealt with if they are believed not to be a suitable person to employ apprentices and trainees are anachronistic. Employers have advised me that they do not support prohibited employers being named in a gazette notice—clause 83(6). Such public shaming belongs in a different era. If shaming is to be a training strategy, why confine it to employers? Why not extend it to teachers, administrators, senior managers or even Ministers who appear to be unsuited to their role in the training process?

The employer is prohibited under this Bill from taking on an apprentice or a trainee if they do not meet specific criteria relating to training. A preferable means would be to advise registered training organisations and group training companies by notice. Revocation in the gazette is similarly not supported by the Opposition.

The restricted callings provision, clause 90(1), is similar to the clause included in the 1998 Bill titled "Age restriction for young persons in specified occupations". This will ensure that young people who are entrants to certain occupations have the necessary qualifications or receive training as part of their employment. We support this provision as a guarantee of training for young people in specified occupations. We do not, however, support the declaration of employment-based training as an apprenticeship or traineeship—clause 183(1). This declaration clearly flies in

the face of agreements made by Governments in 1997 about the points of regulation of apprenticeships. Why is there a need to declare apprenticeships and traineeships? If such a declaration does not prevent the qualification being attained by other means as stated in clause 183(3), why do it in the first place? Why is the Government turning its back on decisions reached nationally? This can only be interpreted as a decision not to participate in the national training framework. I believe the Minister must be held to account for this.

Training packages which are developed and validated through consultative processes and endorsed nationally through the National Training Framework Committee provide for a range of qualifications in any given vocational area. These qualifications can be attained through a range of pathways—apprenticeships and traineeships included. If this declaration is about putting a boundary around those qualifications for which the Government will provide funding, then the Bill is not the place for it. This is clearly an administrative funding matter for the department. We would advocate strongly that the Minister declare the Government's position in relation to being a supportive, constructive and cooperative player in a national framework. This issue is cause for grave concern. It looks very much to me as if the Government wants to limit access to apprenticeship and traineeship training and is not interested in expanding such training arrangements to other industry areas where they have not traditionally been available, such as in the service industries. I suggest to the Minister that the Government wants to protect the "old club".

Clauses about supervising registered training organisations are substantially the same as in the coalition's 1998 Bill, although again many operational matters could have been dealt with in the regulation rather than included in the main legislation. So, while the Government would like to take credit for having tightened requirements with respect to the role of registered training organisations in apprenticeship and traineeship training, in line with the recommendations of Schofield's report, this is not the case and the Minister and the Government have again followed the coalition's lead.

This Training and Employment Bill creates yet another point of regulation for apprenticeships and traineeships in that there are two agreements required for each apprentice or trainee's employment and training—the training contract and the training plan. This requirement over-complicates the process. The coalition's 1998 Bill made the training plan part of the training agreement, offering a more streamlined approach to assuring a quality training outcome.

The vocational placement provisions are substantially the same as in our 1998 Bill. One significant difference, however, is that this Bill allows for "paid" placements whereas our 1998 Bill did not. We took the view in 1998 that if vocational placements of durations longer than 240 hours were required to develop competencies, then industry should specify that training should be provided in the form of an apprenticeship or traineeship.

As an apprentice or trainee, the individual is afforded the protection of the pay and conditions for an apprentice or trainee. Seeking agreement to pay rates for vocational placements of longer than 240 hours duration in particular industries or occupations is impractical.

In practice, attempts to seek approval for pay rates for paid placements under the current Vocational Placement Act 1992 have proven problematic, if not impossible. Parties have not been able to reach agreement even through protracted negotiations. Long paid vocational placements are clearly not required in a system that provides for alternatives in the form of apprenticeships and traineeships.

Therefore, the coalition's 1998 Bill established that vocational placements were "unpaid" placements of less than 240 hours, and we would advocate strongly the removal of the longer paid placements provided for in this Bill as unnecessary and therefore redundant.

There are three avenues for individuals seeking an appeal against decisions under this Bill. These include: the ombudsman for complaints by apprentices or trainees and employers in relation to apprentices or trainees—clauses 133 to 145; the Magistrates Court for appeal of training recognition decisions—registration, accreditation, recognition of ITABs and group training companies—clauses 224 to 229; and the industrial commission for appeals against Training Recognition Council and other decisions relating to apprenticeships or traineeships—clauses 230 to 244.

In 1998, I as Minister saw the need to instigate a fairer and more encompassing approach to dealing with appeals than that used under the current VETE Bill 1991. We included in our 1998 Bill a single review tribunal as a separate independent appeals mechanism to deal with all types of decisions dealt with by the three separate means in this

Bill. This was by far a more streamlined and user friendly approach to dealing with appeal matters.

How quickly will the Magistrates Court and the industrial commission deal with these appeal matters? Appeals could get bogged down for extended periods to the detriment of the various stakeholders in the system. We question whether the approach taken in the Bill is in the interests of those stakeholders.

I return to the committee structures established in this Bill. As well as the Training Recognition Council, to which I have already referred, the Bill establishes the Training and Employment Board to replace the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission. This board has primarily advisory functions to the Minister as well as executive functions, including the functions of the State Training Agency under the Australian National Training Act—Commonwealth. It is a toothless committee in many respects, which must seek approval from the Minister for its guidelines and the Training Recognition Council's guidelines— clause 147(d).

Most of the guidelines under clause 147(d) will be given effect by departmental officers under delegation. The chief executive is not an appointed member and we would question why the Government would not want to have the department head as a member, by appointment, to provide advice on Government policies, parameters for decision making and matters impacting upon the department's administration. We do not support the exclusion, by non-appointment, of the chief executive. Membership of the board is stated as including up to 15 people, with four employer representatives, four union representatives and others with standing in vocational education and training, industry or the general community.

In 1998, we advocated a much smaller authority with up to nine people. We made it clear that membership of the authority would contain employer and employee representation. However, we did not stipulate that there must be a certain number of each—union and employer groups. I believe that such over-prescription is unnecessary. Surely the key requirements are that they be people appointed for their experience and expertise in vocational education and training, industry or community affairs, and for their ability to contribute to the strategic direction of the State's training system. Most of these powers will be given effect through delegation to departmental officers.

The Opposition questions the need for a certificate issued by the Training Recognition Council that sits outside the Australian qualifications framework and the Australian recognition framework—clause 182. Again, I would ask the Minister to declare the Government's position in terms of supporting a national framework. There is no place for a separate qualifications system.

Employers have made representations to me about this particular clause. They do not support the council issuing certificates. There is no guarantee that the assessment of competency will be against national industry standards. Unless this guarantee is forthcoming, Queensland graduates of the training system could be hindered when seeking to use their qualifications to obtain employment in other States. This creates an unnecessary duplicate system of qualifications. Persons with the necessary skills and knowledge in a calling should meet the same requirements for a qualification as do others who undertake formal training and/or assessment.

The TAFE Institute clauses in the Bill are substantially the same as were in the coalition's 1998 TAFE Institutes Bill, though the role of the institute councils has been watered down to an inconsequential and meaningless one. The way the functions are drafted, the councils ostensibly are going to only support VET in the institute—clause 194(1), even though clause 191(2) states that institutes also provide ACE and post-compulsory education. The functions are so broad as to be worthless as a guide to the councils' roles and activities. By comparison, the specification of what these councils cannot do is in fact more substantial that what they can do—clause 209.

It is obvious that the Government's commitment to strong and autonomous TAFE institutes is more rhetoric than reality. The Government is not really serious about giving local communities a say in the direction of training in their communities.

Industry training advisory bodies will be recognised by the Training and Employment Board as the principal—but not only—source of advice to the board, if they meet guidelines established by the board and approved by the Minister. The coalition is very pleased that there is sufficient scope for the board to receive advice from non-ITAB entities because this is needed to balance the ITAB advice.

When the Opposition was in Government, we established round tables to provide advice on regional skills shortages and to assist with

planning and allocation of resources for the vocational education and training system, particularly in rural and regional areas. These round tables were very quickly dismantled by the Government upon its taking office. I believe this was one of the most retrograde moves made by the Minister. The Government's decision was typically narrow and short-sighted. These forums were an excellent mechanism for both public and private training organisations to sit down with local industry representatives and other stakeholders and respond directly to changing regional needs.

We had provisions in the 1998 Bill that prevented ITABs from being ITABs if they were themselves in the business of providing training. There was a clear conflict of interest and potential for bias in the exercise of their recognition, planning and advisory roles. Can we trust that the guidelines developed by the training and employment board and approved by the Minister will manage the potential for bias and conflict of interest? Ways of managing this should be in the Bill. That particular area of policy intent should be specified in the Bill. Again, the treatment here is inconsistent with that level of detail not being in the ITAB provisions, yet it is everywhere else in the Bill.

Group training companies will be recognised if they meet guidelines established by the training and employment board. This is not substantially different from current arrangements managed by the State Training Council. It would appear that the Government wants to have a heavy hand in regulating the number of group training companies allowed to operate in the marketplace. They will use this recognition process to limit numbers and regulate the market. The administration provisions are standard administrative provisions, and I advise the Minister and honourable members that we do not have any problems with any of those.

The enforcement provisions mirror those in the 1989 Bill. I would like to highlight that, in 1998, even though Mr Beattie's Government would have everyone believe that the coalition had no commitment to checks, balances and overall quality in the system, and even though the Beattie Government has made an art form out of blaming the coalition for everything that it saw wrong with the system, the coalition indeed had a very strong commitment to quality assurance and the providing for a strong audit enforcement function. I stress this point very, very strongly: I am pleased that the Government has seen it totally fit to emulate the coalition's approach in relation to accountability, despite all the scaremongering that we have heard from the Minister and others opposite.

Before concluding in 10 minutes' time, I wish to raise some implementation issues that are of concern to many RTOs and departmental officers. On various occasions in this Parliament, the Minister has tried to rewrite the history of training under the coalition Government. In this Parliament we have heard of private providers who were rorters and abusers of public funds, of a TAFE system that was being crushed by the forces of user choice and competitive funding and skills shortages in critical industry sectors, all induced by the coalition Government. I stress that, to the very best of my knowledge, not one of those people has been taken to a prosecution stage and successfully prosecuted—not one! Not one individual who has been described as a rorter has, in fact, been taken to court. One person who was dealt with unfairly took the department to court and, in fact, won a stunning victory through the court, and I will tell members much more about that at a later stage, not in this debate, because we are going to roll it out very slowly for the benefit of honourable members opposite, and particularly the Minister.

In March this year at the Senate inquiry hearing, senior departmental officers stated that implementation arrangements in Queensland for the new national framework were deficient and that quality assurance arrangements were inadequate, further implying that the coalition Government left the system in dire straits. I hope that they are looking at their implementation process for the changes that are proposed in this Bill, and I hope that they are looking at their own backyard. They are all too quick to point the finger of blame when they think that there is some political mileage in it, but how well have they planned for the adjustment to the department processes for the implementation of this legislative framework?

In 1998 I established an implementation team to ensure that, even in the early days of drafting the 1998 Bill, implementation was on the agenda and that the administrative systems would be in place to support an effective transition. I took the step of tabling the draft regulation at the same time as the Bill. Preparations were, in fact, well advanced for implementation. Of course, all of this stopped with the change of Government. It is not surprising that systems were found inadequate and deficient. With the upheaval created by an immediate restructure of the

department, it is not surprising that systems were found wanting.

I am advised that some officers in the Minister's department are concerned that they are working in the dark about what this Bill may mean in terms of administering the system. There appears to be no comprehensive or coherent implementation plan and the very staff who will have to implement the changes have not been engaged. Yet the Minister and his senior executives continue to produce these retrospective criticisms of what the previous Government did or did not do.

In referring to the implementation of the national policy framework in Queensland, Mr Noonan stated—and I quote from the Senate committee Hansard—

> "There was not a forward looking implementation plan put in place at the beginning of this whole process."

Mr Marshman has said—and again I quote from the Senate committee Hansard—

> "User Choice ... and the opening up of the system to competition from other providers ... were introduced with poor administrative systems and resulted in extensive confusion for both those who had to administer the system and those who were clients of it."

I would be very interested to know when the implementation plan for the policies in this Training and Employment Bill were developed and how staff had been prepared for the changes to administration and systems. Let us hope that the staff concerns are not widespread and that Mr Noonan has ensured that he has a forward looking implementation plan for this process.

As we were discovering in the very early days of our implementation of the national framework, Queensland cannot go it alone. A national effort is needed. Mutual recognition will not work unless there is some further agreement on the process for managing quality. I am pleased to note that considerable work has been progressing at the national level with the cooperation of all of the States and the Territories on these matters. Dr Kemp, the Federal Minister for Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, has called for model legislation as the basis for consistency across the nation. That should help get the legal foundation right.

Finally, and despite the major reservations that I have mentioned, the Opposition welcomes the legislation. It is long overdue. We need a training system that will improve the bottom line of Queensland business by making quality training more accessible. Every member of this House would have to agree that training is a major contributing factor to the economic wellbeing of this State and one that we can ill afford to neglect. If we are to compete in global markets, we need to develop a world-class skills base. With training as part of the overall strategy, we will get there. We need to move closer to having a training culture as the basis for our continued success and survival in the competitive international marketplace. However, Queensland cannot operate a system that is outside the national framework. We need to be actively supportive of a coherent national framework, and I challenge this Government to show how that will be achieved with legislation that seeks clearly to overregulate and bureaucratise Queensland's training system.

In conclusion, the coalition will support this legislation but, in doing so, it recognises that sitting opposite is a Government that is overseeing a training system that represents a philosophical and practical retreat from the Goss Labor Government introduced competitive training agenda; the stalling of general work practice reform within TAFE Queensland and the maintenance of uncompetitive work practices; the consequent and long-term need to continually bail out a number of TAFE institutes to the complete frustration of other institutes that operate effectively within their budgets; the tarnishing of the reputation of all private training providers as a result of the selective public emphasis that is placed on a very small minority of errant providers; and the selective implementation of general departmental policies, such as compliance audits, against mainly registered training providers in the private sector and in a much, much lesser manner and quantity in relation to TAFE Queensland.

So this is the Labor Party in action, this is its training agenda in action: rewrite political and training history, commission and then release reports and research that cannot be backed up by decent and empirical evidence, and slander the political opposition and others who are not philosophically committed to the Labor vision of politics and training.

Having said all of that, I still remain supremely optimistic about the future of the Queensland VET system. I believe that it can be a bright and exciting one. I would like to think and believe that an enlightened and progressive age of VET reform can still be ushered in with the advent of the new millennium. This reform should continue—and I offer this to honourable members as some guidance—to include the following, and the

coalition believes that the following are essential policy imperatives—the continuing and sensitive expansion of the competitive tendering and user-choice training market; and the reform of the industrial relations practices that govern the operation of TAFE Queensland, as clearly outlined within the Workplace Consulting Queensland Report to Bannikoff, about which more will be said later by speakers on this side.

I should congratulate the courageous departmental officers who had the foresight, the intellectual and professional decency and integrity to actually write that report. When I received that report through FOI, I could not believe that that sort of courage still existed within the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations—to undertake research that was delivered without fear or favour and which is empirically, statistically and intellectually very, very sound. The reform should also include—

> a continuing integration, albeit with State-based refinements, of the Queensland VET system with the national VET system;
>
> the encouragement of the private training market and the development in it of an attitude that it is a constructive, efficient and essential part of the Queensland and national VET system;
>
> the entrenchment of the enterprise focus within all policy development and implementation;
>
> a commitment to further enhancing the essential industry, and particularly small business, role in the development and implementation of VET policy;
>
> a clear determination and definition of community service obligations by the VET system and also the identification of who the best provider of these community service obligations may be; and
>
> the reaffirmation by all stakeholders within the VET market of their total commitment to the enhancement of a positive training culture within all sectors of the Queensland economy.

I believe that the above principles are supported by the great majority of training providers within the Queensland VET market and other stakeholders who operate within this market. As a former Minister for Training, I believe they are principles that are supported by the vast majority of the bureaucrats who are employed by the department and under the supervision and direct control of the current Minister and his senior executives. If the Minister allowed those people to provide him with advice that is politically untarnished and, if politically untarnished advice is forthcoming, implemented it with judgment and consideration—I stress with ministerial judgment and consideration—I think that the principles that I have outlined will move the training market of the State forwards rather than backwards, and this will have the coalition's support.

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (3.40 p.m.): The comments I wish to make today relate specifically to quality and the initiatives that the Labor Government has put in place to make quality a high priority in vocational education and training. The Labor Government inherited a system in which numbers and ideology had prevailed, sometimes at the expense of quality. We have all heard the stories about the rorts that were made possible particularly under the traineeship system under the previous Government. Back in October 1998 the Employment, Training and Industrial Relations Minister, Paul Braddy, reported some disturbing examples to this House. Our crackdown on existing workers' eligibility for traineeships put an end to the more extreme cases, but the 1999 report entitled Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System by Kaye Schofield revealed that there were some widespread problems.

This report, commissioned by the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission, found that the traineeship system had some major issues in terms of the quality of the training being delivered. Put simply, in many cases trainees had not been given the time, resources or training to gain the skills they required or to earn their qualifications. Since the middle of last year the Government has been progressively implementing recommendations made in that report. Without high-quality training Queenslanders will not have the skills they need to get and keep jobs and our industry will not have the skilled work force that it needs to compete. Putting people into Government subsidised traineeships and then not giving them any training or substandard training undermines our skills base and the ability of workers to adapt in an ever-changing world. That is why the Government has worked hard to restore the quality of training received by apprentices, trainees and vocational students.

The Training and Employment Bill 2000 supports that drive for higher quality. It legislates for quality training through initiatives

such as a new emphasis on training plans, the appointment of a training ombudsman, better registration and accreditation systems for training providers, improvements to the vocational placement system, clarification of roles for the parties within the system, and opening up the system to enable better advice and accountability. The legislation will give real teeth to our drive for better training. It gives statutory recognition to the requirement for employers and training organisations to deliver training to apprentices and trainees in line with an agreed training plan. It sets out in very clear terms the obligations and responsibilities of the apprentice or trainee, the employer and the registered training organisation.

A training relationship is a three-way partnership between the trainee, the employer and the registered training organisation—all of whom must play their role effectively if quality training is to take place. Unfortunately, in the past we have seen cases where one or more of these three parties has, through ignorance, apathy or dishonesty, misused the system, often for considerable financial gain. The legislation provides for penalties and sanctions to support the development and maintenance of a quality system. In extreme cases, the legislation allows a training organisation's registration to be revoked. If employers repeatedly and deliberately fail in their obligations, the Bill allows prohibited employer status to be applied so that these employers cannot continue employing apprentices and trainees and fail to train them adequately. By requiring an agreed training plan to be developed by the registered training provider, the employer and the apprentice or the trainee, the legislation ensures that participants know their responsibilities from the outset. It gives them a mechanism to plan, deliver and assess their training while it is being undertaken. Apprenticeships and traineeships will not be registered until the training plan has been developed.

A major initiative of this legislation is the appointment of a training ombudsman. The Ombudsman will assist with quality improvement by providing a mechanism to protect the interests of apprentices, trainees and their employers. The legislation also allows for better registration and accreditation procedures for registered training organisations consistent with the Australian Recognition Framework. The outcome will give full effect to a nationally consistent registration process so that training organisations can be evaluated using the same criteria across Australia. Training providers registered interstate will be able to deliver training in Queensland, and Queensland registered providers will also be able to train people anywhere in Australia.

In another move designed to improve quality in training the Bill incorporates vocational placement provisions which ensure that students undertaking vocational placement are provided with a training plan. Vocational placement allows full-time students to undertake training in a work environment, allowing them to attain work-ready skills before they enter a workplace. This is a vital part of their training, but in the past we have seen abuses whereby students have been made to undertake duties unrelated to their formal studies while placed in a workplace.

I take this opportunity to praise a vocational placement program in my local area. I refer to SAILS, or Schools and Industry Links Scheme, which is based at the Banyo State High School and which operates under the expert coordination of Heather Peirce. This program has been operating for at least a year and it has placed many students in traineeships in industries surrounding the Banyo district. I commend Heather and her committee for the excellent work that they perform in providing students with the guidance and support to enable them to undertake traineeships whilst completing their schooling in Years 11 and 12.

Finally, the Training and Employment Bill 2000 will improve quality by ensuring that relevant and meaningful advice is provided to the Government through the Training and Employment Board, the Training Recognition Council and the industry training advisory bodies. Most importantly, it ensures that decisions on the registration and outcomes of the audit of training organisations are made independently of the department and with industry input. Our close working relationship with these bodies offers in-built accountability for the training system.

By approaching the provision of vocational education and training as a partnership between Government, industry, the community and the training sector, we can be sure that we will subject the system to the scrutiny and constructive criticism that it requires. When it came into office, this Government knew that the vocational education and training system was in trouble. Several major reports, including the 1999 Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System, confirmed that the problems and rorts related to training were extremely serious. Since then the Labor Government has undertaken a major program of reform, improving the training system so

that our workers and young people receive skills that equip them for the future. The benefit flows on to their employers, industries and our whole community. The Training and Employment Bill 2000 will help us to achieve this goal and, accordingly, I commend the Bill to the House.

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (3.48 p.m.): In rising to make a contribution to the debate on the Training and Employment Bill, I point out that, fortunately, there has been a realisation that about 20-odd years ago we were perhaps putting too much emphasis on tertiary education. People were being encouraged to look for a white-collar job rather than get technical skills. Fortunately, we have turned that around. I pay tribute to Mike Ahern, as the then Premier, because he decided to split the portfolios of Education and Technical and Further Education. Under the member for Keppel, Vince Lester, and his director-general, Barry Reid, we laid down a network right across Queensland and we vastly expanded the amount of technical education available and the locations at which it was delivered.

We have moved on from there. It is always going to be a hell of a challenge for Governments to maintain relevance in what they are training because we are going through a time in history when the needs of the workplace are changing at a tremendously rapid pace. There is always a lag between identifying a need and meeting it. Very often we put lots of money into some sort of training only to find that it becomes obsolete. So it is an ongoing challenge.

I commend the efforts of the member for Clayfield, who was the Minister in this portfolio when the Borbidge Government was in power and continues in this portfolio in Opposition. He is a hardworking person who has put an enormous amount of time into his portfolio, and that was obvious today from his presentation to the House.

I want to take this opportunity to talk about some things that are relevant to my own electorate, because this is probably the last time that this piece of legislation will be debated in the House before the next election and, as members would know, I am retiring.

Mr Mickel: You could always come back.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: No, I have no intention of coming back, thanks very much.

First of all I want to talk about the Dalby Agricultural College. Members would know that there are four agricultural colleges across Queensland. They were the brainchild of the Bjelke-Petersen Government. They did not all come on stream at once. I took a particular interest in the establishment of one which dealt with broadacre agriculture. At that particular time I was active in party politics, but I did not represent the people of Western Downs in this place.

I saw what happened after the decision was made. At that time it was set up under the Department of Primary Industries and was answerable directly to the Minister himself, because the Government of the day saw that there was a need to have a very sharp focus and be absolutely in tune with the need for training out there in the agricultural belt. It worked extremely well until the Goss Government came to power in 1990 and it chose to do otherwise and merge it with TAFE. There was no real reason to do that. In fact, I still hold the view that it has now become just another sector of a department rather than a specialised section. I think we have lost some of the sharper focus in that regard.

Only a couple of weeks ago the Dalby Agricultural College held a big reunion. It is now 20 years since its first intake of students. I find it interesting to read about the graduation ceremonies from year to year in the local paper and also to follow what has gone on. The college boasts something like a 95% success rate in placing its graduates in employment. It offers a range of subjects, and I will speak more about them in the moment.

An unbelievable number of young people have gone into that place, some from a rural background and some from Brisbane and Sydney. While they are there, they take advantage of the expertise of the college and come out well equipped to take their place in agricultural industries across Queensland, be they individual enterprises or large corporations.

I pay a big tribute, first of all, to the board that was put together. I think the first chairman of the board was a fellow called John Brimblecombe, who stayed for quite a few years. A very good friend of mine, Max Middleton, was a member of the board. He was also there for quite a few years—probably 10 or 15 years—and ended up as chairman. Currently the chairman of the board is Neville Wirth of Dalby, and the Minister would be aware of him. Those three gentlemen were all vastly successful in their own field as practical farmers, but they also had the mental capacity to lead a board that was made up of very talented people. They lay down the foundations of the college with the depth of their planning.

The campus itself speaks volumes for the quality of the place. So, too, does the quality of the graduates. Anyone who goes to Dalby should venture out and have a look at the campus. The improvements that have been made are first-class. It is very neat and shiny and shows a well-organised mind. It is all round a well-organised campus. I am sure that many people from elsewhere in the world who specialise in agricultural education come away most impressed after a visit to the Dalby Agricultural College.

The first director of the college was John Lovelace. It is interesting to note that in New Guinea he worked very closely with a former Treasurer of this place, Keith De Lacy. They remain friends to this day. John Lovelace was in agricultural education in New Guinea and was selected by the initial board to act as the foundation director. He left a great imprint on the way the place operated. He was dedicated to high quality organisation with a good understanding of the academic needs of training and yet was very pragmatic and able to work with men with field experience. He left some years ago to retire and we now have a new director, Glen Smith, who is fitting in and probably doing things his way but is still enhancing the quality of the graduates.

I also pay tribute to Rod Plumb. He has been the secretary of the board and probably the chief honcho of the figures ever since its inception. He is going to retire soon. He can look back on his 20-odd years of sterling service to the Dalby Agricultural College. He also serves the community as a member of the Dalby Rotary Club and is to be commended for that service.

While I am speaking about the make-up of the board, I should point out that during the period of the Goss Government it was decided that some educational input was needed. It was decided at the time to appoint the regional director. I think the present Minister was the Education Minister at the time when it was decided that the regional directors should be on the boards of those regional colleges. I think that, in fact, it worked all right. They were able to maintain a tie between academic education and technical education, and they probably made a valuable contribution to board discussions, and continue to do so.

I will now mention just some of the courses that are available. To the credit of the director, his staff and the board, they have always kept in tune with the changing needs of agriculture. They recognise that as well as those taking up initial skills there are many people who want to keep upgrading their skills. So there is a blend of internal courses and external courses. The internal courses are of two years' duration. Originally young people would go there after completing Year 10, but I think members will find that now it is always post secondary education.

In 1998 the courses included Certificate III (Agricultural Production) and Certificate IV (Agricultural Production) or a Diploma of Applied Science (Agricultural Production). There is also a prevocational course in engineering and a certificate in farm skills, which is delivered to St Mary's College, a Catholic college in Dalby. So it is good to see that a Statewide institution such as this liaises with a private school that is servicing an agricultural district.

The external courses are much more extensive than the internal courses. Obviously they are of shorter duration, but they fill an identified need for those people who are trying to upgrade their skills and keep their enterprises up to date. The external courses include Certificate III (Fruit Processing into Wine)—that is up to date—Certificate in Small Business Management, Certificate in Rural Business Management, Certificate in Farm Management, Certificate in Farm Business Operations, Certificate in Land Care, Diploma of Applied Science and Agricultural Production, dryland cropping, horticulture, engineering traineeships, rural skills and Certificate in Meat Processing.

It is also worth while putting on record that each of those four colleges across Queensland has to fulfil a specific niche in agricultural education, and the Dalby Agricultural College is all about broadacre farming, intensive agriculture with some irrigation that has been added over the years—they have a ring tank on the place and irrigate quite a few acres of land—and also intensive animal industries. The pastoral industry is obviously focused on Longreach and Emerald, but such is the diversification of farming across the Darling Downs and the western downs that lots of people are into not only grain production but also animal production. Because of the high value of the land in that area, people get into intensive animal husbandry with feed lots, etc. Anyone who graduates from the Dalby Agricultural College comes away with the necessary skills in those three fields: intensive agriculture with irrigation, broadacre grain farming and intensive animal husbandry.

To date something like 2,000 students have benefited from the college. I would hope that the Ministers of the day continue to

recognise the important role that the college is going to play in keeping our agricultural industries viable. Unfortunately, there is a tremendous change going on in rural Australia at present. We are producing more and more, but about 80% of all the agricultural products we produce are being produced by only 20% of the farmers. So the farm units are becoming bigger, lots of places are becoming available for those people who have specific skills, but they are going to be salaried people rather than self-employed people. The college is aware of that. Nevertheless, there is a need for the Government to keep on injecting money into the Dalby Agricultural College and the other three agricultural colleges to make sure that rural people can remain viable in terms of efficiency of operation and all the other skills that are necessary to look after the rural sector. The importance of rural agriculture and rural production in our overall State productivity might be diminishing, but it is still going to be the main industry for people west of the Great Dividing Range.

The next topic that I want to mention is not quite so pleasant. I refer to the provision of TAFE facilities in Dalby. It is a pretty sad situation. I became the member for Condamine in 1983. It became obvious to me after I had been in this place for some time that Dalby was the largest town in Queensland without its own freestanding, dedicated TAFE college. I set out to do something about it. By 1989 I had an agreement with the Minister in charge of TAFE colleges at the time, Vince Lester, the member Keppel, that Dalby should be next in line to get a college. It took us something like two and a half years working with the council and the then Lands Department to find a block of land in Dalby that would be suitable, because so much of Dalby is flood prone. We found 80 acres on the western extremities of the town. So it was planned to build the college and have it operational by 1991.

The election in 1989 brought about a change of Government and the Goss Government decided that Dalby was not going to get a TAFE college. The local people were shattered. We were provided with some courses. Those courses were operated from an old office block, which was not at all suitable for that purpose. The courses on offer did not compare very well with the courses that were being offered by TAFE colleges around Queensland. Nothing of any consequence was done until the change of Government in 1986. I place on record that the people of Dalby and I started to complain to the Goss Government and the Minister at the time, Nev Warburton, that we missed out badly in not getting that college. Nev Warburton was silly enough to say that the site was unsuitable and was flood prone. The people of Dalby knew that that was not true; they knew why we agreed to put the college on that particular site. That was a pretty lame excuse from Nev Warburton and a good indication that the Goss Government never intended helping the people of Dalby, even though it was the largest town in Queensland without a freestanding TAFE college.

When the Borbidge Government came to power I set about trying to overcome the deficiencies that were being suffered by the people of Dalby. I approached the then Minister, the member for Clayfield. He was very understanding of the situation and what was needed. He commissioned a report by the department into the need for technical training on the Darling Downs and in the western downs. He engaged the services of Mr Dennis Long. Dennis Long was a former regional director of education in the Darling Downs region who had gone into retirement. He had already sat on the board of the Dalby Agricultural College at one stage. Dennis Long went to the region and conducted surveys and talked to the people in the Dalby/Chinchilla area. He liaised with the Minister and prepared a report in early 1997 which showed that there was an enormous unmet demand. The then Minister, Mr Santoro, made sure that the funds were going to be in the next Budget to provide a freestanding college.

By that time, the planners in TAFE had decided that a large college on 80 or 90 acres was no longer the go. They believed that it was more appropriate to have a college in the CBD. With the help of the Dalby Town Council and Mayor Warwick Geisel, a block of land was selected and a design was put together that suited the block of land and which also meet the needs of the TAFE planners. After all that time and after an enormous amount of paperwork had been done and the college was about to become a reality, along came the election in 1996. The Beattie Government came to power. That Government immediately dropped the plans for that college. That was the second cruel blow for the people of Dalby.

An Opposition member: Dreadful.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: It was a dreadful blow to the people of Dalby. I protested to the present Minister and the Premier. When challenged, they said, "Oh, we've upgraded the number of places at Dalby." They may have done that, but it still did not meet the need that exists and it still did not get the

region the facilities that are necessary. One of the plans that they did put in place was a $500,000 machinery training and engineering shed at the Dalby Agricultural College. It appeared in the Budget papers of that year. Nothing happened for 12 months. It was back in the Budget papers last year. I kept on making inquiries about it. After talking to people such as Rod Plumb of the Dalby Agricultural College, I found out that that project had blown out to something like $900,000 or maybe even in excess of $1m. The last I heard is that it is soon to be commissioned in order to take in students in the next semester. The Minister has not been out there to open it, so I imagine that it is not in use yet, but it is certainly on site.

I draw to the Minister's attention that the people of Dalby still feel cheated by that. They still feel that we should go ahead with the freestanding college as planned by the member for Clayfield. The site in town is ideal. We have to remember that Dalby is the largest manufacturing sector in inland Queensland, and that is really saying something. Dalby does not only have a steel fabrication industry. There are enormous skills in the region in terms of hydraulics and electronics, all of which are being used in various types of agricultural machinery. To think that Dalby has the largest manufacturing base in inland Queensland but does not have its own dedicated—

Mr Hayward: Do you seriously believe that the member for Clayfield intended to build that? He had two and a half years mucking around there.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: He did not have two and a half years. I can take members out there and show them the land and the plans. This Minister even denied that the report from Dennis Long was in existence. That is how lame those opposite were. The Government can come good and deliver this facility to the people of Dalby down the line. The people of Dalby have made an enormous contribution to the agriculture industry in Queensland. They are doing it in facilities that are not up to scratch. When I retire from this place, I will always remember that the people of Dalby were let down extremely badly by two successive Labor Governments.

Ms STRUTHERS (Archerfield—ALP) (4.05 p.m.): I support the Training and Employment Bill. I also commend the Minister for his determination to repair the damage done to training provision in Queensland by the member for Clayfield when he had his frightening reign as Minister. The member for Clayfield is allegedly a great numbers man—extensive ethnic branch stacking being one of his recent claims to fame. His training numbers looked good at a glance when he was Minister. The take-up of traineeships in Queensland was moving along steadily, but on closer examination it was apparent that many of these traineeships were not going to those most in need of training. Many were going to professional people to upgrade their skills and other people who were already gainfully employed.

Under the reign of the member for Clayfield, public money was squandered with limited positive training outcomes, particularly for at-risk workers and unemployed people. To keep up to date with changing technologies and to maximise employment opportunities for Queenslanders, our Government is committed to the provision of effective training and growth in apprenticeships and traineeships. The expansion that has occurred with Minister Paul Braddy at the helm is testament to this.

Some of the numbers we can look at to demonstrate this are the number of apprentices and trainees employed by State Government departments and agencies, local government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils. As at February this year, there were some 2,432 trainees and 399 apprentices. Numbers in private sector apprenticeships and traineeships with the $2,000 incentive payment being offered have also gone up. As at February this year, there were 3,900 apprentices and 2,674 trainees. All up, 3,792 employers and group training companies have been paid employer incentive payments totalling $10,693m. This represents 87.6% of the four-year target in just 16 months of the program. Young people in my electorate who are desperately seeking to get a job and money in their pocket—

Mr Purcell: Desperately seeking Susan.

Ms STRUTHERS: That is right. They need access to effective training, as do many mature aged people in my area whose jobs are at risk. People in the railways, sales reps and others are saying to me that they are insecure in their work. Many of them are also looking for retraining opportunities. They are the sorts of people to whom our training is being targeted. Our money is being spent much more wisely than it was under the previous Government.

One of the things small employers in my area are saying is that they do not want the red tape and the complexity of employing trainees and apprentices. One of the key reforms of the Training and Employment Bill is the simplification of administrative

arrangements governing apprenticeships and traineeships. The new procedures address concerns raised in the 1999 Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System by Kaye Schofield. Pilot schemes have been set up to test a number of the initiatives that have been developed by the department in response to the investigation's findings. The pilot schemes are currently being conducted in the north Brisbane and central Queensland regions and have made great progress in the following areas. They have streamlined the administrative system. They have clarified the responsibilities of all parties to training agreements. We have also seen improvement in the quality of training.

While the pilot evaluation has been going for only a short while, already there is extremely positive feedback. The registration process for apprentices and trainees has been modified to ensure that they are registered only after apprentices and trainees have been inducted by registered training organisations, training plans have been negotiated with employers and nominated registered training organisations, and the probation period has been completed. Apprentices, trainees and employers are inducted into the training system to ensure that all parties are fully aware of their commitments and obligations. The training plan, which is negotiated between the employer and the apprentice or trainee before the end of the probationary period, clearly outlines the responsibilities of all parties and details the structure of training to be delivered.

The department is also currently working with the Commonwealth Government, the Australian National Training Authority and key stakeholders to design a training contract that will simplify the sign-up process. This collaboration has prompted moves to establish a nationally consistent approach to the design of training agreements. The contract also introduces a declaration of parties to ensure that quality training is delivered.

To improve the training system, a new approach to user choice will be in place as of 1 July this year. User choice is the process through which the Government purchases apprenticeship and traineeship training from registered training organisations. Once again, the need for reform was identified in the Schofield report, which found problems due to a fragmented market, failure of supply and administrative entanglement.

The investigation also found that the previous Government introduced user choice in Queensland on the assumption that it required a minimalist and purely reactive role for Government in the purchasing process. This led to the squandering of training funds under the reign of the member for Clayfield. In stark contrast, members on this side of the House know and recognise that the Government has a legitimate role to play. Consequently, the new arrangements focus on quality training and assessment, training coverage across qualifications, industries and geographical locations, and continuity of training supply over time.

I accept that in the past the vocational education and training system has been fraught with lots of paperwork and excessive red tape. The creation of the Training Recognition Council seeks to redress some of this with the amalgamation of two vocational education, training and employment commission standing committees: the State Training Council and the Accreditation Council. Previously, many participants could not find a single point of entry to gain information on matters relating to accreditation and apprenticeships and traineeships. Navigating through the system was extremely complicated and time consuming. Quite simply, the move from two councils to one removes duplicate procedures and confusion for stakeholders.

With quality control the primary concern, a stronger performance management framework has been developed, incorporating a rigorous and integrated audit process. The structured audit process will target all registered training organisations with periodic examinations to ensure they meet their training obligations and responsibilities. Training providers were investigated in an ad hoc manner or only in response to a complaint. This is simply not good enough to weed out the bodgie operators. By the end of this year it is envisaged that every registered training organisation with a Government contract will have been audited within the last two years. In the event that training is not delivered as required, this legislation provides a comprehensive range of penalties, calling into play a whole host of sanctions to help develop a quality training system. In extreme cases the legislation enables the registration of a training organisation to be revoked.

I take this opportunity to commend Challenge Employment and Training, Nianda high school, Acacia Ridge Community Support, Delfin Property and other community groups in my area that have offered high quality training to young people and mature aged people in my electorate who previously did not have those sorts of opportunities. I also commend the dedicated departmental officers

who are supporting these community jobs and training initiatives in my area. The sort of collaboration I am witnessing in my area is, I think, a great credit to all those involved. It certainly helps us make sure we provide a bright future, particularly for young people. At the moment many of them are looking ahead and thinking, "What sorts of opportunities are out there?", particularly with unemployment levels being higher for younger people. Certainly, the sort of commitment I am witnessing in my electorate will mean that many of these people will have a much brighter future.

Mr BLACK (Whitsunday—CCAQ) (4.14 p.m.): I rise in support of the Training and Employment Bill, which I believe will be of benefit to Queenslanders involved in traineeships and apprenticeships. There are often complaints about the current system. The complexity of the system confuses all involved and deters employers, apprentices and trainees. Often apprentices and trainees do not finish their training programs. This frequently involves a failure by one of the parties to live up to their responsibility. It is often reported also that apprentices and trainees are not receiving the required mix of work and official training and that there is not enough flexibility to allow the variable amount of working and learning time required to ensure a complete knowledge of the job.

The Schofield report identifies the main problems with the current system. We feel that this Bill addresses many of them. I would like to point to some of the aspects of the Bill that I believe will be of benefit to all parties involved in the apprenticeship and traineeship programs. Specific mention of the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved and the agreed training contract should lead to better quality training and higher completion rates by trainees and apprentices, as will the provisions to remove the licences of training providers who abuse the system or fail to provide the required training as promised. Also, the prohibition of employers with bad track records becoming involved in future apprenticeship or traineeship programs is an improvement. These changes create accountability where it is currently lacking.

The bureaucratic changes are also noteworthy, with the establishment of an apprenticeship and traineeship ombudsman, the Training and Employment Board and the Training Recognition Council. The creation of an independent ombudsman is an important addition to the system and is likely to aid in smooth dispute resolution and increase completion rates for apprenticeships and traineeships. I am satisfied that the establishment of the board and the council in their respective roles will be conducive to a more representative and less disruptive system for all concerned. I am also satisfied with regard to the other major changes proposed in this legislation.

One of the issues I believe important to the continuation of Queensland industry and the quality of tradesmanship is the enormous wealth of knowledge and extensive experience that older tradesmen have. The system deters older tradesmen from employing a trainee or apprentice. Older tradesmen are sometimes not conversant with today's technological advancements and are more easily put off by the amount of red tape or the cost involved. This Bill may provide more incentive for the expertise to be utilised, with training contracts and specified roles aiding in the total training package that can be offered.

In the case of an older tradesman not conversant with modern technology or methods, a training contract could ensure that a trainee or apprentice learns the practical tricks of the trade. At the same time, the trainee is not disadvantaged by the lack of modern methods and technology, as this can be the stated responsibility of the registered training organisation. This and the reduced complexity of the system should make traineeships and apprenticeships more appealing to the employer and the trainee.

While I am on the subject of training, I mention the proposal for the Bowen/Whitsunday maritime training centre. Officers from the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations were in the Whitsundays recently, meeting with the Bowen/Whitsunday Maritime Training Centre Steering Committee and other interested parties. I completely support the proposal for the Bowen/Whitsunday maritime training centre and congratulate those involved in developing the proposal on the work they have done, especially Councillor Tolma Cann of Whitsunday Shire Council and Coral Butcher of the Whitsunday TAFE college. They have provided a comprehensive proposal that has widespread community support.

The Whitsundays is a perfect place for a maritime training centre, with many islands and protected waters and a broad cross-section of industry. Regional communities are seeing an exodus of their youth as they leave to seek employment, training, higher education and so on. A training centre such as the maritime centre will encourage industry in the area and

provide even more local careers for local people and for the entire region.

A meeting between the department and maritime centre steering committee ended with a video link with a Mr Carnie, general manager of the South Australian Fisheries Academy at Port Adelaide. The South Australian academy is an example of the benefits the centre could bring to the region and to Queensland. In a recent article in the Whitsunday newspaper the Guardian it is reported that the academy provides 95% of fisheries trainees in South Australia. It had 200 trainees who came to the academy through a group apprenticeship scheme and it, too, works closely with the TAFE system. Mr Carnie said—

> "Industry now recognises the importance of traineeships and likes the benefits of improved training. Training has to be provided by local people in local industry."

The South Australian academy has proved to be a success for all concerned and for the State. I believe the Bowen/Whitsunday maritime training centre would be just as successful as the South Australian academy. I lend it my full support. This centre will be of great benefit not only to the youth of Whitsunday but also to the entire region and the whole of Queensland.

I support the Bill before us in the belief that it will improve upon the current system and provide a more workable and accountable system for apprentices, trainees, employers and training bodies.

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (4.20 p.m.): One of the key initiatives contained in the Training and Employment Bill 2000 is the creation of an independent Apprenticeship and Traineeship Ombudsman. This is an important and unique initiative designed to ensure the quality and integrity of the training system and protect the interests of apprentices, trainees and their employers. I am pleased to say that it is also an Australian first.

The 1999 Independent Investigation into the Quality of Training in Queensland's Traineeship System report by Kaye Schofield identified a range of problems associated with the quality of training and called for additional protective measures to be put in place. To this end, the ombudsman provides a free, fair and impartial office for resolving complaints about the nature, scope and quality of training. The new legislation will build on the existing system to provide apprentices, trainees and employers with a more accessible and user-friendly point of reference. Previously, many apprentices and trainees did not know where to direct their training-related problems and concerns and had little confidence in their being acted upon. Many members of this place would have been approached by a distressed apprentice or trainee who has been disappointed with the training being provided or concerned about some aspect of the training relationship. That certainly was the situation in my case. In the past it has been unclear where those people could get help, so I am personally very pleased that the Bill includes the introduction of the ombudsman.

In terms of functional responsibilities, the ombudsman will: receive concerns from apprentices, trainees, employers or registered training providers regarding the nature, scope and quality of training received and delivered; forward relevant matters to the Training Recognition Council; and produce an annual report for the perusal of the Minister and the Legislative Assembly. The ombudsman will exercise traditional power to: make recommendations to the Training Recognition Council regarding an apprenticeship or traineeship matter, for example, suggest the council review its investigation; recommend the council exercise a particular power in order to resolve a dispute; and refuse to deal with certain matters if the issue is considered to be vexatious or frivolous. The Minister can at any time direct the council to act on the ombudsman's recommendations. In the wake of an investigation by the council, the ombudsman will be required to notify the complainant of the review findings and give both the Minister and the council a report detailing the findings and any recommendations.

The appointment of an ombudsman is not just another layer of bureaucracy; it is in fact a vital component of the new, improved training system. It provides easy access to the system, protects the interests of all parties involved in the training process and ensures that disputes are resolved more quickly. It is worth while noting that often apprentices are young people who are not experienced in the ways of the world and are not in a position to take action that others might traditionally resort to in the courts or in traditional forms of advocacy. An ombudsman is an excellent initiative, and I commend the Minister very warmly for that initiative, because it certainly gives someone an opportunity to have something said and for an independent person to investigate it. It is an excellent initiative. One wonders why we did not think of it many years ago. If ever there was a case

that was crying out for an ombudsman, this is it.

The legislation keeps sight of the fact that we need to consistently deliver a quality training product. This means it is imperative that the system be transparent and readily accessible from both ends of the training spectrum. The appointment of an ombudsman will deliver this dual access and will deliver on a key recommendation of the 1999 Schofield report. The ombudsman, together with a number of significant initiatives undertaken by the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations over the past two years, will protect the quality of training delivered to apprentices and trainees in Queensland. It is not the position that an employer can deal up to an apprentice any sort of rubbish that they want to. An employer has an obligation to provide their apprentice with quality training so that one day they will turn out to be a quality tradesperson. That is important. That is an obligation that employers have in the system, just as apprentices have an obligation to be diligent and work hard.

The alarmingly high non-completion rate pertaining to apprentices and trainees is a key issue being addressed in the new-look training system. The February 2000 report by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs into attrition in apprenticeships found that more than half of the apprentices—52%—who commenced training in 1994-95 did not complete their approved training program. This negative trend shows no signs of abating, with 28% of the 1998-99 national apprenticeship intake having already withdrawn or cancelled. The picture is no brighter on the traineeship front, with the latest analysis revealing that almost 60% of Queensland trainees abandon their training program prior to completion. The issue of non-completions was identified in the Schofield report, and the subsequent recommendations are currently being implemented.

Preliminary studies suggest that a whole host of reasons contribute to the problem of non-completions, including: participants not being fully aware of their respective roles and responsibilities; poor quality of training; and no training in place. The Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has recently undertaken further research into non-completions in an effort to determine the reasons for apprentices and trainees exiting their programs, where they end up after leaving, whether partial completion helps them access their original goal, and whether former apprentices or trainees can be encouraged to complete their studies. The findings from this study will be used to develop strategies to promote higher completion rates for apprenticeships and traineeships in Queensland.

New processes established as part of the reformed legislation and policy provide for a number of potential intervention strategies relating to non-completions, including: registered training organisations must negotiate a training plan with the employer and apprentice/trainee during the probationary period; the probationary period must be completed before the training agreement is registered; the user choice pricing schedule has been restructured to facilitate the delivery of quality structured training in all delivery modes; and, payments to registered training organisations for traineeship delivery under user choice purchasing arrangements will be conditional on employer and trainee satisfaction with training services delivered. All training organisations will be subject to a rigorous audit process at regular intervals to ensure that they meet their obligations.

The findings of these studies will contribute significantly to developing a sound and consistent skill base for apprentices and trainees around Australia. The Government is firmly committed to providing Queenslanders with high quality vocational education and training. Indeed, education and training, and education in the more general sense, are the key to allowing someone in society to achieve their greatest potential. I am always proud as an Australian to be in a society that is very egalitarian in that it does not, by and large, matter what a person's station in life is, what their mum or dad have done or where they have come from originally. This is critical in terms of our Government's policies in relation to giving everyone a start. Quality education and training does allow a person to show their own merit and to break out of the system, break out of some of the problems that they might earlier have had, or, indeed, just reach their full potential. We recognise the importance of the apprenticeship and traineeship system in this endeavour and feel confident that the interests of our young workforce will be well served with the appointment of an ombudsman and other major initiatives introduced as part of this new legislation.

The Training and Employment Bill 2000 will support the Beattie Government's move to improve quality and confidence in the system. It will help us to position apprenticeships and traineeships as first choice career options for young people and as good investments for business operators. I did not undertake an

apprenticeship or a traineeship; I went to university after I left school. By and large, it is those with skilled trades and technical qualifications in our society who will be creating our wealth for the future, who will be leading us through the Smart State and on whom we will be relying to gain the benefits of this Government's Smart State strategy with investment in our gas pipeline and industrial development throughout the State. This fact makes it even more important that we keep our obligations to those young and not-so-young people wishing to undertake apprenticeships and traineeships.

I am confident that the initiatives contained in this Bill, in conjunction with the other strategies this Government has introduced, will help to improve completion rates.

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (4.29 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Training and Employment Bill. As has already been flagged, the City Country Alliance will definitely be supporting the Bill, which I believe contains some great things. Later on in my contribution I will be referring to some of the horror stories of events which, as a result of the introduction of this legislation, I am assured by the briefing officers will no longer occur.

The principal objectives of the legislation are as follows—

> "establishing a State training system for the effective and efficient provision of high quality vocational education and training to meet the immediate and future needs of industry and the community; and
>
> providing mechanisms by which industry, employers, employees and the community can advise government on vocational education and training needs and priorities to meet those needs;"

Those are both very encouraging things. The principal objectives of the legislation continue—

> "encouraging and supporting the continued development of high quality training by and within industry; and
>
> facilitating the provision of vocational education and training that is relevant to employment or will encourage the generation of employment opportunities; and
>
> regulating the registration of training organisations, accreditation of courses and the training of apprentices and trainees under registered apprenticeship or traineeship contracts within the State; and
>
> promoting the development of a national vocational education and training system including the implementation of nationally agreed policies."

They are all very high ideals and I hope that the Bill helps achieve them.

I want to highlight a few of the problems that I have encountered in relation to employment over the last couple of months. I received an email from the father of a young fellow on the Gold Coast who was laid off before his probationary period ended. The email says in part—

> "Some unethical employers are taking advantage of Government subsidies and using kids as cheap labour.
>
> Peter Beattie's election platform of Jobs Jobs Jobs is a joke.
>
> It's no surprise the unemployment rate is climbing in this country when you have the Government on one hand subsidising employers to employ kids and on the other hand you have unethical employers taking advantage of the subsidies hiring kids for the probation period and then laying them off only to start the whole process again.
>
> The search for employment again is a major stuff up by the Government in that Jobseekers have to register with every Tom Dick and Harry employment agency. Even once registered these employment agencies will not help you obtain a job, they look upon themselves as a medium to gather vacancies from employers.
>
> Centrelink and the internet provide details of job vacancies, but the system collapses at this point, because you have to find out where the vacancy is registered then go to that agency and register with them so they can tell the Government that they have matched up a job vacancy with a jobseeker."

He goes on—

> "What a load of baloney.
>
> One agency will not contact another on your behalf but rather bluntly and rudely tell you where to go.
>
> Every man and his dog requires that you provide your personal details to them. It is no wonder why the unemployed become frustrated and disillusioned.

> I know you personally can't do anything but perhaps this could be brought to the attention of parliament so they at least can be seen to care even if they don't give a rats."

The man's son also contacted his local Federal member, who told him that she was in her last term and would not be making any waves.

It is terrible to see a 17 year old lad taking up what he believes is a chance for an apprenticeship as a motor mechanic, doing his time of grief, running around and doing the dogsbody work, getting himself greasy and dirty and thinking that he is doing this so that he can become an apprentice, only to be told before his probationary period ends that that is it—end of story. It is sad when that occurs to a young person. That young lad's dreams were squashed. I believe that the introduction of this Bill might assist in preventing some of those tragedies from occurring.

Clause 64 details reasons for terminating apprenticeships. I look back at the old section 208 of the Criminal Code, which referred to domestic discipline. In this instance, an employer having an apprentice under his care could institute disciplinary action against his employee under the old Criminal Code. However, times change. Clause 64 provides good reasons for immediate suspension and/or termination.

I recall a case where a carpenter took disciplinary action against apprentices who were in his care. The two apprentices were mucking around with a bandsaw. The carpenter was working up in the roof and he flicked a chip down at the lads and told them to get away from the bandsaw. They continued mucking around with the saw, and the carpenter flicked a bigger chip down at them and it hit one of the young fellows. The carpenter told the young men that they were both sacked and that they had to leave the building site. The parents of one lad tried to bring an action against the carpenter for flicking the chip at one of the young apprentices. They claimed that the lad had a bruised shoulder. When that claim was not entertained, the parents tried to take action against the carpenter for unfair dismissal.

The Explanatory Notes makes it clear that under clause 64 an employee can be dismissed if "while at work, causing an imminent risk of bodily injury to another person or a work caused illness or a dangerous event ... to occur". I believe that certainly covers the aspect of the carpenter trying to take care of his apprentices. He was endeavouring to ensure that they did not cause themselves grief while they were in his employment.

I had occasion to speak with DETIR in relation to a constituent of mine, a Mr Noone, who suffered an acquired brain injury as a result of a traffic accident. Mr Noone is disabled to a degree where he cannot function for lengthy periods of time. Mr Noone and nine other disabled persons were taken on for a traineeship by an employment agency at Caboolture. These 10 people were sold a dream in relation to their future employment.

The employment agency had been promised by quasi-government departments and some shire councils that they would take on these apprenticeships and traineeships of the disabled persons. The matter was not signed off properly and, eventually, it fell down. These young people felt extremely let down. They had been working in the field of information technology for 13 weeks. Suddenly, they found themselves without any prospects of employment. The employment contracts were either terminated or changed. Unfortunately, Mr Noone had to have his contract cancelled by mutual agreement.

He has had further contact with DETIR. I have also had meetings in my office relating to the treatment received by Mr Noone. I hope that the employment provider and the training establishment have learned a lesson about the way in which they do their work. I was advised at the briefing that this sort of situation would not occur in the future because the employment provider would have to make sure that prospective employees would be signed off to the degree that they actually knew what they were doing before they took on apprenticeships or traineeships. I hope the Minister can assure me that that will occur under this legislation. These dreams and these hopes are sold to so many disadvantaged people. In the future, we can only hope that they will be provided with exactly what they were promised.

I spoke to John Thompson in relation to another of my constituents, a lady who had served almost 11 and a half years at an aged care facility. Unfortunately, she terminated her employment in March this year. She would have been entitled to long service leave some three months later, on 23 June, under the current industrial relations legislation. Her long service entitlement was affected. That employer took the view that, because she had not completed 10 years' service since 23 June 1990, the relevant date, there was no obligation to pay any of her long service leave entitlements whatsoever. I think that, under

the provisions contained in this Bill, she would now be entitled to a pro rata payment of her long service leave, even though it was nine years and nine months since that date. Under this legislation, that organisation would now have to actually pay that long service leave.

I think that it is pretty sad that a person has to take an organisation to the Industrial Court to have them fulfil their obligations. I do not know how many other people have found themselves in a similar situation. When someone puts that length of time and effort into an organisation, I think that it is quite nasty for that organisation to say to that person when they leave that, no, they did not quite complete their 10 years and, therefore, do not qualify owing to an anomaly in the Act.

I do not really think that that was the intent of the Act. I think that the intention was that—no matter how long a person had been working for that organisation—even if they had completed 10 years with that organisation, from 23 June 1990 the organisation would be paying pro rata that person's long service leave. I think that, from the briefing that we received for this Bill, that will occur. I hope that that is what will occur and that Lorraine Lavarne on Bribie Island will be able to get her entitlement to that long service leave that I believe—and I think that was the intent of the Act—she is entitled to receive. I will certainly be writing on her behalf to that organisation where she was employed saying that the intent now is that she should be able to gain her legal entitlement to her long service for the time that she has put into aged care at Bribie Island. I think that will well and truly satisfy her concerns.

She left that employment three months before she would have achieved her 10 years' long service. It was pretty sad that at the time the employer did not advise her that if she had completed another three months, which I think she would have well and truly agreed to do, she would have been entitled to her long service leave.

I thank the Minister for the briefing that was provided to the City Country Alliance on this legislation. When I raised these concerns at the briefing, I was advised that, under the provisions of this legislation, they would be taken care of. I look forward to seeing that occur. Once again, I reiterate that we will be supporting the Bill.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.43 p.m.): The Beattie Government brings a collaborative approach to managing the vocational education and training system in Queensland. The young people of Queensland need to know that substantial, relevant training will be available for them when they leave school. We understand that the system will provide quality training only through partnerships between the Government, employers, workers and stakeholders in the training industry. That will mean improved consistency and streamlined training across Queensland.

Both the reform process that we have undertaken since coming into power and the development of the Training and Employment Bill 2000 have seen extensive consultation with all stakeholders. It was important that a broad cross-section of expertise was taken into consideration when making these changes. The new legislation will ensure that the Government continues to receive meaningful input from these stakeholders. In particular, guidance and advice about vocational education and training will be provided to the Minister through the establishment of a Training and Employment Board and a Training Recognition Council.

The Training and Employment Board will replace the existing Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission and the State Planning and Development Council. The Training Recognition Council broadly takes on the functions of the existing State Training Council and the Accreditation Council. The Training and Employment Board will provide high-level strategic advice to the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations and the Government on the planning and resourcing of the vocational education and training system in Queensland.

As our economy changes, so does our working environment. The Government needs to keep up with those changes so that demand and supply needs are met. The board will comprise up to 15 members drawn from industries, unions and the community, giving it broader representation. Up to four of the members will have standing with employers, up to four members will have standing with the unions and the remaining members will have standing with the training industry or the general community. This is well-balanced representation on such a board. In this way, we ensure that the Government receives balanced advice so that the needs of employers, workers and the community are considered. Any guidelines that define operational policy for the training system will pass through the Training and Employment Board before being submitted to the Minister.

The second body established by this legislation, the Training Recognition Council,

will oversee the regulation of training organisations, accreditation of courses, training contracts, the apprenticeship and traineeship system and vocational placement in Queensland. It will also be responsible for advising the Minister on national systems of qualifications, including national training packages and the Australian recognition framework. Similar to the Training and Employment Board, the Training Recognition Council will comprise no more than 14 members. Up to four of those members will have standing with employers, up to four members will have standing with unions and the remaining members will be drawn from vocational education and training, general or higher education, or the general community.

Members of both the board and the council can be disqualified should they lose their standing with the groups whom they represent. The board may also establish committees to advise it on specific aspects of the State training system. For example, currently the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Commission receives advice from the Queensland Adult English Language Literacy and Numeracy Committee and Nagi Binanga. The new board may choose to establish similar mechanisms for advice. The Training and Employment Board will have the power to recognise industry training advisory bodies and group training organisations.

One such training organisation is very active in the Mount Ommaney area. The South West Employment And Training division of the South West Economic Development Network provides employment and training services to the areas in and adjoining my electorate. The South West Employment And Training division—or SWEAT as it is commonly known—operates a group training scheme that currently provides training to 100 trainees and apprentices employed throughout the region and with various host employers for varying periods. To free up small business to employ more people, it makes sense to make training as manageable as possible for them. The group training scheme allows small employers to train apprentices and trainees without the complexity and paperwork that is usually required. Host employers can have a trainee or apprentice for a few weeks or for a term of the traineeship or apprenticeship. SWEAT ambitiously aims to employ 200 apprentices and trainees by December 2000. I wish them every success in this endeavour.

SWEAT also conducts pre-employment programs. Over the past six months, SWEAT delivered a variety of programs for about 150 unemployed people. All of those programs are designed to create pathways to ongoing employment. SWEAT specialises in flexible delivery to encourage more employers to participate in training by bringing the training to their workplaces. They work with employers, unions and employees to get the best possible outcome from the system, just as this Government is doing with this Bill. The Bill also provides that the industry training advisory bodies will be retained as the principal source of advice to the board on vocational education, training and employment issues facing their industry.

The Training and Employment Bill 2000 will ensure that there is a better representation than ever before for the wide range of stakeholders concerned with the training system. Employers, workers, the community and the training sector will provide meaningful input so that our training system delivers a quality product that is targeted to meet the needs of Queenslanders, our industries and our communities. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr CONNOR (Nerang—LP) (4.49 p.m.): I rise to speak on the Training and Employment Bill and in particular about training for justices of the peace, or JPs. Many people do not realise the important role that JPs and commissioners for declarations play in the Queensland community—everything from witnessing documents, statutory declarations, to wills and summonses. When witnessing documents they play a very important role for the community generally and also in respect of commercial transactions. When signing summonses and associated police documents they play a very important role in the administration of the State. It is not unusual for JPs to be pulled out of bed in the early hours of the morning by police who need their services urgently. In effect, they are unpaid public servants and most JPs happily provide this service, feeling a sense of pride in the community and their support for our community.

In talking to numerous JPs in recent months, I have yet to find any commissioner for declarations or the original JPs or JPs (Qualified) who have opposed appropriate training requirements and the qualifications associated with them. There is no denying that legislation and the required knowledge for JPs has escalated as the administration of the State has become more complicated. I believe the JP qualification and the training gives a sense of relief to many JPs in that they can

better understand what their roles and duties are.

At present the decision to undertake training to upgrade to a JP (Qualified) is very much a voluntary one for existing JPs. Until 1 July it is very much a voluntary decision. Many existing JPs have seen fit to undertake this training voluntarily. But as of 1 July this year the voluntary status of this training will change dramatically. In effect, as of 1 July the traditional JP will be downgraded to a commissioner for declarations. Some of the powers that they enjoy currently will be stripped from them unless they undertake this training. Yet in spite of facing this reduction in powers and responsibilities, I have yet to hear any existing JPs complain or say that training is unnecessary. What I do hear are complaints that, because it has become compulsory, more consideration should be given to the costs of that training and the administrative costs of upgrading.

Members will know that the TAFE training normally costs approximately $150. Currently, it is $25, reflecting some acknowledgment of that fact. The administrative cost of the upgrade is $29. I agree that there is a real argument that, if this training and administrative cost becomes compulsory for existing JPs in order to retain their powers and responsibilities, as in effect unpaid public servants they should be entitled to have this training and the associated administrative charge waived in full. The argument, of course, is that when paid public servants upgrade their skills it is usually free if it is done internally and heavily subsidised if it is done externally. What is more, that training is often recognised with a promotion and a higher rate of pay.

As volunteers, JPs do not receive that reward and yet the Government expects them to pay extra for the privilege of serving the community voluntarily. A pamphlet distributed recently at JP meetings by the Department of Justice states—

> "If you were appointed before 1 November 1991 and have not yet changed your office, you should be aware that you will automatically become a Justice of the Peace (Commissioner for Declarations) after 30 June 2000. It means that although you retain the title of JP, but with the suffix of C.dec, you will lose a number of the powers you currently have. These powers relate mainly to the issue of warrant or summonses, and to authority to sit on the bench and conduct any court related procedures."

It continues—

> "Basically, if you remain a JP appointed under the previous JP legislation, then, come 1 July 2000, your powers and duties will become the same as those of a C.dec. So from that date on, your powers will be limited to witnessing documents."

Clearly, these changes mean that they must undertake training and pay TAFE an administrative fee to retain their existing powers and responsibilities. Why should JPs, who may have had that qualification for 20 or 30 years or more, have to pay simply to retain the powers they currently have? If the Government has decided that they need to upgrade their training to retain the skills to perform a community service, and if they have to train for and sit a compulsory exam, surely the Government should be fully subsidising it—that is, paying for it totally—and surely the JP should not be made to pay the $29 transfer fee.

One should also remember that many JPs have stationery or signs to reflect their position. They will necessarily incur additional costs as a result of these changes to their stationery and signs. The JPs are not suggesting that the Government should pay all of these costs, but certainly the Government should at least be paying some of the costs. I believe JPs generally accept the fact that, if they have printed stationery, they will pay the cost of changing or upgrading it. However, the Government should be paying at least some of the associated costs, such as the training and administrative costs. Clearly, that $29 charge should be waived and the cost of the TAFE course should be fully subsidised.

One should also consider that many JPs are pensioners, low income earners or self-funded retirees. There should be some consideration for people on low incomes in relation to any associated payments, especially ones that are effectively compulsory. There is a real argument that, if the Government is not prepared to see its way clear to fully subsidise the TAFE courses and administrative costs, surely the pensioners—the ones who can least afford it—should at least be considered. It should be waived.

One should remember also that, as of 1 July, if insufficient numbers of JPs upgrade their skills and revert to commissioners for declarations they will not be in a position to assist police and the Government by signing warrants and summonses. One should not underestimate the importance of the ready availability of JPs to sign these documents, and any shortage could cause major problems

for operational police in carrying out their duties.

There is also an argument that the Minister should postpone these changes until after the Law Reform Commission, which is currently reviewing the matter, brings down its report. As I understand it, the then Minister for Justice and Attorney-General, Denver Beanland, postponed these changes when in Government and then referred this matter to the Law Reform Commission for a complete review of the situation. I have little doubt that those findings will support the need for training. But I suggest also that they will support, on the basis that these people are performing a very important community service, full subsidies, including the administrative charge.

Recently, I received a letter from a Mr Joe Zerafa, who has already paid for his training and upgraded to a JP (Qualified). He spoke on behalf of many other JPs who have not yet done their course. He made a very good point. His letter, dated 13 May this year, stated—

> "The Question I ask ...
>
> 'When a Public Servant is transferred from one department to another department, who pays the cost of the transfer, the Public Servant or the Public Service?' (Cost of Stationery, Business Cards, Signage, ETC)"

His point is very relevant. If we fully acknowledge—and I think this has been acknowledged in departmental literature—that these people effectively play the role of unpaid public servants, the costs associated with doing their job for the community should be recognised.

Mr Zerafa goes on further to say—and I think this is very relevant—

> "In fact 97-99% of my JP duties are for the Police, and are performed in the odd hours."

Mr Zerafa works shiftwork and, as such, is readily available to the police to sign their summonses and warrants for them at all hours of the day. He is called upon to do this job, one that cannot be done by any other resource. It is a very important part of the law and order system and the administration of the State. He is there. As he said, he paid $125 for the course in 1989, and he is not objecting to that. But he is saying that the ones who are forced to now change their qualification and do this training should be fully subsidised and certainly some consideration should be given for the administrative costs. I believe that there is no justification for charging low income earners, especially pensioners, for this additional training.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (5 p.m.): It is my great pleasure to support the Training and Employment Bill, particularly as this Bill goes a long way towards reinvigorating the TAFE system. I must say that I have had a long association with what was known as the Cairns College of TAFE. Early in 1979—not long after I arrived in Cairns at the end of 1978—I obtained a position teaching part time as well as counselling part time at the Cairns College of TAFE.

I have been pleased to maintain my connections with the TAFE up there through various changes that have taken place over these past 20 years. It is now called the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE. I must say that the truth is that in the months prior to the Beattie Government's election I had never in their history seen the staff of the TAFE as debilitated and dispirited as they were at that time. They were indeed reeling from lots of changes and lots of pressures, some of which were necessary pressures to change but some of which were ongoing uncertainties. Additionally, they were feeling very undervalued by Government at the time, as they were very aware of the previous Government's clear favouritism towards a private sector vocational training system. Of course, I have seen considerable improvements in the years since we have been in Government, but I know that this Bill will be well welcomed by very many of the staff at the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

The Beattie Government is committed to TAFE Queensland. That is the first, clearest and most important message that we wish to send. The Beattie Government is committed to ensuring its viability in a competitive and rapidly changing vocational education and training market. The new Bill underpins that commitment by providing a statutory framework for the TAFE institute structure and its institute councils. It recognises TAFE Queensland as the major and dominant public provider of vocational education and training in Queensland.

The Beattie Government's support of TAFE Queensland acknowledges the immense contribution it makes to regional centres and cities across the State. The TAFE Queensland network of 16 institutes currently provides public sector delivery of vocational education and training programs in over 90 industry areas to about 226,000 students annually. The quality, diversity and

customisation of TAFE's training programs provide invaluable skills development for thousands of Queenslanders.

When the Beattie Government came to power, this valuable asset was on the verge of crisis following the rapid expansion of the competitive training market. The implementation of competitive reforms was undertaken at a faster rate in Queensland than in any other State. The escalation in competitive funding had left TAFE floundering without the necessary time or resources to adjust to such a dramatic change. The Beattie Government acted quickly to deal with the situation by producing a 10-point plan to safeguard TAFE in Queensland. The plan's first point made a firm and unequivocal commitment to the maintenance of TAFE Queensland in public hands. This was accompanied by a freeze of competitive funding at January 1998 levels for three years—still at a level more than that in any other State—to allow institutes to adjust and to place TAFE on a firm financial footing.

Our objective was and still is to see TAFE equipped to compete in both the public and private training markets. Accordingly, we moved immediately towards greater flexibility and autonomy by devolving a range of functions to institutes, including financial and human resource allocations. It will be no surprise to honourable members of this House that this was much appreciated in areas such as Cairns, where it is believed that the particular needs of far-north Queensland are better served by devolution to the local level.

A new body, the board of TAFE Queensland, made up of institute directors was established to provide consultation, coordination and cooperation amongst institutes. The board was given responsibility for matters such as industrial relations, marketing and international business, product development and technology. A task force headed by Kim Bannikoff, a former senior executive of the Australian National Training Authority, was established to undertake a review of TAFE operations. The two key recommendations of that review were that TAFE institutes be re-established in Queensland as key instruments of Government policy in vocational education and training and that institutes be given greater autonomy. In retrospect, those two recommendations were obvious, and yet they clearly needed endorsement by this Government and action to entrench them in the very operations of the institutes.

The report also highlighted the need for TAFE Queensland institutes to adjust to the pressure of change to ensure their long-term viability in the training market. Bannikoff's recommendations formed the basis of a vision statement and constitution for TAFE Queensland, which the Minister launched last July. That vision statement reflects the Government's commitment to preserve TAFE Queensland as more than just another provider. The Bill further affirms this commitment by providing statutory recognition of TAFE institutes in Queensland.

Outlined in the vision is a unique model for TAFE's structure that allows for the maximum level of institute flexibility and autonomy while preserving the strength of TAFE as an individual entity. It also focuses strongly on the relationship between TAFE institutes and the communities they service, and demands that institutes be publicly accountable and responsive at local, regional, State, national and international levels.

I must say that three years ago when I mixed with small business leaders as well as with industry groups in Cairns it was not at all uncommon to hear complaints about the local TAFE institute and its lack of responsiveness to industry needs. I have heard no such complaints in the past 12 months, and that is a credit—certainly in part—to the Beattie Government and the strong leadership and importance we have shown for TAFE institutes as well as, of course, a credit to the staff of the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

To support the transition to more autonomous and accountable institutes, the vision also incorporated the reconstitution of institute councils. These councils represent the community by providing information on local needs and play an important role in contributing to the business direction of TAFE institutes. Through these community focus councils, TAFE institutes are able to respond to the needs of local industries and employers and can use that on-the-ground knowledge to provide the right training for the right people in Queensland communities. The Bill clearly defines the functions of the councils and acknowledges their critical role in supporting high quality vocational education and training in this State.

Already the benefits of the approach encapsulated in the vision are emerging. Eighteen months after the Bannikoff review, TAFE Queensland is in a much stronger position. Through the Government's commitment to implementing the 10-point plan to safeguard TAFE in Queensland and its

freeze on contestable funding, the financial stability of TAFE institutes continues to improve. With this improved financial stability, TAFE institutes are able to offer more effective industry, business and community driven training. Through community representation on TAFE councils, institutes are more responsive than ever to the communities in which they operate. New markets are being identified and opportunities for growth into those markets are being developed.

Significant progress has been made towards achieving a target of 60% of TAFE staff dedicated to training delivery by 2005. Better business practices are being introduced at the institutes and staff morale is improving as TAFE Queensland enjoys success in the State's competitive training market. There is no doubt that TAFE is an invaluable asset to Queensland. Private providers of training in Cairns were also in some consternation at the time of the Beattie Government's election campaign and then election to Government. Their concern was that the competitive market had moved too fast for sensible management even within the private sector and that there was poor control of some fly-by-night providers who were not managing the quality and the standards for vocational education that should be provided.

They also expressed their concern that the Beattie Labor Government may excessively favour public education and therefore favour the institutes at their expense. It is to the credit of the Minister that that has not happened. While we have strengthened the public sector TAFE system of Queensland, at the same time the private sector has been given the chance to stabilise and to compete in a market that they think is fair and balanced.

The globalisation of the marketplace is important for Cairns and, I dare say, other centres in Queensland. The pace and the complexity of technological change demands that TAFE Queensland be equipped with a competitive edge. Through the reforms introduced by this Government and supported in the Training and Employment Bill, TAFE Queensland is now well placed to meet those challenges and to provide Queenslanders with high-quality vocational education and training for the 21st century.

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (5.11 p.m.): I also rise to support the Training and Employment Bill. I will not rehash everything that has been said by other members; suffice it to say that education via apprenticeships is one of the most important tools we have in breaking the unemployment cycle and getting young people back into the work force in meaningful employment and not just part-time casual labour. Many young friends and associates of mine undertaking apprenticeships have a lot of difficulty in completing their apprenticeships. That may have something to do with the terms of reference they are employed under. However, there are also some unscrupulous employers who treat apprenticeships as a means of getting a cheap employee for quite some time and who then let them go just before they finish their trade papers. I know quite a few people who have been put in circumstances where their apprenticeships have been held up because they got dumped just before their papers were ready to be signed because their employer did not want a fully qualified employee but an apprentice. I look forward to this Bill being implemented. Hopefully it will give firmer guidance on those issues.

Meaningful employment is one of the biggest problems we face in our society. More and more people are being employed in casual labour and not in jobs such as those that existed in the old days, that is, jobs in which they could be employed for quite some time. There is also the concept of education before one can be employed in some jobs today. I will give an example. When my father joined the Police Service, he did not even have a Year 10 education, yet to join the Police Service now one has to complete a degree of some sort. Another example is military employment. When I joined the Army, I needed only a Year 10 qualification. Nowadays one needs a Year 12 qualification to join the Army. Higher education levels are needed to get into jobs that may be considered by some to be of an ordinary nature, such as a soldier. As those levels increase, the support we have to provide to people when moving from high school into TAFE or tertiary education also needs to increase at the same time.

We need to recognise that having permanent employment enables a person to build a life around that employment. That is the difference between a person who is employed casually at Coles and a person who is employed in a stable career as a police officer, for example. One has a career path from which they can build a life, plan for the future, get a loan, get married and move on. The other has a job that is there one week yet might not be there the week after. We certainly need to address the permanent employment issue. I believe that this Bill is a step in the direction of addressing those issues. The Bill makes it more possible in realistic terms for

people to get a tertiary or TAFE education in order to move into that level of employment. Another example is an apprentice chef. They obtain their qualification and trade papers through an apprenticeship. They can then move into a service industry, an industry which is growing quite rapidly and in which demand is high.

A couple of months ago in Cairns a severe shortage of chefs and cooking professionals received quite a lot of press coverage. It made the papers. Employers were going to start looking overseas in the South Pacific and New Zealand for people to come to Australia to work. That to me is a shocking indictment on the levels of training we provide for young people in our society.

Ms Boyle: What about the Olympics?

Mr NELSON: Exactly. There is a massive demand. In Cairns, the tablelands and areas in far-north Queensland there is a growing demand for skilled labour. The James Cook University, much to its credit, is trying to address that as best it can. I recently attended the opening of a new library at that university. The facilities at JCU are certainly expanding to meet the needs of far-north Queensland, as is the Cairns TAFE and TAFE colleges throughout the region, be that at Innisfail or Mareeba. Now that the facilities are in place in those regions, we need the people there as well. We need the positions. We need the teaching staff. We need to create all the opportunities we possibly can to enable the people of far-north Queensland to fill those positions.

Cairns has an incredible tourist base judging by the number of visitors coming into the area. We need people in that region to cater for and look after those tourists, especially with the advent of the Olympics. A lot of people will see the Olympics as an opportunity to come to Australia for a holiday. They may go from Sydney to Cairns and spend a couple of days in paradise before they head back to the drudgery of Washington, New York or whatever hellhole they came from.

Ms Boyle interjected.

Mr NELSON: Melbourne. The simple fact is that education and training are issues that need to be addressed not only at this level but also at a Federal level. A point made blindingly clear by protesters at the opening of the library was that JCU is not being treated fairly by the Federal Government. The southern universities based in Melbourne and Sydney get a much greater advantage with access to student numbers than JCU does, because it is a regional university. This issue certainly needs addressing as far as equity and funding levels from the Federal Government are concerned. I do not wish to deprecate the fact that it helped fund a $12.5m library and is helping to fund medical facilities at Townsville. However, in a modern society moving very rapidly into IT, we need to give people training. We need to give people a leg up. We need to have move-on powers, if one can call them that, from high school onwards so that people can gain meaningful employment and build lives.

Ultimately, one of the biggest issues in our society is the breakdown of the family unit and the breakdown of what a lot of us in this Chamber grew up with, that is, where either mum, dad or both had full-time employment they could count on to get a housing loan and to get a car loan. Those days are gone. About 80% of the people I went to high school with have not been able to gain full-time employment. That is a very tough statistic to come to terms with. Yes, they might be partially employed or may have a retainer from a law firm, but they have not gained that full-time employment that their parent's generation were able to gain and build a life around. That is going to start hitting home within the next 10 or 15 years. We are already seeing ramifications like a massively debt-ridden society. I support the Bill. I certainly hopes that it achieves the results it sets out to achieve.

Mr WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (5.19 p.m.): I rise with great pleasure to support the Training and Employment Bill 2000 and to indicate my support for a number of amendments that are effected via Schedule 1 to the Bill currently before the House. They are consequential and supplementary changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999.

The provisions of the Industrial Relations Act became effective in July 1999. The Act promotes economic and social objectives by providing an industrial relations system that is fair and equitable and promotes economic prosperity, job security and jobs growth. This Act represented a significant step forward in industrial relations in this State and has set the stage for the conduct of industrial relations into the 21st century.

At the time the Act was introduced, members opposite sounded the death knell for business in Queensland and heralded industrial chaos. These predictions have not come true. Not one of the predictions of doom that came from the Opposition has eventuated. The evidence for this can be seen in the figures for industrial disputes and unfair dismissal applications. Both of these indicators

are lower under the Industrial Relations Act than they were under the coalition's Workplace Relations Act.

The latest available figures show that 1,331 unfair dismissal applications were made in the first 10 months of the operation of the Industrial Relations Act, compared with 1,404 during the last 10 months of the operation of the previous Act—a fall of 5.5%. Industrial disputes decreased from 36,000 days lost to 26,000 days lost—a fall of 26.3% based on most recent figures comparing the seven months prior to and following the introduction of the Industrial Relations Act. Queensland was the only State to record such a drop. A major reason for this is that the Industrial Relations Act gave the Industrial Relations Commission the power to intervene during protected bargaining periods and resolve disputes quickly.

Now we see a number of amendments to the Industrial Relations Act that are contained in Schedule 1 to the Bill. As the Minister stated in his second-reading speech, these amendments are mainly technical amendments. Nevertheless, they show three things very clearly. The first point is that the spirit of consultation and cooperation that was evident at the time the Act was first introduced has continued. The Act was introduced following a significant consultation process, the key feature of which was the independent tripartite industrial relations task force. Many of the amendments that are contained in Schedule 1 to the Bill are the result of consultation with unions and employer organisations or approaches from these organisations. The Government has demonstrated that it is continually willing to work with employees, unions and employers to develop and improve its industrial relations legislation.

The second point is that these amendments are of a technical nature. They strengthen and clarify the original intentions of the Government when it introduced the Industrial Relations Act 1999. These amendments represent no change in Government policy because the Government got it right the first time. The provisions of the Act address the real needs of Queensland employees and employers. They take account of both social and economic goals and ensure a balance between the achievement of fair outcomes for workers and the improvement in the production performance of Queensland industry.

The third point is that the recent proposal put forward by Peter Reith to try to use the Constitution's corporations powers to override existing State and Federal industrial laws is fatally flawed. The relevant amendment relates to the removal of the exemption from State unfair dismissal provisions for Federal award employees not employed by constitutional corporations. Clause 18 of the Bill removes the feature of the Act that was first introduced in the Workplace Relations Act 1997.

This provision was designed as complementary legislation—designed, I might say, by the coalition—to support an experiment by Peter Reith to use the corporations power to underpin Federal unfair dismissal laws. This experiment, aided and abetted by the member for Clayfield—the workers' friend—has failed miserably. The High Court has held that Federal award employees who are not employed by constitutional corporations—there are a staggering 55,000 of them in Queensland alone—are not protected by any unfair dismissal provisions. They can be sacked at will. This is a direct result of the coalition's amendments to reflect the Reith agenda at a Federal level. We will not see the member for Clayfield or the Federal Minister crying any tears for these workers. They would be happy to see these workers without any industrial relations protection whatsoever. We note the total silence of the member for Clayfield about the High Court's decision since it was handed down.

The member for Clayfield has already talked about handing Queensland industrial relations powers to the Commonwealth, the great defender of States' rights that he is. He has expressed keen interest in the Reith proposal to try to use the corporations power to abolish the current State and Federal industrial relations system—an abuse of the Federal Constitution.

Mr SANTORO: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I again go on the record as saying that the comments that the honourable member is making in relation to me are not true. I have not—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): What is your point of order? If you are seeking to have it withdrawn, I will ask him to withdraw.

Mr SANTORO: Has he signalled that he will withdraw it?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: You are entitled to seek a withdrawal on the basis that—

Mr SANTORO: I would like the comments to be withdrawn, because they are not true.

Mr WILSON: I would not want to offend the member for Clayfield and excite his exaggerated level of sensitivity, so I will

withdraw that, in great deference to you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, the agenda of Mr Reith and the member for Clayfield has been to exploit the Federal Constitution, contrary to the intention of the founding fathers of our Federal Constitution, to use the corporations power to diminish the rights of the States—to circumvent the industrial relations powers the States retain by virtue of the plenary powers they have arising from their own separate State constitutions. That exercise has been thwarted by the High Court—thankfully, we must say.

The Reith and Santoro agenda would see the dismantling of the strong and independent industrial tribunals and take us back to the law of the jungle, where the relative power of the corporations and of workers is left to work itself out in this mythical, magic place called the marketplace. Workers would be left without protection and would see their employment conditions vanish.

Under this scenario strikes would escalate, as we saw in relation to the Gordonstone mine. Workers were covered by a Federal award and the dispute was dealt with in the Federal commission a year or so ago. We would again see the masked security guards and attack dogs behind barbed wire fences. Those symbols of the Reith agenda and the agenda of the coalition here in Queensland will remain forever etched in the minds of not only workers in Queensland and throughout Australia but also the general population. They signify everything that is anathema to the concept of a fair go held by all workers and decent people in the community, including the vast majority of employers in Australia.

Victoria is an example of a State that sought to hand its industrial relations system over to the Commonwealth. Its system had far less coverage than does the Queensland system. Historically, the Victorian industrial relations system was developed with a major role for the Federal industrial relations system in any event. So there is a relatively small number of State award workers employed in Victoria as opposed to, say, Western Australia or Queensland. The consequence of Victoria going the full hog, as it did—it handed over its industrial relations system to the Commonwealth—was that when industrial disputes followed the Victorian Government was powerless to act and Reith himself refused to act. Indeed, the Federal coalition Government was delighted that these disputes existed and that they became protracted disputes that were difficult to settle and caused enormous disruption to the normal course of business and Australian community life. This was part of the Federal coalition's agenda.

This case shows that the Federal Minister has no genuine commitment to establish a workable, unified industrial relations system on a collaborative basis. Hundreds of thousands of Victorian workers have been left with little or no industrial relations protection as Reith rejects the continuing efforts of the Victorian Government to establish a satisfactory system—efforts now being undertaken by a Victorian Government under the leadership of Steve Bracks, who heads an excellent Labor Government. Do not believe Reith and the member for Clayfield and others of the same Far Right ideological bent when they seek to justify deregulation of the labour market on the basis of jobs growth and the economy. The evidence is clear that this is not the case. All that deregulation would do is increase the growing gulf between high and low-paid workers.

A 1997 OECD report found few real links between economic performance and bargaining systems. A recent analysis of the radical deregulation of industrial relations in New Zealand introduced by its Far Right idealogues has shown that expected improvements in economic performance have not been achieved in that economy or that society. The study, commissioned by the New Zealand Treasury, found that labour productivity fell following the unchecked Reith-style deregulation of the labour market.

The member for Clayfield has also stated that the Beattie Government's industrial relations laws have favoured unions over business. The facts simply do not support the member's political rhetoric, but then we would not want to get in the road of the absence of facts. The Industrial Relations Act was developed with the cooperation of employers and employees, as I indicated earlier, and this spirit of cooperation has continued. As I said earlier, there were higher levels of industrial disputes and unfair dismissal complaints under the coalition's Workplace Relations Act. When that flawed piece of legislation was in force in Queensland, there was no talk from the member for Clayfield of handing Queensland's industrial relations jurisdiction to the Commonwealth. In contrast, he defended it vigorously. His latest statements are clearly all about putting ideology before commonsense, but we have come to expect nothing less than that approach from the member or the Queensland coalition generally.

In this climate, given the fundamental policy differences between the Queensland and Federal Governments, it is more important than ever that Queensland maintains its own strong and independent industrial relations jurisdictions, just as it has over many, many decades of a separate State-based jurisdiction that has developed in Queensland since 1916.

In conclusion, I congratulate the Minister on the Industrial Relations Act 1999 and the Training and Employment Bill. I have been addressing my comments to Schedule 1 to that Bill. Both of those pieces of legislation are fair and balanced, and each has demonstrated the clear intention to meet the needs of all Queenslanders. The amendments being made under the Bill before the House can only strengthen that Act. I thoroughly support the Bill.

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—CCAQ) (5.34 p.m.): I rise to support the main thrust of the Bill. I have been listening to some of the waffle from Government members about training, sacking and employing. I disagree with their comments. I am one of the very few members of this House who has done an apprenticeship.

Government members: Ha, ha!

Mr KNUTH: How many Government members have done an apprenticeship? How many of them have even been employees? I have a 16 year old son who has already lost his first job. That did not upset me, because I consider that part of his training in life. He has to learn to respect the employer, and he has to learn to get his head down and work.

We hear from Government members of the unfair dismissal laws introduced in the past. They wonder why employers do not want to employ any more. We always hear journalists and talkback radio hosts saying, "Why can't somebody get a job? Why can't they get employment?", but we never hear those people ask an employer why he will not employ people. Government members always advocate the bleeding-heart approach that everybody has a right to keep a job no matter how little they work or how badly they perform.

Mr Sullivan: Rubbish!

Mr KNUTH: It is not rubbish; it is fact.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I am not a Tory; I have never voted for the Liberal Party in my life. I will not even get their votes. The system under which an employer cannot sack an employee who is not performing is wrong. For hundreds of years employers have put on workers, and I have never met an employer who will sack a person if that person is doing the job right.

Mr Lucas: Oh!

Mr KNUTH: The member for Lytton would not know. He came out of school, went to university and came straight into this House. He would not have a clue. He has never experienced life.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr KNUTH: How many people has the member employed? I have been through the school of hard knocks, and I know what it is like out there in the real world. I respect the member for Bulimba. He has been through the school of hard knocks and he knows what I am talking about.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr KNUTH: The hard knocks I got are from experience. It is about time we woke up to why we have such high unemployment in this country.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I am not intending to flatter the member for Clayfield, but I recognise some truths on both sides, and I appreciate the true position.

I do not know which Government implemented prevocational training, but it was one of the best ideas ever put in place.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I do not know who put it in place, but it alleviates a lot of the problems experienced by employers in the past in taking on apprentices. The system allows apprentices to complete their theory before they are employed. One of the major problems has been a lack of incentives for employers to take on apprentices. One of the problems employers faced in taking on an apprentice was having to send him or her to college for seven continuous weeks each year. That was pretty hard on an employer, because he had to pay the apprentice while he or she was attending tech and not on the job. Usually when an apprentice finished the stint at tech, the employer had to pay him or her for four or five weeks' holiday. That turned off a lot of employers. But prevocational training is a very intelligent and good idea. This is the sort of incentive required by employers. They do not need handouts or money.

The $2,000 incentive has been a failure in the past, and I believe I know why. I note that the legislation defines an apprentice, a trainee and a registered training organisation, but it does not define a trainer, an employer or a tradesman. I do not know whether this matter

has been rectified—I do not believe it has—but a lot of so-called tradesmen are taking on apprentices under these incentive schemes. These people are not tradesmen. I have witnessed this occurring quite regularly. Young fellows have been taken on by fly-by-night tradesmen who have no qualifications to train apprentices. However, the apprenticeship board has recognised these fly-by-nighters and has given them the $2,000 incentive. Three or four years later these apprentices have still not learned a basic trade because they have been victims of the blind leading the blind.

A Government member interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Some have and some have not. Some of them keep the apprentices on. This is something I have witnessed. Honourable members opposite cannot say that it has not happened, because I have seen it all my life. Before anyone can be considered as an employer in the building trades he must be an accredited tradesman.

The Gold Card system has been an absolute failure. Many so-called tradesmen were able to get through the loopholes and gain their Gold Card.

Mr Robertson: There is nothing worse than a dodgy employer.

Mr KNUTH: There are plenty of dodgy employers, but an employer has the right to get rid of someone who is not worth being employed.

Mr Robertson: Even a dodgy one?

Mr KNUTH: Dodgy ones should not have apprentices in the first place. If a person is not an accredited tradesman he should not be able to employ an apprentice. Do the members opposite want me to say that again?

Government members: No.

Mr KNUTH: These people are slipping through the system. A lot of the apprenticeship boards are not scrutinising the people who are receiving these incentives. These people are using the $2,000 incentive to take on young apprentices when they do not even know the trade themselves. I have seen this first-hand. I was in the building trade for 20 years. I have seen this occurring time and time again. These young fellows are taken on by another employer later in their lives and they are abused because they are not tradesmen. They do not know how to do their job because they were not taught by an accredited tradesman.

I have no problem with the actual thrust of the Bill. However, it does contain flaws. If the situation with regard to apprentices is rectified now, I am sure that we will not have a similar problem in the future. When the Gold Card was introduced it did very little to separate non-tradesmen from tradesmen because there was a grandfather clause in the Gold Card system whereby anyone could go and grab a Gold Card. Many tradesmen had completed four-year apprenticeships and they had to stand by and watch just anyone grab a Gold Card and call himself a tradesman. That is one of the great flaws in the Gold Card system.

I do not deny that the system has been tightened up, but we are going to have apprentices all around this country who have been trained by non-tradesmen. This anomaly has not been rectified in the Bill. I ask the Minister to take this problem into consideration. We need to ensure that any tradesman who employs an apprentice is a genuine tradesman. He must be able to prove that he has been through—

Mr Lucas: Or she.

Mr KNUTH: Or she, yes. He must be able to prove that he went through a technical college, as I did. I attended Ithaca College. He must be able to show his indentures in order to prove that he has completed an apprenticeship. That is all I am asking.

As I said earlier, prevocational training was definitely a step in the right direction. It gives employers incentives to take on apprentices. 95% of the students who go through prevocational training are employed within three months. That is a pretty good indication that the system is working well. That is the sort of training system that we have to look at. We should not be considering giving hand-outs. We have to give employers greater incentives to employ apprentices.

It is very hard out in the real world. I know that a lot of honourable members opposite do not understand, but it is very hard for small businesses, especially those in rural Queensland, to make ends meet. They would find it difficult to put on an apprentice at the moment. They need greater incentive systems such as prevocational training.

Mr SULLIVAN (Chermside—ALP) (5.45 p.m.): I rise to support the Training and Employment Bill. I had not initially put my name down on the speaking list, but I feel that I must respond very briefly to a couple of things that the member for Burdekin has said. The member for Burdekin is wrong in a couple of the claims that he made about this side of politics. Unfortunately, his ignorance in this area is quite profound.

I speak from a background of having been involved in the independent teachers union—it was then called QATIS and it is now QIEU, the Queensland Independent Education Union. I can say to the member for Burdekin that, from that union's point of view, the teachers and the union have no problem with the sacking of people who are not performing as teachers. They also have no problem with the sacking of persons who are unfit to be teachers.

I was the independent teachers' nominee on the Board of Teacher Education, which is now the Board of Teacher Registration, which registers the 60,000-plus teachers in the State. It was fellow teachers who brought to the board's attention people whom they believed were either non-performing or were unsuitable people to teach. They do not want a poorly performed, poorly trained, unfit person as a teacher. The union gave total support to that view.

I also want to say that unions have no problem with the sacking of people provided that two things occur. Due process must be followed so that if there is a fault in what the person is doing that person has a chance to rectify it. Unfair and unjust dismissals which are the result of a personality clash or simply where an employer takes a dislike to an employee for an unknown reason and which had nothing to do with their work performance must be reversed. They are the only two areas where the unions have a problem.

Mr Lucas: In fact, usually fellow workers are very clear on their view either way—either pro or against in relation to a dismissal.

Mr SULLIVAN: That is right. Who wants to be in a manufacturing industry where a person is not performing well? That person endangers the lives of his fellow employees.

Mr Knuth: Why do they take them to court, then?

Mr SULLIVAN: That is because there are some cases of unfair and unjust dismissals. The number of cases that come before the Industrial Commission compared with the number of people who are sacked during the year is infinitesimal—it is a fraction of 1% of the work force.

Mr Knuth: That's not what I have seen or been told.

Mr SULLIVAN: If that is not what the member is seeing and being told, then he is not seeing and being told the truth. I suggest that he gets some better information. He could have a look at the detailed report that this Minister puts out each year. That report shows what the Industrial Relations Commission does. He could speak to an industrial registrar, who is a public servant at the Industrial Relations Commission. That person will be able to tell the honourable member the number of cases that come through and he can compare that with the number of dismissals—which are many.

On a personal basis, my family's business was in the liquor and catering industry through 29 Murray Street and the Royal National Association grounds where we had the liquor licence for many years. We catered for the Ekka, the speedway, the footy and things such as that. We had permanent employees, we had permanent part-time employees and we had casual employees. All the people who worked for us held a union ticket. A number of people were sacked. Over the 70 years that we held the franchise we did not have one blue with the union, and that was for this reason: any time someone was sacked, it was because they were not performing and their fellow workers knew that the extra workload was being thrust on to them. What the member for Burdekin said in regard to permanent part-timers and casuals is simply untrue. I hope that, as a result of this debate, he can be educated.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (5.49 p.m.): I rise to support this legislation that was introduced by the Minister for Training and Industrial Relations, the Honourable Paul Braddy. I wish to address a particularly important aspect of the training infrastructure in Queensland, and that is the important role played by agricultural colleges in this State.

Members will be aware that I have the privilege of having two such colleges in my electorate—one in Longreach and one in Emerald. The other two colleges are located at Dalby and in the Burdekin. Those colleges play a vital role in the training of young people who want to enter agricultural industry. Today, I want to place on record the magnificent work that has been and is being done by those colleges and will be done in the future. An important fact to remember is that these colleges provide young Queenslanders and other young Australians with the opportunity to be trained to a very high, professional level in the art of management and all other facets of agriculture. I pay tribute to the Director of the Longreach Pastoral College, Dr Frank Keenan, the Director of the Emerald Pastoral College, Mr Mal Binnington, and their respective boards, which operate under the chairmanship of Wally Miller for the Longreach college board and Mrs Dyan Hughes for the Emerald college board.

As I said, those two colleges have played a vital role in the training of young people in agriculture over a long period. The important thing to remember is the diverse skills that these colleges instil in these young people and the opportunities that these young people are given through their presence at these institutions. Back in December 1989 when I became the member for Gregory, I visited the Longreach Pastoral College and saw the opportunities that are available to these young people to familiarise themselves with all facets of the pastoral industry. I believe that those young people can learn at those colleges in two years what took me 20 years to learn. I think that those colleges present wonderful opportunities for young people.

I salute the Government for its apprenticeship scheme. I know that in many ways that scheme has copped a fair bit of flak, but we are talking about young people and it is absolutely paramount that we recognise that it is our responsibility, no matter on which side of the House we sit, to provide them with a future. I believe that young people are our most important natural resource. It is our responsibility to make absolutely certain, no matter what field they want to enter, that we give them the opportunity to do so.

Since about 1965, agricultural colleges have been providing essential vocational education training for the State's rural sector. These colleges were an initiative of the former coalition Government and have had a very positive impact upon the professionalism of various occupations that are critical for the future development of rural industries. We know that in recent times some of those rural industries have been going through trying times. We know of the hardship that is being experienced by the sugar industry in the Burdekin. We also know about the developing fruit industry in that region. I know when I was Minister for Transport and Main Roads—and this is going back a couple of years—it was considered important that we upgrade the road infrastructure of that region so that we could develop that industry.

The magnificent value of these agricultural colleges lies in the fact that they are located in four totally different rural districts. Young people—not just young people from Queensland but young people Australiawide—can take advantage of the unique training skills and the unique career paths that these institutions offer. The Emerald Pastoral College offers wide-ranging training in horticulture, cotton cropping, the grain industry and the cattle industry to allow young people to take our agricultural industries further into the 21st century. The Dalby Pastoral College deals mainly with grain. The Longreach Pastoral College deals with the wool industry. I know that currently the wool industry is going through trying times. However, we still have young men and women who want to give their total commitment to that industry, and I believe that we have to give them a total commitment in return.

As I say, these four colleges give young people a qualification that will enable them to understand our agricultural regions and the difficulties that they face. I want to take this opportunity to touch on a couple of very contentious issues. Last Thursday evening in this Parliament, I referred to the plight of the wool industry. Currently, the wool industry is trying to take itself out of a dilemma. However, the industry was told by the Federal Government to take control of its own agenda and put in place an operation that will take it out of the wilderness and into the clouds above. During my contribution last Thursday evening, I said people such as Warren Truss, Mr Costello and John Howard, the Prime Minister, were not listening. I think that Governments, politicians and communities at large are going to fail if they are not going to listen to the needs of people, and the people involved in the wool industry are no exception. The people in the sugar industry are also no exception. Those industries face hardship.

I also want to touch on the fruit and vegetable industry. The glassy winged shooter moth could be imported into this country through the importation of grapes. Grape growing is an integral part of the Emerald irrigation area, which is a developing agricultural area. It is absolutely paramount that the Government—and I am not talking about the State Government; I am talking about the Federal Government—realises the consequences of ludicrous, irresponsible policy decisions that act to the detriment of those agricultural industries.

Debate, on motion of Mr Johnson, adjourned.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Members for Tablelands and Barambah

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Leader of the House) (5.58 p.m.): I give notice that tomorrow I shall move—

> "That the House notes Report No. 41 of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee and resolves—
>
> (a) that Mr Shaun Nelson MLA, Member for Tablelands and Mrs Dorothy Pratt

MLA, Member for Barambah committed a contempt of the Parliament by engaging in disorderly and disrespectful conduct in the precincts of the Parliament while it was in session and behaving in a manner not befitting members of Parliament;

(b) that both members be suspended from the services and the precincts of the House for 28 days; and

(c) that the House discharge Mr Shaun Nelson MLA, Member for Tablelands from membership of the Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee."

NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (5.59 p.m.): I move—

"That this House calls on the Federal Government, and particularly the Federal Health Minister, to recognise the current inequity across Australia where those dependent on illicit drugs access free syringes through needle exchange programs yet others with diagnosed medical conditions—for example, diabetes—are required to purchase their syringes from Government or private suppliers.

Further, this Parliament seeks an assurance from the Federal Health Minister that access to free syringes for medically dependent individuals is made available during this budget period."

In moving this motion, I am not intending to pit the State Government against the Federal Government but to encourage cooperation in an area which affects many families in our electorates. However, in addressing this motion to the Federal Government I am endeavouring to avoid cost shifting or cost transfer, as a motion calling on "the Government" to fund a free needle service to diabetics would inevitably be interpreted as "the State Government should pay this cost". Currently, the Federal Government covers this cost. Through the diabetics association and other avenues, I understand that the cost is $8 per hundred needles. If one is a Health Care Card holder or a pensioner, the cost is $5 per hundred syringes. Many diabetics, especially young children, need up to four injections per day, with many more requiring two injections per day. This means that a person or a family may be required to buy more than a box per month each and every month of the year into infinity. This motion is intended to retain that cost within the Federal jurisdiction, where it sits appropriately at the moment.

In Queensland, the State Government funds the needle exchange program. I am sure that following my contribution tonight either the Minister for Health or other honourable members will cite the cost of this program to Queensland Health. Needles are made available to people with an addiction free of charge for very simple reasons—to avoid the spread of HIV/AIDS, hepatitis A and hepatitis B and other diseases transmittable through the multiple use of syringes by a number of people. The risk of these diseases being spread via medically diagnosed patients, for example, diabetics, is not an issue. Firstly, they do not share needles; however, secondly, because of the cost of purchasing needles, many individuals do reuse syringes. This practice is not encouraged by either the manufacturers or health practitioners. However, it is known to occur. If needles are available to diabetics free of charge, as occurs under the needle exchange program, they will return to using a syringe only once or twice. As I said earlier, they do not attract any concerns about HIV/AIDS and other transmittable disease. However, with the cost factor being removed, they will go back to less risky practices.

As to the problems they face at the moment with multiple use, the needles weaken after several uses and subsequently are at risk of breaking off. They get blunt and therefore greater pain is experienced by the user of used syringes and greater damage to tissue than is desirable occurs. The easy answer to these problems is for the medically diagnosed individuals to access free needles from the needle exchange service. That is a throwaway statement, but practical problems are attached to this proposition.

I have spoken to the diabetics and other people who are medically required to use syringes and also to their parents and grandparents. For example, they have told me that, if they attend a needle exchange venue, it could be perceived that they are addicted to illicit drugs. In a small or even in a large community that perception results in a label attaching to a person that is neither true nor desirable. They also have safety concerns. It has been acknowledged in this Chamber that illicit drug users—not all but a proportion of them—commit crimes to fund their habits. Parents of diabetics have said that they would use the needle exchange but for the fact that they feel vulnerable and unsafe when

accessing the service. As a result, they have a great sense of insecurity.

The syringes given out at the replacement program centres are too large for many diabetics. Young children need only a very fine syringe. An allied issue and one that I, unfortunately, did not include in the motion but which I will discuss tonight is something that cannot be ignored and must be included along with the consideration of the free supply of syringes, and that is the free availability of medical sharps containers to diabetics and other medically diagnosed people for the safe disposal of used syringes. Currently, diabetics must purchase these at their own expense.

Small sharps containers are located on each level of Parliament House. These are provided for the disposal of not only syringes but also other sharps, such as splinter removers. Today I checked their cost at a chemist. A one to 1.4 litre container costs $6.95, a four litre container costs $12 and a 7.8 litre container costs $15.95. Currently, diabetics and others with similar problems are required to purchase those containers. In my local area, an average of 10 to 14 containers are handed to drug users every night. Yet diabetics and others with a medical problem are required to buy their needles and their sharps containers. Many of the people I am talking about—the people with medical problems—are responsible people who dispose of used syringes appropriately and safely. Without free access to those sharps containers, councils face the increased risk of injuries to their workers or other people who visit council dumps to dispose of household waste. Many councils have special arrangements enabling responsible people who use sharps containers to bring the full containers to the council chamber or to the council depot for safe disposal.

As I said, the two issues are interrelated, although the motion I have moved tonight—and I am pleased to note it will get general support—deals with just the free supply of needles. That is the focus of the motion. However, as I said, sharps containers are an additional cost to families who often can ill afford it.

A six year old girl whom I know very well administers her own insulin by injection. Her parents have educated her on the safest possible way to administer her insulin and are continuing to do so. That includes using a single syringe for a single injection and disposing of it afterwards. The family is on a limited income and other children in the family also have health problems. The cost to many of us, at $8 per hundred syringes, even when it is multiplied out over a year, appears insignificant, but this is an added burden for this family that it can ill afford.

As a community we accept the availability of syringes free to people who have an illicit drug habit. We accept the cost to Government and the community as a form of insurance against or at least as a way of reducing the probability of diseases being transmitted through the multiple use of syringes. The motion tonight is intended to show regard for a group in our community that deserves equal consideration—not better consideration but equal consideration.

As I said earlier, the Federal Government already supplies syringes at a subsidised price—$8 per hundred or $5 per hundred for Health Care Card holders or pensioners. But many of these families still see this as iniquitous. They hear a lot about the free needle exchange program and about the irresponsible discarding of needles on streets and beaches. They have to go to their chemist or their supplier at the community health centre or at the diabetics association and purchase their needles and sharps containers. They are angry about this inequity. They believe needles should be available to them free of charge. I support that. I believe the majority of honourable members support the motion. It is essential also that consideration be given to the provision of free sharps containers to ensure safe and appropriate disposal of used syringes. I thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for Health for indicating to me that they will support this motion. I believe our community will be the beneficiary if we can convince the Federal Government to fund this most appropriate service.

Hon. W. M. EDMOND (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Health) (6.09 p.m.): I am happy to second this motion. It is estimated that more than 160,000 Queenslanders suffer from diabetes. In this day and age, diabetes is a major health concern. Due to the lifestyles we are living, growing numbers of people are developing diabetes, and the flow-on effects are impacting severely on our health system, as we see increased incidences of kidney disease, cardiac disease, cardiovascular problems, eye problems and all of the other secondary effects of diabetes. Obviously not all of these diabetics require regular insulin injections. However, the cost and the availability of needles is a real issue for the tens of thousands of Queenslanders who do, and I accept the points made by the member for Gladstone.

In the 12 months from 1 April 1999 to 31 March this year, almost 50,000 packs of needles were distributed to Queenslanders under the national diabetes services scheme. My advice from Diabetes Australia, which administers this scheme on behalf of the Federal Government, is that demand from this scheme is growing at 20% per year. Of the packs of needles distributed in Queensland during the period just quoted, more than 14,000 were distributed to general patients and the other 33,000 packs were distributed to concessional patients. While the needle packs are subsidised, there is a cost to patients. For general patients, as the member for Gladstone mentioned, it works out at a cost of 8c per needle; for concessional patients it is a cost of about 5c per needle.

This impost is a cause of concern to Diabetes Australia and the Queensland part of that organisation, Diabetes Australia (Queensland), which does excellent work in the interests of Queensland diabetics. Not only do I endorse its excellent work, but I have also agreed to be the patron—I have been for some time—of the organisation, and I work quite closely with them and help them whenever I can. So honourable members can see that I have a personal as well as a professional interest in this issue.

Perhaps I should admit to the House that that personal interest is even deeper because I am one of those many people who are at risk of diabetes. I was told when I was 25 that I could expect to get diabetes by the time I was 40, largely because of my predisposition and the fact that I have a strong family history and I had gestational diabetes when I was pregnant with each of my children, and that caused severe complications for those children. I am now, I guess, overweight and over 50 and even more at risk. I am still holding it at bay through diet and other things, but it still is a problem and I am still on that cusp of not quite needing medication but being close to it. So I do have a close personal interest in this issue as well as a professional interest.

On 29 April I had the pleasure of attending the Royal Australian College of General Practice conference on the Gold Coast to launch a diabetes management plan called Queensland Standard Care Pathway 2000. This plan is an excellent example of the close collaboration which now exists between the medical profession, Queensland Health and the community sector in identifying, managing and treating diabetes. The pathway is a tool for integration. While it is clearly a decision support instrument for GPs, it is also a tool for other health professionals who are members of the diabetes team.

Diabetes Australia has worked diligently on behalf of its constituents and has a long and successful history of lobbying for a fair deal for people with diabetes, and that is what we are talking about tonight. Diabetes Australia is a federation of 12 community based medical and research organisations. In 1986 it successfully lobbied the Federal Government for subsidised products for people with diabetes and, as a result, the national diabetes supply scheme was established. This scheme is administered by Diabetes Australia on behalf of the Federal Government.

I have to say that the organisation has a very proud history throughout Australia, although I am most familiar with its work on the ground in Queensland. In common with so many Queenslanders, I am personally disappointed that the Federal Government has been deaf to the approaches from Diabetes Australia and has refused to loosen the Federal purse strings to meet the reasonable expectations of the organisation and the people it represents. For that reason, I am pleased to support the motion before us tonight and pledge the Queensland Government's ongoing support in this campaign for a fair deal.

In Queensland diabetics can and do access free needles through our safe needle programs. However, I fully understand their concerns and their reluctance to do so. That is why we support their call for financial support from the Federal Government. I think it is absurd that the Federal Government can find $2.2 billion to prop up wealthy private health funds but cannot find a few dollars to fund important and worthy initiatives such as a free needle program for diabetics. It can find $360m to splurge on the GST ads but not for Diabetes Australia.

Mrs PRATT (Barambah—IND) (6.13 p.m.): The member for Gladstone has raised an issue that has been of great concern to many members of the general public over a long period. There is a perceived inequality between those who have a need to obtain syringes for what is—or could be—a life threatening condition and those who choose to become drug abusers. These items are essential for the wellbeing of those people who suffer a diagnosed medical condition over which they have absolutely no choice, such as diabetes. The needs of drug abusers and addicts, on the other hand, are seen as a choice, a self-afflicted condition. Although people may not object to the issuing of

needles to these addicts, they do question the fairness of the system.

In rising to support this motion, I acknowledge the purpose and intent of why the needle exchange program was brought into being. This program was implemented to combat the growing problems of the transmission of contagious diseases, such as hepatitis and AIDS. Both of these diseases were becoming widespread and continue to be spread by the continual sharing of needles by drug addicts or substance abusers. It is often the case in modern society that those who rebel against society and do not conform, who put themselves in a position of losing all concern for not only their own welfare but also the welfare of others by sharing needles, do need to have available programs such as the needle exchange program. However, I question the volume of syringes that are handed out.

It would be accepted more readily by the community if it was indeed a one-for-one exchange. The reports of discarded syringes on beaches have begun to have everyday beach goers questioning their safety and that of their children. The volume of syringes carelessly discarded by users is often noted by council workers and others around the streets, and it is the aim of a one-for-one proposal to stop the wilful discarding of used syringes which endanger the health of many non-abusers. The wound inflicted by those discarded needles is as devastating emotionally and psychologically as it possibly is physically. I would be surprised if any of these discarded needles were attributed to diabetics or others using syringes as an aid to maintaining their health.

The argument to supply free syringes to addicts is purely a health one. People who access the needle exchange program because of their drug addiction are more often than not recipients of some form of Government payment. It is more than likely that, after buying their drugs or food, they would not have the money to purchase syringes and would, therefore, share any syringe they had and, thus, aid the spreading of disease. That is the reason for the various outlets for the needle exchange program.

People who suffer diabetes or other life threatening medical conditions may also be on Government benefits and have the same amount of money on which to survive. Because these people choose not to squander their finances, they are penalised. Although I understand that they can also obtain access to needle exchange programs at the same venues, they are not necessarily places that those requiring syringes for diagnosed medical conditions would willingly choose to frequent. These venues are frequented by drug users, as is their purpose, and although I do not claim that all are dangerous, research has shown that a percentage of addicts have obtained money or goods through aggressive behaviour. That is not the sort of behaviour that diabetics or any other non-drug abusive person would choose to be confronted with.

The cost of syringes may be considered reasonably small, but over a period of years this cost becomes quite substantial. If a diabetic enrols as a member of the diabetic association, they can purchase 100 syringes for $5 from local chemists, a reasonably small amount. These are the figures that I was quoted in the South Burnett. If they are not a member of the diabetic association, they will pay between 20c and 25c for each syringe. I am informed that the needles that are used in the needle exchange program are too big for small children and, therefore, would not be accessed even if the child's parents were willing to go to the same venue as drug users. The stigma of association would also act as a severe deterrent. The cost of syringes is not the only expense, as mentioned by the member for Gladstone. I believe that the cost of a one litre sharps disposal container, which holds approximately 40 to 50 syringes, is $6.95.

I find it difficult to understand how anyone could oppose this motion tonight and, therefore, I expect that it will pass with the full support of the House. This motion is pursuing an equal right for a need, whether that need be through medical grounds, such as diabetes, or drug use. I congratulate the member for Gladstone on moving a motion that should receive the support of the House.

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (6.18 p.m.): I welcome the opportunity to take part in tonight's debate, and I thank the member for Gladstone for raising the very important issue of the Howard Government's inequitable approach to health care. The motion moved by the member for Gladstone and seconded by the Minister is but one example of this inequitable treatment of Australians by the Federal Government. The Federal coalition Government has failed and continues to fail Australians where their health care is concerned and no more so than their misplaced and misguided private health insurance incentive scheme.

Imagine the difference the $2.2 billion already spent on that scheme would make if it was put directly into our public hospital system. This scheme demonstrates the lengths to which the coalition will go to dodge its responsibility in providing a first-class, universal health care system in Australia. I will come back to this point shortly. I want to take this opportunity tonight to also talk about the Queensland Needle Availability Support Program. It was pleasing to hear that the member for Gladstone is not arguing against this program. In fact, I think I heard her say that she supports the program. I also welcome the fact that the member for Gladstone is looking to broaden access to needles.

It is to be remembered first and foremost that the Government does not condone illicit drug use but recognises that there will be people who choose to use drugs. In order to protect the health of the community, we must seek to minimise the harm experienced by illicit drug users. That is why Governments of all persuasions are committed to programs such as the Queensland Needle Availability Support Program. That program offers people who use drugs by injection methods access to sterile injecting equipment.

The Needle Availability Support Program was established in Queensland during the 1980s by the coalition as one of the strategies to deal with HIV/AIDS. The overall aim of the program is to prevent the spread of infectious diseases in the community. These programs are the single most effective strategy in reducing the number of Queenslanders who have become infected with blood-born viruses such as HIV and hepatitis B and C. Conclusive evidence has emerged that the provision of sterile injecting equipment reduces the prevalence of hepatitis C. I understand that Australia has led the world in harm minimisation programs where illicit drug use is concerned.

The demand for needles through the safe needle program is increasing by up to 40% per year. This is a national pattern that reflects how successful these programs have been in educating illicit drug users and changing their behaviour on sharing needles. Drug users are more aware of the dangers of sharing needles and are now prepared to use sterile equipment. Right across Australia needle availability programs have been highly successful in reducing the transmission of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C in people who inject drugs and in the wider community. As previous speakers have said, diabetics can access free needles through these programs. We on this side of the House understand their reluctance to do so. That is why we support their call for financial support from the Federal Government.

One of the major concerns the community has expressed about safe needle programs is the safe and responsible disposal of needles. Queensland Health trains workers in needle programs to reinforce the need for users to dispose of their needles and syringes in a safe and responsible way. Last year Queensland developed and implemented the most comprehensive mandatory training package in Australia. This training reinforces the importance of safe disposal to both distributors and users. The policy is to encourage the safe disposal of needles, including returning them to the point of issue. A puncture-proof container is provided with packs supplied from the Queensland Needle Availability Support Program.

Furthermore, limits have been placed on the maximum number of needles to be issued at any one time to ensure there is no wastage. Queensland Health works closely with local councils, which are responsible for waste needle collection, to determine the best sites for the units. On 18 April the Premier announced a crackdown on people who dispose of needles in public places. There is now a $3,000 fine for doing so. Queensland has also shown national leadership on the issue of calling for research into a safe and effective retractable needle. This issue is on the agenda at the July ministerial council on drug strategy.

Returning to the issue of the Commonwealth dodging its responsibilities, the States and Territories have decreed diabetes to be a national health priority area, yet there was no money for diabetes initiatives in the Commonwealth Budget this year. Worse, there was no money to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Time expired.

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (6.23 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to support the motion before the House tonight. It certainly is heartening to see the Queensland Parliament call upon the Federal Government to look at this issue. It has always surprised me that this has never happened in the past. I have heard a few members say tonight that it was terrible that the coalition Government did not do it in the past. I say that it is terrible that it was not done by any Government in the past.

Many people in my electorate suffer from illnesses. One that comes straight to mind is migraines, which are a very debilitating illness.

I do not suffer from them, but I have spoken to people who do. Migraine tablets cost about $40 a pop. When people know that they are coming down with a migraine, they have to swallow a migraine tablet to stop it. That is a $40 tablet. For some people that is a huge expense. Yet methadone is supplied for free. I know we need treatment for heroin addicts. I am not saying that we do not. I support the statements that have been made here tonight. I am not calling for the abolition of needle exchange programs. I realise that they provide a service to the community.

When I was a security officer, I worked in an area where a needle exchange program was in action. In my capacity as a security officer, I found a lot fewer syringes on the ground when doing my rounds than I had in the past. In the area in which I was working in the ACT, the AIDS rate did drop in that community. So, yes, I can see the need for needle exchange programs. Yes, I can see the need for drug therapy treatment provided by the Government.

In the same breath, I have always found it amazing that we can look after those unfortunate members of society who get themselves into the predicament of drug abuse and yet we leave people behind who suffer from illnesses through no fault of their own. Those illnesses are debilitating and take them out of the work force and their day-to-day lives. The rationale put to me by people in my electorate was that, if heroin addicts can get their methadone for free, why can people who suffer from migraines not get their migraine tablets for free? Of course, the same argument is evidenced with diabetes. Why can diabetics not get their syringes for free when there are needle exchange programs set up for heroin addicts?

As I said at the outset, it is with pleasure that I see this Parliament taking action along these lines. My only hope now is that the Federal Government—a Government that, over the past few years, has proven itself to be, as far as I am concerned, the enemy of Queensland—listens to this plea from a united Parliament with open ears and with an open heart and takes into consideration the fact that the costs outlined in the speeches by the member for Barambah and the member for Gladstone are not massive. They are not huge. We are not talking about millions and millions and millions of dollars being expended. We are not talking about breaking health budgets. We are not talking about taking money away from other important health initiatives. We are talking about providing a facility and a service that will give a reasonable amount of financial comfort to people who might find it hard to cover the costs associated with their illness—an illness they did not ask for and did not want, an illness which they are fighting with great fortitude.

I take great pleasure in adding my voice to the other voices supporting the motion tonight. I look forward to the timely response of the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care. I hope that he will not only consider it for the State of Queensland but for other States in general. Perhaps this can be a Federal Government health initiative which can be extended to cover Western Australia, South Australia and so on so that all Australians can look forward to a better level of health care in the future.

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.28 p.m.): I am pleased to rise tonight to support the motion of the member for Gladstone calling on the Federal Government to provide free needles to diabetics. In common with the member for Gladstone, I have had diabetic constituents point out to me how unfair it is that drug addicts should be able to access free needles while they, suffering a serious illness, have to pay $8 per hundred. Notwithstanding the very good public health reasons for providing intravenous drug users with clean needles, diabetics understandably feel that they are being unfairly discriminated against. I can also appreciate their unwillingness to line up with drug addicts to get free needles. Why should they have to endure the social stigma of being classified as an addict to get needles they need to inject their life-sustaining insulin?

The total support of the House for the motion tonight from the member for Gladstone allows me time to also explore the health promotion and prevention issues related to diabetes. How much better is it to prevent diabetes in the first place? A Courier-Mail article today revealed that Australia is in the grip of a diabetes epidemic, with one in four people suffering from the disease or at risk of contracting it. Diabetic and vice-president of the Queensland branch of Diabetics Australia, Gary Deed, knows personally the value of prevention programs that focus on encouraging healthy lifestyles. He said—

> "We've always known that people who have been diagnosed with diabetes are just the tip of the ice-berg. There's thousands of people out there who have the disease and don't realise or they have high risk factors."

Mr Deed himself was diagnosed with diabetes some five years ago when he was only 32. He said that, even though he knew that he had a family history of the disease, he never thought that he himself would contract it. He said—

> "It came as such a shock to me and made me understand just how vulnerable I was."

He went on—

> "I wasn't taking any exercise and I was overweight at the time. These are the kind of risk factors people should be thinking about now before they actually contract the disease."

Labor is serious about the need for a sustainable health system. A sustainable health system is one that can take pressure off our public health system in the longer term. That is why Labor's health policies are unashamedly biased towards preventive health areas and health maintenance.

The challenge to get people to eat healthy food, stop smoking, reduce alcohol intake and exercise is enormous, but it is a challenge that we must take up. That is why the Beattie Government set up Health Promotion Queensland. This council has an annual budget of $1m and delivers on an election commitment. The council advises the Government on health promotion programs, research and other strategies to improve the health of Queenslanders.

At the Community Cabinet meeting in Proserpine Premier Peter Beattie and Health Minister Wendy Edmond announced the first major project to receive funding. It is the first project of its kind in Australia and it is a very exciting one, because whole communities are going to be the focus of an intensive two-year health promotion strategy. Some 14,000 residents of Bowen and Collinsville are being encouraged to lose weight, eat more fresh fruit and vegetables, be more active and drink less alcohol. In fact, they are going to be encouraged to change their lifestyle and there is going to be a big pay-off, both for themselves and for the community, if they are successful.

Just a modest change in lifestyle should result in lower rates of heart disease, colorectal cancer and type 2 diabetes in the future. The trial project will target two groups—older people and men aged 30 to 50 years. Research shows that these groups are at major risk of contracting these diseases. Some $700,000 has been invested in this project over the next two years.

So what are the implications of this project for Queenslanders? The aim is to develop strategies that can be copied in other towns and cities throughout Queensland. Most importantly, the project will develop ideas generated by the community. Health projects developed by communities themselves have the best chance of working. The communities will have ownership of the programs and investment in actually implementing the strategies.

The project involves cooperation between a number of universities, Queensland Health, Bowen Shire Council and non-Government agencies such as Diabetes Australia. Last night I had the pleasure of meeting with members of that consortium at a function here at Parliament House, hosted by the Minister, to recognise this initiative and the work of the consortium to get the project to this stage.

We in far-north Queensland have some particular challenges. Whilst diabetes affects some 3% or 4% of the general Australian community, it affects between 12% and 24% of the indigenous populations of far-north Queensland. There have been a number of really exciting and successful projects in that part of the world. One of those is a strategy for diabetes prevention and management in the Torres Strait and northern peninsula area which was developed in 1996 by the people of the Torres Strait with the help—

Time expired.

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (6.33 p.m.): I have no hesitation in supporting the motion moved by the honourable member for Gladstone. For some considerable time free syringes have been made available by Government to illicit drug users, yet people suffering other medical conditions that require the use of syringes are not afforded the same privilege unless they attend the same outlets as drug users. This is a most unacceptable situation. These people should not need to suffer embarrassment as well as their condition. We should not discriminate between medical conditions or members of the community. The old saying "If it is good enough for one, it is good enough for all" should apply. I was pleased to hear that the Minister for Health will support this motion. I believe that it should be supported by all members of this House.

Mr SULLIVAN (Chermside—ALP) (6.34 p.m.): I rise to support the motion before the House. The Chermside/Stafford area has one of the highest percentages of constituents aged over 60 in the State. A large number of these people are patients with diabetes or

other diseases which require injections. In fact, in the Prince Charles Hospital Health District I believe there are more than 14,000 patients with either type 1 or type 2 diabetes.

I thank very much those from the Prince Charles Hospital Health District and the community workers who treat these patients over an area from the Brisbane River to the Pine Rivers Shire. I also thank Alison Edwards, a local member of the Labor Party in the Chermside area who raised this important topic with the Chermside branch of the ALP last year. The branch supported her motion unanimously and we forwarded our concerns and our suggestions to the relevant Health Ministers. I thank the State Health Minister for her reply. We have not yet heard back from any Federal agencies.

As was alluded to earlier, today's paper notes that Australia is in the grip of what has been called a diabetes epidemic, with one in four suffering from the disease or at risk of contracting it. The report goes on further to note research which shows that the number of people with diabetes has doubled in the last 20 years and that Australia is now ranked as having one of the highest rates in the developed world.

Queensland, fortunately, is leading the way in responding to effective management of diabetes in the community. I am pleased that a five-year health outcomes plan for diabetes mellitus has been developed. This plan identifies priorities and strategies to be progressed and recognises the role and responsibility of key players, which of course includes the patients. The primary health outcome of the plan is to reduce the rate of increase of diabetes mellitus, its health impact on the Queensland population and associated health systems costs. This plan is the first and only of its kind in Australia. Even the Commonwealth has not developed such a plan, despite recognising diabetes as one of the six national health priority areas.

The priorities and strategies identified in the Queensland Health outcomes plan cover the areas of prevention, early detection, management and systems issues. The Queensland Government does not just have a plan; it is also responding to patients' needs in a practical and efficient manner. The Minister touched on a number of the activities that the Government has funded through Diabetes Australia (Queensland) which are undertaken on behalf of the patients.

I take the point made by members opposite who have spoken in this debate that there is an anomaly between those who have free access and those who have to pay for needles. I take the point of the member for Thuringowa, who said that, while there are free needles available through the needle exchange programs, the atmosphere or ambience of those centres sometimes militates against, for example, a mother going with children to pick up needles for a diabetic child. The same may apply to an elderly person, who may feel a bit threatened in the atmosphere of that needle exchange program, which often has in attendance younger persons whose presentation can sometimes generate some anxiety in older persons. So the honourable member is correct: while free needles are available to diabetics, there is probably a factor which militates against their availing themselves of that program at the same rate as other people. As the Minister said, this plan is about collaboration across Government, the community and the individual. That is what we as a Government want.

I congratulate the Community Diabetes Care Service, which operates from the Prince Charles Hospital. The service commenced in October 1997 with the aim of providing a multidisciplinary educational service for people with diabetes in the Brisbane north area, involving the general practitioner as the coordinator of care. The Minister will know that I have written to her on a few occasions about this matter. Dr Barbara Cooper is a very strong advocate of that service. I believe that members opposite have raised concerns of equal magnitude that apply to their own electorates. I am very happy to support the motion before the House.

Dr PRENZLER (Lockyer—CCAQ) (6.38 p.m.): I rise with pleasure to support this motion. The current needle exchange program is a misnomer of major proportions. It should more correctly be described as the free syringe and needle handout program. That in itself, or more particularly, the failure of the scheme to operate as it was intended, is of real concern. The purpose of the scheme is obviously to reduce the transfer of infectious diseases such as HIV and hepatitis. That is a commendable aim, but statistics tend to suggest that it is not working as well as it could.

Without becoming embroiled in the semantics or the ethics of what some see as aiding and abetting the illegal use of drugs, I believe that if the scheme were truly an exchange system at least it would keep used needles out of parks and public places. It does not do that either, and one must question the likely result of a cost-benefit analysis of supplying needles and syringes to so many

users of illegal drugs, and presumably to the New South Wales Rugby League team as well!

The issue tonight is the unfairness of a scheme which discriminates against those who are unfortunate enough to be afflicted with an illness such as diabetes. There is absolutely no justification for providing needles and syringes to those who choose to embark on a particular course of action while denying the same privileges to those who did not have a choice in the matter.

It is all very well to say that diabetics have the recourse of attending an established needle exchange facility, and the member for Chermside just referred to that matter. This is not a desirable option for these people because to do so would require deception. It would also be unfair for diabetics to have to frequent areas where they would be in contact with the illegal users of drugs. Apart from conveying the perception or impression that they, too, were drug addicts, there is a risk that they could become victims of the antisocial behaviour which unfortunately is common amongst these people. They could even become victims of assault and robbery induced by the need for addicts to find money to feed their addiction by whatever means they are able to. No, sharing a needle exchange facility is certainly not an option for these people.

Apart from the discriminatory aspects of providing free needles and syringes to one group and not to another, there is yet another discriminatory aspect. The other area of discrimination relates to increased and increasing access to diabetics living in regional areas. The evil spectre of economic rationalism again rears its ugly head here. Hospitals in regional areas are being downgraded or even closed. Chemist shops are suffering a similar fate. Many small regional communities are now without a pharmacy. Unfortunately, diabetes is not discriminatory. It can strike anyone at any time at any age. There are many diabetics living in remote areas or small regional communities who have great difficulty in accessing the insulin and syringes and needles that they have to have to treat their disease.

The diabetic is required to present in person at the point of supply, often requiring considerable travel. To then have to pay for the needles and syringes is just one more imposition on those already suffering the illness. In fact, there are also quite substantial price differentials between pharmacies depending on whether they are affiliated with the appropriate body. This double discrimination, by comparison with a drug addict living in a city close to a free needle and syringe handout facility, should not be allowed to continue.

It has already been noted tonight that some diabetics reuse their syringes and needles. This is a practice that should be absolutely discouraged as the consequences of reuse can be quite drastic, including as little as more pain due to using a blunt needle on injection or, at worst, infection and possible death. This must be stopped, particularly with respect to sufferers of diseases such as diabetes. A free scheme will overcome many of these difficulties.

I urge all members to support the motion before this House and urge that corrective action should be swift and comprehensive. Let us send a clear message on the feelings of this House to our Federal Government.

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.43 p.m.): I rise to join with other members of the House in supporting the motion before us. It is indeed a fine thing that we are able on these occasions to work together for better fairness for all members of our community.

I have long been a supporter of the availability of clean needle programs for illicit drug users, not so much because I worry about their health but more because I worry about our health, the impact on the broader community who are not illicit drug users and who should not be put at risk by those who are and by their unsafe practices or their waste disposal methods. Of course, it is important to give recognition to the effectiveness of that program in Australia. In fact, despite the doubts of the previous speaker, I must say that there is overwhelming evidence that the clean needle programs have worked in Australia in reducing the risk of passing on infections and serious viruses such as the AIDS virus. In fact, Australia leads the way with Sweden in clean needle programs.

At the same time, however, I entirely endorse the motion of the member for Gladstone and her recognition that there is a perceived unfairness. Australia is the land of the fair go, and while we have not yet discovered a system of government at any level that ensures that we are always fair, this is an inequity that is before us at the moment. I understand why people, particularly those of limited incomes, believe that it is, in a sense, as though we are rewarding bad behaviour by giving needles free of charge to illicit drug users while we charge those who have a medical need for them week in, week out, year

in, year out. It is as though we are penalising good behaviour, charging them, when in fact it is those who are more troublesome in society who should, in principle at least, be the ones to pay. That is why we should have clean needle programs and offer easy availability of needles at no or extraordinarily low cost to all users, not only illicit drug users but also those who have medical conditions.

Particularly tonight we have given recognition to the importance in the management of diabetes of easy availability and low or no-cost access to clean needles and sharps containers. In speaking about diabetes tonight, I am reminded of the extent of the programs existing in far-north Queensland aimed at assisting diabetics. Unfortunately, the rates are high in Cairns. While the access to needles is one element of diabetes management, there is much more to do not only to keep those with diabetes under control but also to minimise the risk of diabetes in the generations of the future.

This is an opportunity for me to give recognition to the tremendously good work of the Cairns Diabetes Centre in Lake Street and also to the fine initiatives that were started by the Tropical Public Health Unit based in Cairns back in the early nineties. Their focus has been particularly on indigenous people in Cape York and in the Torres Strait, where there is a high rate of diabetes. Much of this has been related to diet and to exercise. They have, along with others such as the Cape York Health Council, the Torres Strait Health Council and the Health Promotion Council of Queensland, initiated programs that are culturally appropriate to assist people in cape communities and Torres Strait communities not only to look after themselves better once diagnosed but particularly to improve their nutrition towards a healthier future for their children.

We do not yet have figures proving that those programs have been effective, though we do have some early figures to indicate that the children of the latest generation born in the cape are much healthier than are their parents. So we can be hopeful that not only through the availability of clean needle programs and other support services for diabetics but also with continuing education programs we may well one day be in a position where we do not need so many needles.

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.48 p.m.): The Queensland National/Liberal coalition is calling on the State Government to follow the lead of the New South Wales Government to help provide free syringes to insulin-dependent diabetics. I applaud the New South Wales move and believe that it sets an example for this State Government to follow to help ease the burden of people with this chronic illness. Despite the subsidies available to insulin-dependent diabetics, there is still a considerable cost burden, particularly for those who may have to use up to six needles per day. As has been mentioned by previous speakers, the costs also associated with appropriate disposal and the use of sharps containers.

Currently, the Commonwealth Government subsidises the treatment for diabetic patients to an amount in excess of $180m per year for insulin, diagnostic strips and syringes and pen needles. Needles and syringes under the federally funded National Diabetic Services Scheme cost registered diabetic concession holders $5 per hundred syringes or, for non-concession holders, $8 per hundred. As for insulin, which is listed on the pharmaceutical benefits scheme, a concession holder pays $3.30 for a prescription and a non-concession holder pays $20.60. The actual cost for each prescription is between $100 and $250, the balance of which is paid for by the Federal Government.

In New South Wales, the Carr Labor Government announced earlier this month that it would pick up the tab for the shortfall in the needle subsidy so that needles would be available completely free of charge for diabetics for the first time. The Queensland State coalition supports the move for more funding from both the Federal and State Governments to assist diabetics, be it through equipment to administer medicine or in other treatments, in early diagnosis and research, or in health promotion and education. Health promotion is also a fundamental part of the National Diabetes Strategy which was developed and launched in August 1999 by all Health Ministers.

This motion tonight addresses the issues of insulin-dependent diabetics, or type 1 diabetics, of whom there are currently about 22,000 registered in Queensland. The known registered non-insulin-dependent, or type 2 diabetics, in Queensland number about 43,000. However, we know that there are many people who are still yet to be registered because they are yet to be diagnosed. That is why proper promotion and education is so important.

Diabetes is one of Australia's deadliest diseases—in fact, it is our sixth deadliest killer. It disproportionately affects indigenous Australians. Indigenous Australians suffer the

fourth highest rate of type 2 diabetes in the world, and available data suggests that the overall prevalence rate among adults is between 10% and 30%—that is, at least two to four times that of non-indigenous Australians.

Diabetes is a serious condition. When undiagnosed and untreated, diabetes can lead not only to a substantially increased risk of blindness but also to heart disease, stroke, kidney failure and diabetic foot disease, which in turn can lead to gangrene and amputation if not properly managed. If diabetes is detected and treated early these complications can be prevented.

I commend to the House the Federal Health Department web site which outlines the National Diabetes Strategy for Australia and key initiatives which are being implemented in recognition of diabetes being declared a national health priority area in 1996. The address is www.health.gov.au/hsdd/nhpq/diabetes/keyinit.htm.

It is inappropriate for insulin-dependent diabetics to be told that they can obtain free needles from a needle exchange. It is inappropriate because these people—some of them have children who need to access needles to appropriately administer insulin—quite rightly say that it is not an environment into which they want to take their children. They do not choose to have this chronic disease.

Whilst we want to assist people with chronic drug habits to get off drugs and ensure that they do not contract contagious diseases, there are needle exchange programs which provide clean needles. It is hoped that this program will prevent contagious diseases being spread in the community.

It is an inequity that insulin-dependent diabetics do not have access to free needles. I applaud the New South Wales move. I believe that there are more things that can be done at the Federal and State level. Already $180m is being spent by the Federal Government in helping to subsidise these treatments.

Time expired.

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 6.54 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.

COMPETITION POLICY REFORM (QUEENSLAND) REPEAL BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 17 May (see p. 1168).

Hon. T. R. COOPER (Crows Nest—NPA) (8.30 p.m.), continuing: As members realise, a couple of weeks ago I moved the adjournment of the debate on this Bill. I am not going to reiterate the things that I said then but, of course, I stand by them. I agree with what most members have said about the National Competition Policy and its repeal. Most people are responsible and realise the need for reform—be it economic reform, social reform, or whatever. Over quite a period in this State I have been involved in a lot of reform. However, I believe that if the reform process has moved too far away from the people there is a need to stop and take stock to see whether that reform is actually assisting the people or hurting them.

As we can see, in many respects people in rural and regional Queensland and other rural and regional areas of Australia are being hurt by National Competition Policy. As such, we should not proceed blindly with that reform. I am saying that the time for experiments should be finished. The National Competition Policy was an experiment that was started by Professor Fred Hilmer. As I said before, I do not blame him one bit for it. He was given the task to look into National Competition Policy, and he did. It is the respective Governments that ticked off on National Competition Policy that are to blame—and Governments from all sides ticked off on it. However, as we now know after five or six years of National Competition Policy, a lot of people have been hurt. A classic example is the dairy industry. I am aware that there is legislation before the House in relation to the dairy industry, so I am not going to dwell on that. However, that is one of the industries—and there are many other industries—that has been hurt by the imposition of National Competition Policy upon us.

Even the people who initiated the National Competition Policy are amazed at the way it took off. It took off because, firstly, there was very little understanding of it but, secondly, when things started to go wrong, very few or no people moved in to say, "Whoops, we had better stop and have a look at this to see whom it is hurting and who is benefiting." If there are benefits to National Competition Policy, that is fine. I do not argue with that. However, if it is hurting people, then it is time to pull it up or make sure that we can put in place safety nets so that people cannot be hurt. Lately, National Competition Policy has gone out of control and too many people have been hurt.

The benefit that Queensland was supposed to receive from National Competition Policy over 10 years from the time of its implementation was about $2.3 billion.

However, $2.3 billion over 10 years is $233m a year. That may sound like a lot of money, but it should be viewed in the context of the Queensland Budget of $17 billion or $18 billion. Those benefits probably would have been forthcoming to the State, anyway. However, I also know that Federal Governments can intervene to the extent that they will give with one hand and take with the other. I have seen that happen before so many times. Therefore, if our people are being hurt, I believe it is our responsibility to represent them and see that safety nets are put in place.

Over the past 10 years or more, we have seen many so-called reforms that we have been told will be good for us—National Competition Policy, economic rationalism, globalisation, trade reform, level playing field and political correctness. We have had the lot and we have had a gutful, because we have not been in control of our own destiny. That has worried our people. It is one thing for us in this place to be worried, but it is worse for our people to be worried—our people who are going broke because of the so-called reforms that were put in place. I cannot be heard because of old Pat up the back.

Mr Purcell: I will entertain your guests while you are away.

Mr COOPER: I know very well that he agrees with everything that I have said. I know that he has listened to every word I have said.

Mr Kaiser: I always have.

Mr COOPER: I am not talking about that member; I am talking about the member sitting behind him. I know that the member for Bulimba agrees with every word that I say. During this debate, a lot of members have said some words of sense, particularly the member for Southport, who spoke extremely well about this issue. As I said, our job is to represent other people. If we see our people being hurt, be it our dairy farmers, our sugar producers or our wool producers—it does not matter who it is—it is up to us to stand up for them and defend them.

I welcome the review of National Competition Policy that was brought on by the Federal Government because it realised finally that there was a need to see whether or not this policy was actually working. On umpteen dozen occasions we told the Federal Government that it was not working and that we had created two Australias—one Australia that was not benefiting, which is rural and regional Australia, and the big end of town, which was benefiting. As I have said before, the big end of town is doing well. We all know that. That is fine, but people in rural and regional areas are not doing well.

I went to that review process that was held in Toowoomba. Such meetings were held throughout the nation, but I went to the one that was held in Toowoomba and put forward a case, especially in relation to the dairy industry. One or two people on that review panel knew what they were talking about. However, the one from South Australia did not have the faintest idea.

Dr Clark: You will be rewriting the National Party web site, will you?

Mr COOPER: She was a professor. What has the member been doing tonight? She should just relax. It is all right. I regard the National Competition Policy review that was held in Toowoomba as far more important. I think that the member should sit up and take notice of this. Such a review might have been held in Cairns, and maybe the member put forward a submission herself. Did she? No, she did not. She was out of town at the time.

However, I was at the review that was held in Toowoomba, and I made sure that I represented my people, including dairy farmers. An enormous number of dairy farmers in my electorate are suffering deeply through deregulation and National Competition Policy. That is why I went to that review in Toowoomba and put my case. Most of the people on the panel understood what I had to say, but a professor from South Australia did not have the faintest idea of the damage this policy was causing. She said, "Competition is good for everyone." I thought, "You are okay. You are fine because you are in a job. But you are not in that industry that is being hurt." So that person had to be put in her place. I can assure members that she was because, as I said, my job is to represent my people.

The important thing to note is that most other countries look after their people. Recently in the US, President Clinton gave $17 billion or $18 billion to the farm lobby of that country. We do not expect to receive that sort of money. Nevertheless, America will look after its farmers first. Japan will always look after its farmers first.

Mr Purcell: Look at France.

Mr COOPER: France is a classic example, as is the European Community. They are all in together.

Mr Feldman: The subsidy is $20 billion in the US.

Mr COOPER: It is a massive amount of money. We can say good luck to them, because it is not for us to interfere in what they

are doing. However, it is our job to make sure that we look after ourselves first. Most countries do. Nearly every country in the world looks after itself first, except this country. We are sick and tired of that. That is what I am saying: it is about time that we pulled up this National Competition Policy, because if it is going too far then it is our responsibility to make sure that our people are okay. That is the point that I am trying to make.

We know that there will always be reform. We know there is a need to make sure that we are operating efficiently and effectively. But if that means a scorched earth policy that leaves the rural areas of Australia decimated, we are making a mistake. It is one thing to have people living and earning a useful and productive living in the bush, but it is another thing to have them wiped out and relocated to the hinterlands behind Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. That will not do any of us any good. It is far better to have them out there being productive. We are not saying that they need a handout. They do not want a handout. They want to be able to make a living on a fair playing field, not a level playing field.

We were told that reform was going to be good for us, but we have not seen anyone in our constituencies benefiting from it. That is a point that seems difficult for others to comprehend. Our people, having been hurt for five or six years now, are wondering where all of these benefits will fall. They have not fallen to them. That is why they feel frustrated and angry. That is why there is a different political atmosphere out there in the real world. Members opposite know that. They were affected by the then One Nation vote. That vote built up through frustration and anger over 20 years. It just built up and built up.

As I said, everyone ticked off on economic rationalism, globalisation, political correctness—all those sorts of things. They were alien to us. For a start, they were never explained properly. In addition, the safety nets were not put in place for the people who were going to be hurt. That is where all of us went wrong. That does not mean that we should continue down this path just because someone said at the time that this was a good idea and a great experiment. If it is going wrong, we should stop it. We should pull it up and say, "Okay. We have gone so far. Now where do we go from here?" We should not continue blindly down the path and fall off the cliff like lemmings. Members opposite know where I am coming from. We do not have to continue with this policy. It is eminently sensible to pull it up and have another look at it. We all want to make sure that we are producing efficiently. I do not know how many times rural people have been asked to be more efficient. They are now so efficient that we are starting to denude the country of its people, be it the work force, the landowners or the people in small business. They are all affected. My electorate, being a rural electorate, is heavily affected.

Mr Kaiser: Saved by Labor preferences.

Mr COOPER: That is hardly the point.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Nelson-Carr): Order! The member will stick to the topic of competition policy reform.

Mr COOPER: I am. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you want to refer to the interjection, I do not mind. I am happy to talk on that, because I appreciate the fact that I was able to continue to represent my people. That is our job in here. The moment we forget that, it becomes a different ball game. As the member knows, I will be leaving here soon and I can leave it up to him to make sure that he looks after my people. And he better look after them well, because I will come back to haunt him if he does not.

Mr Hamill: That is a dreadful threat.

Mr COOPER: I am sure the Treasurer appreciates that. That is another story and that will come in time, whenever the Government is prepared to call the next election. In the meantime, I will continue to represent my people strongly and make sure that their interests are fully and properly—

Mr Hamill: You are doing a Banquo's ghost act tonight.

Mr COOPER: A what?

Mr Hamill: Banquo's ghost.

Mr COOPER: What on earth is he talking about?

Mr Baumann: Shakespeare.

Mr COOPER: Sorry, the Treasurer is way above me.

The issue that we are talking about tonight—and which the Deputy Speaker would love us to get back to—is of vital importance to every member in this place. As far as the city vote is concerned, at the big end of town there are people who are doing well and the economy is not too bad. We are constantly told that the economy is booming; that there is 4% growth and so on. The people in my area are not experiencing that boom. It is tragic to see the effect on small businesses out there. It is one thing to ignore that and walk away from it and say, "In five years' time it will be okay.

This is good for you", but it is another thing in the meantime to recognise that we are dealing with human beings. If those people are going to suffer even more than they are now, it is our responsibility to try to make sure that we make their life a bit easier. That is what this debate is all about. I commend those who brought on this debate.

Mr Hamill: Are you supporting the repeal?

Mr COOPER: Yes, I am.

Mr Hamill: Last week you supported the amendment.

Mr COOPER: The honourable member is dead wrong.

Time expired.

Mr STEPHAN (Gympie—NPA) (8.45 p.m.): This evening my contribution to this debate will be brief, bearing in mind that there has been considerable debate over time on this subject. We will continue to see competition. However, there will be times when the competition becomes intense and comes at a cost to those who have been delivering services over a long period. For example, at the moment dairy farmers throughout the State are nervous about the future of their industry, which has served people in the cities and towns of this country and overseas for a long time. The farmers need our support on this issue.

Farmers mean food—food for Australians and for those in other parts of the world. We are not talking about luxury items. Our farmers are facing many hardships. Rural people have been doing it tough for the last 40 or 50 years. We should take a moment to realise just how difficult it is for our farmers.

The Gympie Show was held recently. If honourable members had attended the show, they would know that about 250 dairy cattle and more than 300 beef cattle were put to the test. That goes to show what can be and is being done by rural communities. They are doing their job very well indeed. I say "Well done" to them. They are going through a very difficult period at the moment.

Deregulation has also taken place in the banking industry. Not many honourable members would suggest that this has amounted to anything positive. Deregulation has made life very difficult for a lot of people in country areas who rely on banks and the services that they provide. The flow-on effect is disastrous for Queensland. We must surely realise that a lesson is to be learned from this. We have to look at the effect of this policy of deregulation on industry. In my own area, for instance, the dairy industry is worth about $52m a year not just to primary producers, but to processors and suppliers as well. Local businesses derive a great deal of benefit from the dairy industry, even though it is struggling.

Mr Fenlon: You should be on the front bench, I think.

Mr STEPHAN: The funding that the Federal Government is going to provide to support new industries is to be commended, particularly in the area of retraining for those who will have to go into other businesses. It makes every one of us realise that it is difficult for those who are doing the right thing and it is difficult for those who are trying to do the right thing. I commend the Federal Government for that program.

We need to acknowledge just how tough life will be for dairy farmers following deregulation. It is going to be a very, very difficult period. I believe that this is just the beginning. Deregulation is not going to go away. It is not going to affect just one segment of the community; quite a number of different sections of communities will suffer. That is especially so when people are shifting from one business to another; they are taking their equity with them. We must realise that it is going to be very, very difficult to turn the wheel around.

We can also look at what is happening in other countries. I do not believe that the USA, for example, is doing anything but supporting its industries. I will just leave that comment with honourable members. It looks after its industries and looks after the people who work in those industries. It is a bit like a hare chasing its tail: it does not catch up with it. The USA is giving its own industries some support, and that is exactly what we should be doing.

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (8.53 p.m.): Although much has been said about National Competition Policy in this debate so far, and many honourable members would say that it should be nearing its conclusion, and it is, it has been a very, very worthwhile debate because the issue that we have been discussing is something that has affected all of our electorates, not only the country electorates, which have been more adversely affected—and I do not think that that can be disputed—but also the city electorates. Many of the consequences of National Competition Policy impact on the average citizen—if there is such a thing—in all electorates.

Although National Competition Policy was introduced with the best of intentions to improve the lot of Australians, its consequences have not necessarily achieved

that aim, particularly given the way in which it has been implemented. I guess the other point is the lack of understanding of what it has to contribute compared with the pain that it has caused in certain areas. The problem has been mainly in rural areas. That has been established quite clearly by every committee that has examined its results to date. I know that back in 1995—while it can be said that it was a Labor Government, the Goss Government—

Mr Hamill: And a good Government, too.

Mr SLACK: I am not saying it was a good Government. It lost office, so the people obviously did not think that it was a good Government.

Mr McGrady: What about yours?

Mr SLACK: There were reasons for that, too.

National Competition Policy was signed off on with the best of intentions. All honourable members who have listened to this debate would know that everybody who had contributed to it has been trying to distance themselves from it to various degrees. There has not been one speaker who has said that it was a good thing—not one. Can members opposite name one?

Mr Kaiser: Your web site.

Mr SLACK: I take the interjection in relation to the web site. This morning the Deputy Premier referred to our policy. I inform the former secretary of the Labor Party—and he should know—that policies are fluctuating things and that in this particular case the policy of the National Party is under review. I do not doubt that his party's policy has been under review because—

Mr Johnson: They haven't got any.

Mr SLACK: Good point. What is the Government's policy on National Competition Policy? The Premier condemned it as much as he could, but what is the reality? The Government of the member opposite will not jettison it because it wants the dollars. It wants the billions of dollars that come with it. That is what it is all about. The member waxes lyrical about how bad it is, how it affects adversely the constituents he represents, but does he make the move to jettison it? No! How many dollars are involved? How many dollars does the Treasury depend on?

Mr Malone: Who signed off on it?

Mr SLACK: Exactly! Who signed off on it? The Labor Government! So the Deputy Premier cannot turn around and point the finger at the National Party and say that it is our policy that recognises some of its benefits—and there are some benefits, but there are also some very marked negatives. The major negative has been the effect it has had on the rural communities that we represent.

Mr Lucas: Why are you being absolutist about it, then?

Mr SLACK: If the member for Lytton had any heart or thought, he would not be sitting back there interjecting and denigrating the contribution that has been made on behalf of those people whom this policy is affecting adversely.

Mr Lucas: Not at all. I am saying that you're being absolutist about it. The fact is that we have among the most efficient primary producers in the world. We don't throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Mr SLACK: I would expect the member for Lytton to be voting for this legislation when the time comes. Anyway, we will see what the Labor Party does when it comes to the vote.

I take the point of the member for Lytton; we have some of the most efficient primary producers in the world. However, members opposite cannot deny the fact that those primary producers are under considerable pressure, as are primary producers all over the world, through changing terms of trade for primary products as much as anything. Certainly I am the first to concede that National Competition Policy has been blamed for a lot of ills for which it does not deserve to be blamed. It is also responsible for some ills in that it has been unrealistic.

Professor Hilmer, the academic who drafted it, was not even supported by many of his contemporaries. It was an ideological statement that was embraced by Governments—to their shame, when we look back on it, because what they were really doing was abrogating their responsibilities as members of Parliament. They are the ones who should make decisions on some of these social issues. National Competition Policy is taking the power away from politicians—the elected representatives—to make the same decisions that they would make in relation to the social consequences of a policy when it is proposed to be implemented. That is the major fault of National Competition Policy.

In relation to chemists, the taxi industry, newspapers or whatever, National Competition Policy takes decisions out of the hands of elected members to represent their constituency whether a regulated system is in the best interests of that constituency. There

are many country areas where it is in the interests of our constituency to have a regulated system. The Senate report—and I commend the Queensland Parliamentary Library for its precis of the latest report of the Senate inquiry into National Competition Policy—endorses what I and other members have been saying. I will read an extract from it for the benefit of the House. I take it that many members in the House have not given the Library the courtesy of reading it. The precis gives an outline of the terms of reference and states—

> "Broadly, the Committee was to inquire into and report on the NCP, including:
>
> its socio-economic consequences, including benefits and costs on unemployment, changed working conditions, social welfare equity, social dislocation and environmental impacts
>
> the impact on urban, rural and regional communities
>
> its relationship with other micro-economic reform policies, and
>
> clarification of the definition of public interest and its role in the National Competition process."

This is the important part. It goes on to state—

> "This final report reiterates many of the conclusions reached in the Interim Report of August, 1999 Competition Policy: Friend or Foe—Economic Surplus, Social Deficit? (See Acquisition Highlight No. 133). namely, that there are deep-seated concerns about the social impact of economic reforms which are perceived to value economic objectives such as productivity and efficiency over the social cohesion and common good of the community. The social benefits which economists promise will flow from the achievement of economic objectives are often not apparent to an increasingly sceptical public. This is particularly true in the numerous small, rural and regional communities that have been disproportionately affected by the pace of change. The Committee notes many times this central message:
>
> 'The nexus extolled by economists between the achievement of economic objectives and the flow-on to the achievement of social benefits is not always evident to the community at large. This scepticism of the nexus arises particularly in the many small communities being disproportionately affected by the impact of economic reform policies, social changes, globalisation and technology.' "

That sums up the effects of it very well.

The Government's position is that it wants the dollars. At least we were moral about it. As was instanced with the Local Government Association, we were prepared to return $150m to local government because of the social impacts of National Competition Policy. Those opposite might say that it was not a payment.

Mr Hamill: You are not going to call it a loan, are you?

Mr SLACK: No. I heard what the Minister for Primary Industries said in here this morning as to why the Government could not give the dairy industry the $98m that came back.

Mr Hamill: There was no $98m.

Mr SLACK: The Premier has already said it is $98m. It is not given to the Government to do it. It is withheld if the Government does not do it. Is that right? That is right. In effect, it is $98m in the system—

Mr Hamill: No, it is quite arbitrary. They call it as they see it.

Mr SLACK: The Treasurer should know better, but I can understand that he is not in a perceptive mood at the moment. Let us look at the $2.4 billion over eight years or 10 years, if my memory is correct. The Treasurer should know those figures. That money is for the adoption and acceptance by the States of what is embodied in National Competition Policy. If we fail to do what the non-elected people decide, a proportion of that money is withheld. Is that right?

Mr Hamill: That's the problem.

Mr SLACK: Okay. That money, as the Treasurer should well know, is to address the social impacts arising from National Competition Policy. It was always recognised that under National Competition Policy there would be those who were disadvantaged. I refer here to the moral ground. The moral responsibility of a Government when it collects those national competition payments is to pay that money to those people who are disadvantaged by its introduction. That is a fair point of logic at the end of the day. This Government is trying to shirk from that responsibility. We accepted that responsibility in relation to the effect on local authorities, but the Government is trying to shirk from that responsibility. When the Treasurer gets up on

behalf of the Government in this Parliament—I know there is a dairy Bill, but this is about National Competition Policy—and says that as a State there is no responsibility to address a proportion of the problems the dairy industry is facing as a result of National Competition Policy, then the Government is not accepting its moral responsibility to that industry.

Mr Hamill: Dairy farmers in Victoria sold out dairy farmers in Queensland.

Mr SLACK: I made the point before that the Treasurer is not perceptive tonight. Let me explain it to somebody who has difficulty understanding it. He was a Rhodes scholar in days gone by. He has had some problems in maintaining the intellectual capacity he displayed in gaining that honour. Let me explain it to him. Yes, Treasurer, it came out of Victoria. For the Minister's benefit, I say that deregulation was advocated by Victorian dairy farmers. They have been pushing it because deregulation is in their interests. They produce 94% of milk. They can supply the whole of Australia and they supply some of the world with their milk. Therefore, it was in their interests. So they pushed it. That happened, and the dairy industry throughout Australia had to recognise that.

However, at the same time that was happening, National Competition Policy was coming into force. While the Victorian dairy industry was going to deregulate—that was fact, and that would have quite a damaging impact on the rest of the dairy farms in Australia operating under regulation—the response to that was governed by the requirements of National Competition Policy. Because the requirements of National Competition Policy had to be conformed with, that removed some of the options available in addressing the push by Victoria for deregulation. If the Minister for Primary Industries does not believe me, I suggest that he go out and do his homework again.

Mr Lucas: There is no legislative power to stop interstate trade.

Mr SLACK: The member for Lytton is misrepresenting what I am saying. Whilst there is no legislative power to stop Victorian dairy farmers doing what they are doing, they have decided that they are going to deregulate.

Mr Hamill: Because the dairy farmers want to do it.

Mr SLACK: Yes, they do. That is right. The Treasurer does not have to press that on me. I am saying that. The other dairy farmers in Australia did not want to do it, but there was pressure in the process. At the end of the day, to cut it short the Premier got up in this House and said that a figure of $98m was relevant to National Competition Policy. That is in the same category as that $150m we gave to local authorities to counter the impact of National Competition Policy. It can be put in the same category. Putting it in the same category, together with the Commonwealth contribution from which Queensland will get $232m, the State Government should contribute something because that equates to the $98m that is not being withdrawn. That is the position in relation to the dairy industry.

Mr Hamill interjected.

Mr SLACK: The Treasurer can argue his case when the dairy industry Bill is debated. I hope that he will be a prominent speaker on the dairy Bill to support the argument he is advancing.

I raise the issue of water. The Government has advanced the argument that National Competition Policy is responsible for the jettisoning of the dam on the Balonne at St George. I will not argue the matter one way or the other. It may or may not be correct. We claim that that is not the full story. Having said that, there is no doubt that the effect of National Competition Policy on the provision of water resources for farmers and immediate users of water is very detrimental to their economic wellbeing. It does not take into consideration in a meaningful way the contribution that water conservation and the use of water by farmers or industry makes to the general economy of an area.

The provision of water is not an economically sustainable industry in itself for the farmer. There would be very few farmers who could afford to pay the full charges of the provision of water as per the National Competition Policy. If the farmers cannot afford to do that and therefore cannot reap the benefits of the production that flows from that water, then the whole community misses out because of the multiplier effect. Other industries that would be affected by such an arrangement are the transport industry and the sugar industry. There are also environmental benefits and leisure benefits that flow from water. It is of benefit to the whole of the community in which it is provided.

In other words, the provision of water infrastructure throughout the State is of benefit to the whole of the State. Therefore, it is unfair to burden the farmers with the whole cost in order to recoup the cost of providing the storage. That is one of the major failings of National Competition Policy in respect of water storage. The same applies to the provision of

many other types of infrastructure to facilitate development within this State, as in any other State. If National Competition Policy is applied strictly, there will be a big restriction on the establishment of infrastructure which supports long-term development that benefits the economy of this State. I hope that members take note of the adverse effects that National Competition Policy is having on rural areas in particular.

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (9.12 p.m.): I take great pleasure in making a contribution to the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Repeal Bill. One would have to wonder about the direction of National Competition Policy in relation to the industries I represent, that is, the sugar and dairy industries. Our rural industries seem to be bearing the brunt of some reform program that has been dreamt up in Canberra and passed on to regional communities.

I ask members to consider the coastal region of Queensland, from a little north of the Sunshine Coast all the way up to Mossman. If it were not for primary industries, particularly the sugar industry, that area of Queensland would be virtually unproductive. The sugar industry is a $2 billion industry that has to compete with the rest of the world. It is mostly an export industry. Earlier this week I spoke in this House about the sugar industry. I highlighted the problems that it is experiencing. On top of all of those problems, it is going through some massive deregulation, brought on not necessarily by National Competition Policy but certainly by the policies of the Labor Party.

Going back over a period of time, National Competition Policy has had a real impact on the direction of the sugar industry. It quite often amazes me that the primary industries of our country, and particularly Queensland, seem to be bearing the brunt of it. I can name quite a lot of other industries in Queensland and right across Australia that do not seem to be impacted upon at all—banking, taxis, lawyers and the Law Society, which seems to be a law unto itself, newsagencies and chemists. There is also a monopoly, particularly in our regional areas, by supermarkets. National Competition Policy really does make a mockery of decentralisation. It is having a real impact on the productive industries in Queensland.

It has been stated that the benefits of National Competition Policy would be about $2.3 billion over 10 years. I question where that money comes from. Is it new money that is being generated? Is it money that is being circulated? I believe it is money that was due to flow to the State Government. I am sure that it is not new money. In terms of productivity there is only one way to produce new money, that is, through our export industries.

Where is all of this being driven from? It is a policy that was dreamt up in Canberra by Professor Fred Hilmer. It was a con job on all of the States. It was signed off on by the Labor Governments of Keating and Goss. Unfortunately, the policy gained a life of its own and kept running over a period of time. Under review, the sugar industry accepted that the National Competition Policy is alive and well. The sugar industry in Queensland had to give away quite a number of its bargaining points to ensure that it retained single desk selling, which has traditionally been against the thinking behind National Competition Policy. We gave away the run-down in tariffs and export parity pricing, which we were able to substantiate without National Competition Policy. It was certainly a real asset to the industry. The tariff we supposedly had on our industry was never regarded as a tariff as such. It was added on to the domestic price of sugar because that was the price at which it was sold to our refiners. The price at which they could import sugar to Australia was the price that we charged our refiners.

It is interesting—I gave the figures earlier this week—that up until only a couple of months ago we sold sugar to our refiners here in Queensland for $A180 a tonne. About 12 months before that we were selling it at around $A300 a tonne. In the period of about 12 months, the price that the raw sugar market sells to the refiners has been halved. I wonder whether members have noticed the price of Coca-Cola or a bag of sugar in the supermarket reduce by any substantial amount. I can assure them that they have not, although the price of the raw sugar that goes into those commodities has actually halved.

We really do have a pretty level playing field. The National Competition Council has taken no interest in this at all. At the end of the day, these are the real dollars that the Australian sugar industry has to live with and try to support itself with while the export price is languishing around 5c a pound, which is probably 5c or 6c a pound below the cost of production.

The dairying industry was also accredited with National Competition Policy guidelines and was cleared of meeting the guidelines. The public benefit test was clearly substantiated, yet we are seeing with

legislation that is currently before the House that, despite that, and certainly in spite of the issues before it, the industry will be deregulated and will suffer greatly from the fact that somewhere along the line National Competition Policy has allowed the deregulation of the industry in Victoria, the effects of which will spread to all other States. The unfortunate part about all that is that it seems that the State Government will receive some extra funding from National Competition Policy payments and, it appears, will not be contributing towards the infrastructure and the build-up that is required for those dairy farmers to exist post deregulation.

Obviously we have to compete on the world market. Third World countries pay a harvester driver $400 a month; in Australia we pay $800 a week. Yet we have to compete in the same markets. We see that other countries, particularly America and the EC, give tremendous support to their farmers because they understand that farmers are the backbone of decentralised areas. Particularly in Europe, as I understand it, farmers are regarded as the custodians of the land. I think we should take that on board in Queensland and Australia. Instead of our farmers having to earn an income off the land, maybe we should consider paying our farmers as custodians of the land. If I can get some support from the Government, we might move along those lines. Quite frankly, I think that we need to look at all avenues. Certainly, carbon credits would be an ideal opportunity for farmers to become involved in the energy industry and would ensure that, in the future, farmers are able to retain their position on the land and be a viable community unit. If that does not occur, we will see some of our smaller country towns disappear. Infrastructure right across Queensland will degenerate to the point where roads become unpassable and we do not have economic units in small country towns.

It amazes me that we seem to have a single-minded intent on attacking our primary industries and leaving other industries alone. I mentioned earlier the position with the legal industry, where lawyers are able to go out and virtually name their own price. There is also the supermarket industry, where large conglomerates offer the only shopping alternative in certain locations. I just wonder where this is going.

I intended to make just a few comments. I support the legislation.

Dr KINGSTON (Maryborough—IND) (9.22 p.m.): I rise to give conditional support to this Bill, conditional because the consequences of Queensland going it alone have not been defined. I look forward to an informed definition of the consequences, both negative and positive, following this debate. Therefore, I strongly suggest that this Bill, regardless of whether it is passed or not, is rapidly followed by a carefully researched elucidation of how Queensland can reduce the negative impacts. The need for such reviews is an argument for the reinstatement of the Upper House in Queensland. We should also investigate the support for the NCP in other States. I know that support for its withdrawal is strong amongst certain members of the WA Parliament. After moving the motion against the NCP last year and it being supported by all members of this House, I have been surprised by the number of supportive messages I have received from all over Australia.

I congratulate previous speakers on their contributions. The contributions by the members for Nudgee and Gladstone were well researched and logically presented as usual. I commend the member for Gregory for his understanding of the negative impacts and his genuine and correct plea that rural communities require immediate relief. I agree with the speakers tonight that rural communities are being unfairly impacted upon. Additionally, I congratulate the two new members on their maiden speeches. I was gratified to hear the member for Woodridge express his appreciation of the impact of globalisation, and I welcome the support for community impact studies from the member for Bundamba. However, I am curious to know whether, along with the other members on this side of the House, she classifies me as worn out and ossified. If so, then I request a mobility test at her expense. I remind both new members that caring for all sections of the community, including the poor and the downtrodden, is not the sole prerogative of the Labor Party. There are others who have spent many years amongst some of the most unfortunate people in the world.

Hilmer introduced his competition commissions because he believed that increased competition would force an improvement in efficiency into some industries which had grown complacent behind the walls of tariff protection and that Australia nationally and consumers individually would benefit if those industries were forced to trade in a more competitive market. I have no problem with that philosophy, as long as the resulting strategies are introduced steadily and sensitively on a case-by-case basis. Possibly John Button realised the need for considered tariff reduction better than most. However,

Hilmer himself is on record as saying that the NCP has been applied with too much enthusiasm and rigour and, as a result, it has had unintended negative impacts.

The NCP, as with globalisation, has become a gospel to be obeyed in all circumstances, instead of being used as an economic strategy to be used with discretion and following adequate analysis. The member for Warrego identified some practical examples where the NCP has been inappropriately applied. I acknowledge that we now live and trade within a global economy, but I believe that those in Canberra have adopted globalisation with an unquestioning religious fervour without carefully examining how they could maximise the benefits and minimise the disbenefits to our national accounts and to the benefit of all our citizens.

I agree strongly with the member for Cunningham that we desperately need antitrust laws, as they have in the US, to curb monopolies. Further, I believe that a large proportion of our population are now working harder for less. They are helplessly watching their quality of life deteriorate. We are helplessly watching our control over our own destinies decrease. We are helplessly watching our influence on the destiny of our nation decrease. Commentators much more skilled than I believe that if this accelerated trend continues, then our Westminster system of government will be severely threatened and maybe will be ineffectual. In other words, policy decisions will be made by external forces, not politicians elected by Australians to govern Australia. I think I heard a passionate reference to this danger from the member for Southport, and I agree.

These same commentators point to the success of resource-poor Singapore under the uncompromising rule of Lee Kuan Yew. He used protection to get those industries he wanted safely established for the benefit of Singapore people. He obtained all the foreign capital he wanted on his own terms without selling national assets. He has publicly criticised Canberra as naive in the international arena. To those members who doubt this, I recommend reading the Asian Mind Game or owning and running a business in Asia, as I still do.

Tom Curtis, international trade manager for Price Waterhouse, warned some time ago that—

> "Whilst Australia is busy dismantling its protective barriers, the rest of the world seems intent on raising trade walls by way of incentives, tariffs and non-trade tariff barriers."

Ask our pork producers. They will be further impressed when they discover that two Queensland economists—QDPI economists—have developed a more accurate econometric model and have now proved that the Canberra model predicted incorrectly and that the Australian pork market will not return to stability at a lower price, as predicted, but will remain unstable, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, for Australian pork producers to predict market trends and thus budget.

What were the compelling arguments for the introduction of the NCP? The Committee for Economic Development of Australia—CEDA—published information paper no. 49 in 1996. It was edited by Douglas McTaggart, the Under Secretary of the Queensland Treasury at that time. That paper says—

> "The NCP is arguably the most far reaching micro-economic reform initiative undertaken between the Commonwealth Government and the State and Territory governments. Based on the Hilmer Report of 1993, the NCP aims to achieve competition reform in all sectors of the economy with an emphasis on the creation of integrated national markets by breaking down barriers to trade across jurisdictions. The policy has a particular focus on the public sector, given the importance of efficiency in this sector to the overall economy, and its traditional protection from competition."

My comment is that I do not think the report was recommending that sale to overseas buyers and privatisation was the methodology of achieving efficiency in the public utilities. To continue with the quote—

> "The NCP also has major implications for other sectors of the economy such as the professions and statutory marketing authorities, where competition has been limited.
>
> If implemented genuinely, the gains from the competition will be immense. The Industry Commission has identified there will be a net gain to Australia's GDP of 5.5% per year, or $23 billion per year."

I find it hard to understand how a 5.5% increase compounding yearly can result in a steady yearly increase of $23 billion, but the actual results which I will define later show that such an oversight is of no significance. The information paper continued—

> "These gains will be shared by consumers and industry alike."

Let us have a look at the actual consequences. Firstly, I address the GDP. Remember that a 5.5% annual increase was predicted as a result of NCP. The actual GDP percentage changes from 1994 have been: 1994, 4.7%; 1995, 4%; 1996, 3.9%; 1997, 3.7%; 1998, 4.7%; 1999 forecast, 4.1%; and 2000 forecast, 3.8%. Considered yearly, there is a considerable shortfall; compounded, there is a huge shortfall.

The Industry Commission predicted that an increase in household disposable income of $1,500 per annum, deriving primarily from lower prices resulting from competition driven improvements, would benefit members of the Australian community. The commission also identified that employment would increase from higher participation rates by 30,000 jobs. It also identified that, of the $23 billion per year increase in GDP, reforms at the State and local government level would contribute $19m. Thus, reforms undertaken by State and local government levels is critical to realising the promised gains. The commission also identified that the benefit from NCP would be widespread throughout the economy, with particular gains going to consumers, small business and exporters. That promise is at great variance with the facts given by previous speakers in this debate tonight. So, what have been the results of this micro-economic reform?

Firstly, I will deal with GDP. Obviously, the GDP percentage change is influenced by a complex of factors, but the above percentages show a very significant shortfall from the proposed results. Personally, I have great difficulty accepting that GDP is the best indicator of national economic performance. Increased GDP, coupled with an increasing overseas debt, can signal that, as a nation, we are living beyond our means.

Michael Cave, writing in the Financial Review on 6 May 2000 said—

> "The last couple of years have seen more people swept up in a consumer frenzy that has encouraged them to loosen the purse strings and live the lifestyle of a high roller regardless of whether they have the wealth to support it."

He continued—

> "The level of household personal debt in Australia has grown 17% in the last year to $69 billion."

During the period concerned our current account deficits in billions of dollars recorded yearly were as follows: 1994-95, $28.7; 1995-96, $21.7; 1996-97, $17.8; 1997-98, $22.8; and 1998-99, $32.4. Australia now has a net foreign debt of $228 billion. This can be translated to mean that each of Australia's 5.5 million families has $42,000 of foreign debt. This probably halves the net assets of each family in Australia. It is 25 years since Australia had a surplus in its dealings with the rest of the world.

In 1998-99, we spent $14.9 billion more on imports than we earned from our exports. In that same year, we paid out a net $17.5 billion as interest and dividends on the very high level of foreign investment in Australia. We have progressively privatised and sold our public assets to service our debts. I suggest that an annual balance sheet for Australia would show a steady decrease in national net worth. In my jaundiced eyes, quoting only a rising GDP as evidence of a strong economy is irresponsible.

Employment is hard to truthfully compare between the years involved because of the different methods of defining employment. We currently seem to regard a few pitiful hours of work per week as employment. In his 1994 book titled "Pedalling Prosperity—Economic Sense and Nonsense in the Age of Diminished Expectations", Paul Krugman discusses the difficulty of defining full employment. He discusses the relationship between wage levels and employment and the so-called Phillips curve which supposedly defines the trade-off between unemployment and inflation. Thus, the truthful definition of unemployment needs to be qualified by a definition of what is defined as employment. It should consider current inflation, etc. Frankly, I do not believe that employment has increased as a result of NCP. In fact, rural employment has definitely declined.

With regard to the equal spread of benefits, previous speakers have already shown that the benefits of deregulation have not been equally spread, with the dairy industry being the favourite example. I have listened to over 300 dairy farmers in the last week, and their futures are frightening. The member for Gregory, the member for Charters Towers and the member for Warrego are undoubtedly aware of the negative effects of NCP on isolated local authorities.

Employees of Queensland Rail in four Queensland provincial cities, including Maryborough, who are currently under threat of job losses must be wondering why Queensland Rail is buying rolling stock overseas and is not quoting on the transport of coal from the central Queensland coalfields.

The employees of Walkers in Maryborough and Goninans in Townsville must be wondering about the purchase of railway rolling stock from overseas.

What is the price differential between Australian and overseas manufactured rolling stock? Has the multiplier of buying locally been considered? How do the quality and expected working life compare? Australian manufactured steel costs around $900 a tonne and imported steel, intermittently landed and available in Australia, costs $650 to $700 a tonne. Fabricated steel from overseas can be landed in Australia $300 per tonne cheaper than steel products manufactured here.

Canberra, the WTO and globalisation have exposed our steel fabricators to competition from Brazil and the Philippines. Any thinking person must ask: can our fabricators compete against such low wage countries without lowering wages and, thus, our standard of living? Recently, there has been much talk of "competitive neutrality" and "comparative advantage" in this House. Does this situation, which also exists in other manufacturing industries, imply that we are facing the alternative of sacrificing our standard of living, or sacrificing jobs?

We seem to have forgotten that we should be putting Australians first. The ABS states that from 1994-95 to 1997-98, the mean annual gross weekly income for all income units in private dwellings increased by 10%, that is, from $596 to $658. However, mean incomes for units depending on their own businesses were particularly volatile. Many Governments acknowledge that small business, including farming, is the internal powerhouse of their national economies and the source of their future job growth. The Dutch Government has made a policy decision that future improvements in its national economy will come from small business, and it is taking aggressive action to increase the potential for success of small businesses. If the NCP has increased the volatility of small business, then its benefits must be questioned.

Between 1992 and 1998, the average debt to asset ratio of Australian farm businesses rose significantly. In 1993, the average farm external debt was $145,000 and in 1998, $208,000. In relation to household disposable income—and I remind the House that the commission promised an increase of $1,500 a year—to my surprise, when researching this statistic, I found that, in fact, it is the measure of household expenditure. How, then, do we know that it is actually disposable income and that it does not reflect an increase in credit facility debt? The Reserve Bank bulletin of February 2000 reveals that in December 1996 the total advances outstanding on the 7.4 million credit cards then issued was $7.67 billion. In December 1999, there were 8.8 million credit cards with $14 billion outstanding.

The only simple industry that I can find that has improved its performance is gambling. Gambling expenditure as a proportion of household disposable income has risen from 1.75% in 1982 to 3.25% in 1997. Recently, the Queensland Council of Social Research reported that, from 1982 to 1996, poverty in Queensland has doubled, and that the number of single people under 25 in "after housing" poverty has increased to 37.3%. In 1997, the Council of Small Business Organisations of Australia reported that SMEs employ over 57% of the private sector work force. Further, it found that regional small businesses are facing major constraints on their competitiveness and that the policies at all three levels of Government are not keeping up with the changing pressures on regional small business, mainly because of a profound lack of information on this sector.

I conclude by saying that the NCP may have sounded like a significant and beneficial micro-economic reform, but its impact has been the reverse of what was predicted. Thus I support very significant changes to the National Competition Policy. I recommend that this Parliament investigate in detail the impact of Queensland alone withdrawing from the NCP. Assuming that this study will be done, I support this Bill.

Time expired.

Mr KAISER (Woodridge—ALP) (9.43 p.m.): At first, I did not intend to speak in this debate but after hearing this evening the contributions of a number of members in which they referred to the impact of the National Competition Policy on rural communities, I felt obliged to say at least a few words in this debate about the impact of National Competition Policy, globalisation, deregulation, privatisation and all the rest on the urban fringe. I am indebted to the member for Nicklin for allowing me to jump the queue and make a brief contribution in this debate before returning to see my wife and one of my three children who are in the Parliament tonight.

During this debate, a lot has been said about the rural sector. I do not doubt for one minute that the bush is burning, that the rural sector is doing it tough. It might interest members to know that I was actually raised on

a farm. It was not a very big farm; it was a five-acre farm in Woodridge.

An honourable member: That is not a farm.

Mr KAISER: It was a farm to my old man. He actually enjoyed it, and he enjoyed the lifestyle. He considered himself a farmer and for many —

An honourable member: A backyard.

Mr KAISER: The member might call it a backyard but it was my father's backyard and for many years he derived his income from that farm and fed a four-kid family from that farm. On occasions, he went broke and he had to go back to blue-collar work to save up enough money to pursue his passion for farming. After that, he did upgrade to a 72-acre farm out at Logan Village, which might meet with a little bit more satisfaction from the members opposite, but to him it was a farm and he derived an income from it. So I may not have as much appreciation of farm life as have other members of this House, but I have some appreciation of the lifestyle and the conditions. The old man went broke several times having a go at farming and had to return to blue-collar work, which was not his passion. Blue-collar work is not a passion of many people, but on many occasions he had to return to blue-collar work to pursue his passion for farming. I just said that to give members an understanding that I have some appreciation for what it might be like on the land—not as much as others here; I acknowledge that.

Mr Pearce: He brought you up the right way.

Mr KAISER: That is right. Despite being a farmer, my father brought me up the right way.

Tonight, I really wanted to say that, although we have heard a lot about the impacts of NCP and deregulation on the rural sector, let us not forget the effect that that has had on the urban fringe, which is currently falling between two stools. The inner city receives benefits by virtue of where it is and who lives there. Members have referred to the big end of town. Where does the big end of town live? They live in the inner city. The urban fringe is also not part of rural communities, either. The urban fringe falls between two stools, and currently is not getting much attention at all. At least the rural sector is now getting some attention from the Federal Government and from other levels of government. However, the urban fringe—

An Opposition member interjected.

Mr KAISER: The member should talk to his Federal colleagues about that. The urban fringe is falling between two stools and is not getting the kind of recognition that it deserves.

The member for Crows Nest talked about the One Nation vote and how it was a manifestation of the anger and frustration that people felt about National Competition Policy. I agree with him, but I ask members to consider where the One Nation vote was at its most savage. The One Nation vote was at its most savage in the urban fringe communities around the major provincial cities of Queensland. If we accept the argument put forward by the member for Crows Nest that the One Nation vote was a manifestation of the anger and frustration that people felt about all of these issues, then we should look at where the One Nation vote fell. According to the member's argument, that is where the most pain is being felt. Therefore, it is being felt mainly in the urban fringe communities. In fact, the further west in Queensland, the lower the One Nation vote. The One Nation vote was also certainly not high in the inner-city areas. It was at its highest in the urban fringe.

The One Nation vote in that area was a cry for help. A lot of blue-collar people voted for One Nation. The mob that they elected to this place has not been much help to them, and they have deserted that mob in droves because they did not take up their issues for them. The Labor Party and the National Party have been working hard to try to claw back that vote by changing some of our views and attitudes to some of those people's concerns. We are succeeding to a greater extent than those former One Nation members in representing their points of view and, to an extent, I include the National Party in that.

Mr Dalgleish: We'll see at the next election.

Mr KAISER: We will see at the next election.

The real concern that I have—and it is one of the things that I observe happening in my own community—is the separation of Australian society into the haves and have-nots. It used to be the case in Australia that the rich and the poor lived in the same street together. There was a diversity of view in every suburb, in every street. The really disturbing thing that is happening now is not so much that there are wealthy people and poor people. That has probably always been the case and probably always will be. There will always be different levels of wealth. However, what I think is really disturbing is that the haves and the have-nots are now separating geographically. Wealthy people are living in the inner-city areas and poor people are living

in communities such as mine. Whether those people are welfare recipients or the working poor, they are poor people who are congregating together in suburbs. That is not a healthy thing. There ought to be diversity in all of our suburbs in all of our streets. It is not a healthy thing that we are dividing geographically as well as along socioeconomic grounds.

The other point I wish to make is that the Federal Government and the Liberal Party in particular use globalisation and National Competition Policy as an excuse to pull out of a community and not intervene. The Liberal Party and the Federal Government use it as an argument for less Government intervention. In my view, globalisation and National Competition Policy—and this point was made by a number of members from both sides of the House—is the very reason why Government needs to intervene more, not less. It is not an excuse for less Government intervention, it is a reason for more Government intervention. A number of members on both sides of the House have made that point. Interestingly, when it comes to rural communities or rural industries the National Party argues for more regulation, but when it comes to the labour market it argues for less regulation.

Mr Slack interjected.

Mr KAISER: Generally speaking, it does. But if it applies to one set of industries, it ought to apply to the labour market as well. Globalisation and deregulation is a good reason for regulation in the labour market.

Mr Slack interjected.

Mr KAISER: The member should talk to Santo some time about his views of regulation and the labour market.

If it is good enough for rural communities and industries it is good enough for the labour market generally—for blue-collar workers, too. They need regulation. They need Government intervention to make sure that they are protected from the worst aspects of globalisation and National Competition Policy. But it is hard to intervene. It is hard for a Government to intervene if it does not have the financial benefits of being involved in the system. The member for Burnett made a point about the payments that are received through our participation in the National Competition Policy. It is hard to intervene in a meaningful way if we do not have the legislative framework to get involved in mitigating the worst aspects of National Competition Policy. That is why I oppose this Bill.

Mr Johnson: The point is, though, if a policy is not working—and this policy is working in some places and not others—don't you think we've got to be man enough to admit that there's a problem there and we've got to have flexibility and change direction or reverse the policy?

Mr KAISER: That could well be the case, but the answer is not to scrap Queensland's framework, because Queensland's framework gives us the money.

Mr Johnson: I am not talking about scrapping the framework. I am just saying: there's aspects within that framework that we have got to revisit.

Mr KAISER: I could not agree with the member more, but the answer is not to vote for this Bill, because it removes the very mechanisms that we need in order to be able to intervene to protect people.

People speak about the great US economic miracle of simultaneous low inflation with low unemployment. We look at that policy, scratch our head and wonder how they could have done that. I know their tariff walls are high, but generally speaking they have embraced globalisation. Let us face it, there are not many alternatives. We need to embrace globalisation. It is here and there is not too much that Governments can do about it. We scratch our head and wonder how the US—a relatively open economy by world standards—can achieve low inflation and low unemployment while still embracing globalisation. At the heart of that economic miracle is a move by the Clinton administration towards more Government intervention, not less. They have used globalisation as the reason for more Government intervention, not less. I draw the attention of honourable members to its policy of enterprise zones. They go into communities and say, "This is a distressed community. This is a disadvantaged community." Whether it is an urban or a rural community, they identify specific geographic areas and they devote Government resources, tax breaks and focused social policy to try to deal with the issues in those distressed communities.

Mr Johnson: You've got to admit, though, that element is creeping into every community. I think that's something that we as members of Parliament are well aware of, and you lot highlighted that in your area. We have all got it.

Mr KAISER: Sure, we have, but to varying degrees. I would stack up the social problems of Woodridge against the social problems of any rural community. I have held up the member for Nicklin for much longer than I promised I would. In conclusion, globalisation is the justification for more Government intervention, not less.

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—IND) (9.53 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Repeal Bill. The House has been debating this Bill on and off for many weeks and I am looking forward to a vote on this Bill finally being taken. I do not intend to go over the many issues that have already been raised, discussed and debated in this House. Suffice it to say that I believe by voting in support of this Bill I will be adding my voice to the growing number of calls for a major review of this type of legislation.

Yesterday, when I listened to numerous farmers who visited Parliament House, a common comment made to me was the desire to see all politicians working together to solve the problems and difficulties many people in our community are experiencing as a result of the effects of the changing rules of production and supply. Some politicians say that we cannot stop the competition policy reform, which commenced a number of years ago. I do not share that view. I believe we have a role and an opportunity to have an impact on this issue by improving the living conditions of many Queenslanders. I intend to vote in support of this Bill and I hope that vote will be taken later this evening.

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (9.55 p.m.), in reply: As was highlighted earlier, the debate on the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Repeal Bill has gone on over a number of weeks now, and it has been very enlightening. I thank all honourable members for their contributions and for the manner in which they have conducted the debate. The debate has highlighted the fact that there is a real devil in the competition policy as it has been dished out to a lot of communities across Queensland and Australia.

I can relate to the comments of the member for Woodridge, who said that his family came off a small farm or a small lot. As the son of a cream farmer from Kumbia, it is enlightening to know that somebody else has come off a small property that met with devastation. As he said, his parents went broke a few times working their way through life. My family was no different. My father's passion was farming. Unfortunately, he wound up having to join the Transport Workers Union and drive trucks for a living rather than working with his brother on the farm that they lost due to the elements and a drought back in 1964.

As I make my contribution to the House tonight, I will highlight some of the things other members have said and respond to their questions as I address the devil of the National Competition Policy and the reason for our introduction of the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Repeal Bill.

There is probably no legislation more soul destroying for the average Queenslander than that which implements the idiocy of the National Competition Policy. Competition is healthy, but the rampant, ruthless and unbridled predatory behaviour which is condoned and even encouraged by the National Competition Policy is already destroying the very fabric of our society. I acknowledge that the financial gamblers, the shareholders, the futures punters and those who seek, and often find, a short cut to wealth through derivatives trading and the like may applaud, and indeed embrace totally, economic rationalism. However, that quick quid—that quick make—comes at the expense of the small and inexperienced investor, the mums and dads who cannot afford the losses that are necessary to fuel the profits of the big operators.

Meanwhile, in the real world of production out there in rural and regional Queensland, National Competition Policy wreaks absolute havoc among farmers, the workers and the small business operators. Let me reiterate those sectors of our communities—the farmers, the workers and the small business operators. Those people are the real wealth producers of our State. They are the people who actually produce the goods and services. They are the people who are the backbone of our society and they are the people who deserve a fair go, but instead they are being ground into the dirt by the ravages of a flawed economic theory.

"The free market will provide competition and efficiencies which flow on as benefits to the consumer", say the simpletons who promote this puerile dogma. Wrong, and I mean wrong! For a start, there is absolutely no such a thing as a free market. Every single market, from the tiniest local flea market to the mammoth international commodity markets, suffers aberrations, whether deliberate or coincidental, because of the formation of monopolies, oligopolies and cartels, predatory pricing, market share dominance and a raft of other factors. Even if there were such thing as

a free market, any efficiencies would be more likely to flow into increased profits for the dominant company than into benefits for the consumers.

The level playing field of laissez faire economic theory has all but destroyed the Australian beef industry, as other speakers have already highlighted. I pay homage to those on this side who spoke about the beef industry with passion. In years gone by there were myriad meat companies and small and medium butchering enterprises; competition was strong and producers received realistic prices for their cattle at saleyards throughout the nation, and then entered the market manipulating bullyboys.

The Federal Government stood idly by and allowed the amalgamation of a host of meat processing and exporting companies to form a conglomerate which became Australian Meat Holdings. AMH is an arm of the monolithic transnational, ConAgra. I do not have to tell members on this side what it is about, but I will let other members hear about it. The formation of this entity alone, absorbing several of the major players of the industry, caused a massive—and I mean massive—drop in competition. That was not enough for this greedy predator. AMH embarked on a vicious campaign to achieve market dominance. One by one smaller opposition operators were singled out, attacked and ultimately destroyed.

AMH buyers wandered the saleyards openly nominating who had been chosen as the next victim of its ruthless campaign. It attacked its opposition by forcing prices above viable levels. It had the market coverage and livestock turnover to average its purchases and the financial might to withstand any short-term trading losses. Its presence in every market in the State ensured that its victim found no relief, and one by one it annihilated its opposition and became ever more dominant and exerted ever greater control.

At the same time it waged a concerted campaign against the auction system, which had been the mainstay of competition. By forcing producers to sell weight at works, it would have even greater control over cattle prices. It was aided and abetted in this campaign by leading luminaries in the Department of Primary Industries who, for whatever reason, encouraged producers to sell direct, further tightening the noose around the neck of the beleaguered producers. That company has all but achieved its aim. Morex and Hub Meats, Murgon, are but two of the many who tried to provide competition in the marketplace against this predatory juggernaut, and they failed.

AMH rolls on and inevitably will be the sole arbiter on cattle prices. Cattle producers will be at the absolute mercy of this greedy multinational, and I believe that it is fair to say that they will take a fair bit of convincing about the credibility of the free trade theory. These are the bullyboys who are the mates of our current State Government. This is a company that received a $500m hand-out by way of a massive taxpayer-funded upgrade of the Dinmore rail yards. This is the privileged organisation whose executives travel around Japan on a Government jet to conduct their business, and I am sure that the displaced workers of Murgon—and there might not be so many now that they have received a bit of a hand-out package—and the disadvantaged beef producer clients of that company would be thrilled to see their tax dollars being spent so judiciously!

AMH, this Government's bullyboy mate, is just one of the monopolistic beneficiaries of a crazy free market theory which underwrites the National Competition Policy. The National Competition Policy driven onslaught on the regulated milk market was supposed to deliver benefits to the consumers, many of whom are real battlers to whom milk is a vital daily requirement. But will it deliver cheaper milk, better milk or a more assured milk supply? Will it deliver any benefit to the consumer whatsoever? The answer is a resounding no.

It is now a matter of record that even the first stages of deregulation have resulted in a reduction in the price to the farmer but an increase in the price to the consumer. We heard again just the other week of another 9c per litre rise in the retail price of milk. The only efficiency likely to be achieved is that the Victorian dominance of production will force Queensland farmers directly to the wall, and where is the efficiency in that? Where is the community benefit? Where is Queensland's community benefit in that? Unfortunately, Victorian production is seasonal. So the reduced production from Queensland, which traditionally has been year round, will cause seasonal shortages. It will cause inconvenience and even more savage price hikes to the consumer. There is no benefit to the consumer in this example, just as there is no community benefit in most others—and that was supposed to be the whole purpose of this ghastly exercise.

The absurdity of the free market theory can be demonstrated by the analogy with school football teams. Generally, competitions

are structured and staged in weight ranges or age groups. No-one would suggest that an under 6 should play with an under 15, and I defy anyone to claim that there is not fierce competition within those grades. But Professor Hilmer in his simplistic free market theory and traders would suggest that to promote full competition those barriers should be removed. The next thing we will see will be the Caboolture under 10s running on against the Broncos.

Professor Hilmer and his tunnel vision followers have been dazzled by perceptions. Free trade sounds good. Regulated trade sounds bad. But if we redefined "free trade" as "unmanaged trade" and "regulated trade" as "managed", the perception is reversed. The economic rationalists cannot see that a degree of management in markets will always be needed to prevent bullyboy tactics of those who have total market dominance, because when that happens it is always the consumer who suffers. The very person who was supposed to be advantaged by National Competition Policy actually becomes the victim.

Much has been made of the cost to this State if we were to withdraw. Sure, there is a considerable amount of blackmail money that the Commonwealth may seek to withhold, but what value do we place on jobs, on human dignity and, in extreme cases, on human life? At this point we should acknowledge that there are those, especially in the bush and especially from farming communities, who have been so ravaged that they have, in fact, taken their lives. There has been an alarming increase in the number of dysfunctional families and the incidence of depression and even suicide. A large percentage of this social malady has been evident in rural and regional communities, and the blame can be laid directly at the feet of National Competition Policy.

Information from the Department of Health and Aged Care supplied by the Australian Bureau of Statistics states that there were 2,683 suicides recorded in 1998. Male suicides continue to outnumber female suicides by four to one, and males in rural areas have a consistently higher rate of suicide than their urban counterparts. Most of those afflicted are young people, particularly young males who previously had so much to live for, so much enthusiasm and bucket loads of that great, indomitable Queensland spirit. Those people have seen the careers and lifestyles that they loved destroyed before their very eyes. They were never afraid of hard work. They were never afraid of adversity. In fact, they relished the challenges thrown at them by the robust nature of their chosen field. The one thing they are afraid of is being dependent on the welfare system and dependent on the charity of others, and that is what National Competition Policy has done to them.

For this disruption, waste and destruction of human life, combined with further fracturing of the traditional family unit and the blow-out in welfare payments, the Commonwealth offers us some blackmail money. In competition payments for 1997-98 we received $40m, which was repeated in 1998-99. For 1999-2000 the ransom is set at $81.4m, while for 2000-01 we will be blackmailed to the tune of $122.1m.

Dr Kingston: How much has primary industries lost?

Mr FELDMAN: Yes, how much have we lost through that industry? How much have we lost through farms that have been shut down?

This is not a bucket of money which has appeared as if by magic. The money is not the product of National Competition Policy; the money is simply an allocation from Commonwealth funds. Commonwealth funds belong to the people of Australia and should be distributed equitably. The people of Queensland have a degree of ownership of those funds. The people of Queensland are entitled to their normal per capita distribution of funds from the Commonwealth, whether we embrace the idiocy of NCP or not. Are we prepared to sell out our constituents by embracing the evils of National Competition Policy? Are we prepared to accept the bribes from the Commonwealth and ignore the wellbeing of rural and regional Queenslanders? What will we receive anyway?

The enormous administrative burden involving the inane application of competition reform tests applied to everything from parking laws to purchasing a few pots of paint have already saddled State and local government departments with enormous expense. Add to that the cost of welfare payments and the loss of productivity from the only truly productive sector of our economy and it is quite obvious that the bribe money has all been dissipated. Is the result increased efficiency? Is the result consumer benefit? No, it definitely is not. The only result has been the destruction of rural and regional Queensland.

An article in the Australian by Gerard McManus entitled "The Evolution of Political Parties" states—

> "The history of federal political parties in Australia revolves around two themes still present in politics today—protection vs free trade and Labor vs anti-Labor."

That philosophy is reflected in the Prime Ministers who have been and gone: Edmund Barton, protectionist; Alfred Deakin, protectionist; John Christian Watson, protectionist; George Houston Reid, free trade; Andrew Fisher, protectionist; and the list goes on. We see how it has evolved between free trade and protection since 1901. Our best times have always been in times of protection.

I heard the member for Maryborough ask, "What will we lose?" I have already highlighted what we will lose. What will we gain? We will gain a State that stands up. We will gain a State that has had the backbone to actually deny the Commonwealth its bullyboy powers. The domino effect will start and this State will again be the once great State it was. I cannot see the Commonwealth not bowing to some of the demands of Queensland when most of the wealth that it splashes around comes from this State. That is what we will gain: a State with backbone and a State to be proud of.

National Competition Policy is a scandalous misuse of power by the Commonwealth. It is a disgrace that it is prepared to use funds which are rightfully ours in the first place to blackmail us into accepting its flawed and simplistic theories embodied in the dogma of economic rationalism. Blackmail is a capital offence for which an offender should receive a term in jail. And here we have the Commonwealth Government prepared to blackmail our States! We have even heard the Treasurer get up and tell us how he was blackmailed into signing Queensland into the GST. We have been signed into jail numerous times before. Let us resist the blackmail attempts. For the sake of a few pieces of silver, let us show that this Parliament is prepared to put people before profit. Let us send a message to fellow Australians that this Parliament, the Parliament of Queensland, places Queenslanders ahead of international big business.

This Parliament is elected by the people of Queensland to stand up for the rights of Queenslanders and to make decisions in the best interests of Queenslanders. Each and every one of us has an obligation to ensure that our decision making is measured by the needs of our constituents. We are not here to give force to the fanciful dreams of economic theorists, nor are we here to do the bidding of the Federal bureaucrats who have swallowed the economic rationalist hype and are now seeking to blackmail us into accepting a product of their whims and daydreams.

We are here to make decisions in the interests of the displaced regional workers and the regional small business operators who have been bankrupted and continue to be bankrupted by this evil policy. We are here to protect the interests of all those battling Queensland families who rely on us not so much to protect them but to ensure that at least they get a fair go. The only way they will get a fair go is by ensuring that the monopolies, the cartels and the oligopolies are not allowed to take advantage or even encouraged to do so, as they are in the current circumstances by legislation such as National Competition Policy legislation.

I call on all members of this House and everyone who has spoken against what is inherently evil in this policy to ignore the rantings of the "profit before people" brigade. The old adage, "every man for himself and God help the rest"—what the elephant said as he tap danced among the chickens—adequately describes the attitudes of these soulless bean counters. I call on all members of this House to find the courage to support the people of this State who supported them and vote to adopt the Competition Policy Reform (Queensland) Repeal Bill.

The Treasurer is trying to use some very manipulative political speak to try to point the finger of blame at me for the destruction of Queensland industry. It almost makes me keel over with laughter. The City Country Alliance did not make these laws. We did not and have not embraced globalisation. We have not sold our souls and the souls of the people we represent to international influence. I am sure that the major parties in this country could not say the same thing in truth or with a clear conscience. If for one second the Treasurer believes that his Government is protecting industry, I would hate to see what they call destroying industry. The Treasurer ranted and raved with excuse after excuse and finger pointing and rhetoric, yet his own organisation is a party to the dangerous and disgraceful trade-offs to Mr and Mrs Average, for Mr and Mrs Big Banker, Big Business and Big Donor and for Mr and Mrs Overseas Interest.

Unfortunately, the coalition was perhaps no better. The Government and the coalition were like two sides of the same coin when it came to the crunch. All State Governments are overrunning with excuses as to why we can or cannot do things because the Commonwealth Government this and the

Commonwealth Government that. It is time for us to grow up and realise that we have been elected by Queensland to represent the interests of Queenslanders. They obviously do not know what the interests of some Queenslanders are, or is this just another example of the adept excellence at arrogance and ignorance?

It is successive Labor and coalition Governments that have allowed and aided the continual erosion of the powers of the State. Blaming others for inaction is not an acceptable excuse. I am sure I speak on behalf of many Queenslanders, especially those who exist in the industries affected and damaged by National Competition Policy, when I say that excuses are not good enough. The people have been fed so much rubbish over the years that all the major parties are beginning not to work any more. It is only a matter of time until all the political propaganda and posturing in the world will not stop the people from holding them accountable.

Mr Knuth: No wonder north Queensland wants to separate.

Mr FELDMAN: Yes, it is no wonder north Queensland wants to separate and become its own State. I am sure that there would be many members of this House who would probably want to emigrate to north Queensland should it become a State in its own right. I am sure there would be many members of this House, especially members on this side, who would agree with the sentiment expressed by the member for Burdekin.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: That is right. I saw the statements of the member for Townsville in one of the papers.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): Order! I am having enough difficulty understanding this speech. I ask the Chamber to allow the speaker to continue.

Mr FELDMAN: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was going to comment on a statement made by the member for Townsville some years ago about seceding. It is very interesting. I find it interesting to hear the Treasurer's comments about the dispassionate operation of the free trade market and the level playing field he thinks his Government is protecting Queensland industry from. Again, that is a turnaround in the truth. I have no hesitation in saying that none of the major political organisations has shown real evidence of a fight against the free market and the level playing field to which the Treasurer refers.

If anything, Labor and Liberal have shown that they support this utopian economic rationalist agenda of the level playing field and the free common market for the world. In no way does the Treasurer have any reason to mention his Government's action in protecting rural industries from the dispassionate operation of the free market. His Government promotes it and indeed sends honest, hardworking people broke in the process. Honest, hardworking people go about their business for years with certain expectations and certain unwritten boundaries to their livelihoods. Then one day some arrogant Government decides to change the rules and starts preaching at them about environmental decay, international agreements, Commonwealth bean counters and economic experts recommending better, more efficient ways of doing things—and, bang: suddenly Mr Honest Hardworking Queenslander finds himself struggling to survive in an industry that had survived for a long time before all the social experts decided to run his life for him.

Labor's response to National Competition Policy is just like its response to the GST: just do nothing. After all, it will be riding the one-horse Government sooner or later. Both NCP and GST were first introduced by the Labor Party to begin with, hence its reason for inaction. Both NCP and GST were touted by the biggest economic rationalist this country has ever seen and indeed ever had—Paul Keating. One would say that Keating has "out-liberalled" the Liberals.

I ask the Treasurer what industries he considers himself and his party to be protecting with competition policy. National Competition Policy certainly did not protect any industry that I can think of or that I have seen in the past few years. And what good is it anyway? It represents more excuses for the weaknesses and the inability of a Government to do what it is really paid to do.

The Treasurer makes fun of our fight for fair trade, not free trade. The Government mocks our calls for fair trade, not free trade. The coalition does not support that call either, yet fair trade is not free trade. That has been our message since our inception. It is a fair conclusion, then, to say that they also mock and ridicule those who spoke out about free trade.

The City Country Alliance did not introduce this Bill to create hardship, to hurt anybody, to connivingly destroy people's lives or any of the actions referred to by the Honourable the Treasurer. We introduced this Bill because of the devastating effect National

Competition Policy is having in our communities and our State. We introduced this Bill to represent our electorates and those who have supported us and our cause and have stood behind us. We introduced this Bill in the interests of the whole of Queensland, to aid in the fight against the economic madness that is in our nation. We introduced this Bill because, quite obviously, unlike others, we put people first rather than politics or power.

As I have said, just about every election since Federation has been fought on the protection versus free trade issue. It is unfortunate that this is how long the dogma of free trade has been around. The offering in the Australian newspaper that I spoke about earlier is just a sad indictment of how the Labor Party has changed over the years. I guess declining union membership and substantial donations from large multinational companies to Labor Party coffers have caused a paradigm shift, and hence we see the conflict of the schizophrenic attitude of our Treasurer.

I will comment briefly on some of the comments of the members for Gregory, Toowoomba North and Southport.

Mr Seeney: What about me?

Mr FELDMAN: And, I must admit, Mr Seeney. Indeed, there were some excellent contributions. I wondered whether they were hiding what was actually written into National Party policy, which I have a copy of here. I am led to believe that the web site was even updated on 17 May this year, while this debate was going on. It is sad to think—

Mr BORBIDGE: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the House. He knows full well that the National Party attitude in respect of NCP is—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves): There is no point of order. Resume your seat.

Mr BORBIDGE: The member's lies will not carry weight.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! You will withdraw that remark.

Mr BORBIDGE: I will withdraw that remark, but I will just reaffirm that—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Resume your seat. This is not a debate.

Mr BORBIDGE:—it is a stated position—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Resume your seat!

Mr BORBIDGE:—that this matter is under review at this year's National Party conference.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I warn the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr FELDMAN: I know that the attitude has changed, and I am pleased to see that change in attitude. I will be even more pleased when I see it changed in the policy documents of the National Party. I know that most of the honourable members on this side of the House have anti-NCP feeling. I know that because that is the sentiment of all of their speeches. I commend the Bill to the House.

Time expired.

Question—That the Bill be read a second time—put; and the House divided—

AYES, 33—Black, Borbidge, Cooper, E. Cunningham, Dalgleish, Elliott, Feldman, Gamin, Healy, Hobbs, Horan, Johnson, Kingston, Knuth, Lingard, Littleproud, Malone, Mitchell, Nelson, Paff, Pratt, Prenzler, Rowell, Seeney, Simpson, Slack, Springborg, Stephan, Turner, Veivers, Wellington. Tellers: Baumann, Hegarty

NOES, 47—Attwood, Barton, Beanland, Beattie, Bligh, Boyle, Bredhauer, Briskey, Clark, Connor, J. Cunningham, Davidson, Edmond, Elder, Fenlon, Foley, Hamill, Hayward, Kaiser, Lavarch, Mackenroth, McGrady, Mickel, Miller, Mulherin, Musgrove, Nelson-Carr, Nuttall, Palaszczuk, Pearce, Pitt, Quinn, Reeves, Reynolds, Roberts, Robertson, Rose, Santoro, Schwarten, Spence, Struthers, Watson, Welford, Wells, Wilson. Tellers: Sullivan, Purcell

Resolved in the **negative**.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from 25 May 1999 (see p. 1795)

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeronga—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for The Arts) (10.32 p.m.): On 11 March 1999, on my motion as Attorney-General, the Queensland Parliament referred a wide range of matters regarding the Freedom of Information Act 1992 to the all-party Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee for inquiry and report. That motion was supported by all members of Parliament, including the member for Surfers Paradise, the Leader of the Opposition. But a little over two months later, on 25 May 1999, the same honourable member came to this House to introduce the Bill which is currently before this Chamber. In so doing, he simply showed brazen disregard for the motion that he himself had agreed to but two months before. He did not wait for the all-party parliamentary committee to do its work. He did not wait for the members of his own party on

that parliamentary committee to do their work. He showed a high-handed indifference for the opportunity for members of the public to make their submissions and to be heard in the work of that all-party parliamentary committee. No, the member for Surfers Paradise simply sought to score cheap political points by introducing the Bill in the form that it had been introduced by the current Premier when in Opposition, at a time when there was in existence no all-party parliamentary committee reviewing the Freedom of Information Act. That is the crucial factor in this debate.

It is significant that that reference by the Parliament was done in terms that were deliberately wide so as to allow that all-party committee to consider submissions on all issues of concern regarding the operation of the Act. The terms of reference specifically required the committee to examine "whether the FOI Act should be amended, and in particular ... whether, and to what extent, the exemption provisions in Part 3 Division 2 should be amended". This review has given the community as well as Government agencies the opportunity to have a say on how the Act should be amended. But Mr Borbidge does not want the community to have a say. He wants to pre-empt the outcome of the all-party parliamentary committee review for which he himself voted.

The committee has received more than 160 written submissions and has also held public hearings. It is expected that it will table its report later this year. It would be the height of folly for this Parliament to snuff out the important work of that Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee by seeking to move by approving this Bill. One looks, for example, at the excellent work done by that committee in discussion paper No. 1, in which is set out a wide range of issues on which comment has been sought from members of the Parliament.

What we are dealing with here is a National Party and Liberal Party that not only shows brazen disregard for the committee system but also a National Party and Liberal Party which frankly refused to do anything about freedom of information during any time in which they were in Government. In the period leading up to 1989, they fought tooth and nail to stop freedom of information from being introduced into Queensland. It took the Fitzgerald report's recommendation for this to see the light of day, and it then took a Labor Government for the Freedom of Information Act to be introduced.

What about the poor member for Indooroopilly, the former Attorney-General, who had spent so much time when he was in Opposition criticising the Goss Government. When he came into power in the period 1996 to 1998, did he in fact reform the Freedom of Information Act in the manner which he foreshadowed by dint of his virulent criticisms? No! Why not? Because he was rolled in Cabinet by Premier Borbidge and his colleagues! They made it clear that there was to be no reform of the Freedom of Information Act, much less an opportunity for the people to have their say. That is what this Government promised to do before the election; that is what we have delivered on. We did so because that was the very process which the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission recommended. EARC recommended that the Act be reviewed by an all-party parliamentary committee from time to time. That was what was recommended; that is what the Labor Party took as its promise to the last election, and let me take honourable members to that. The election commitment was that—

> "Freedom of information laws will be reviewed by an all-party parliamentary committee to ensure that they are up to date and appropriate for developing technologies."

We promised to do that; we set it in train by dint of the motion that I had the honour of moving in this Parliament and which was unanimously accepted.

What this Bill does is to seek to turn back the clock to the time when Labor was in Opposition and when it had no choice but to bring legislation before the Parliament to deal with the scandalous attempts by the then Government to cover up its ministerial expenses. It was the Charlie Doyle situation which led to this scandalous attempt to cover up, which then prompted the Bill. That was done at a time when the Government of the day had certainly not moved in this House to empower an all-party parliamentary committee to review the legislation to enable the community to have its say, to enable a thorough examination of the issues as recommended by EARC.

It is the height of hypocrisy for the member for Surfers Paradise—the Leader of the Opposition—to come to this Chamber and to seek to pre-empt the outcome of the all-party parliamentary committee review in this area. Much is heard from time to time from the coalition about its supposed respect for the parliamentary committee system. Well, here is

the coalition's opportunity. Those opposite can either show some respect for the all-party parliamentary committee which is engaged in this important exercise, or they can persist with this cynical, brazen disregard for the parliamentary committee system which is embodied in Mr Borbidge's Bill.

The Government will not be supporting this Bill. It is an attempt to pre-empt the outcome of the all-party parliamentary committee. Mr Borbidge and his colleagues should be ashamed of themselves for seeking to disrupt the parliamentary committee process after they themselves voted for it on 11 March 1999.

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (10.41 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to speak on the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill introduced by the honourable Mr Borbidge on 25 May 1999. It is interesting to note the background to the introduction of this Bill. Far be it from me to be commenting that this Bill is another example of political posturing. The Premier introduced an identical Bill into this Parliament in March 1998. The Bill lapsed in May 1998.

It is interesting to note that both major parties introduced very similar legislation into this House. We do not know whether they really want to introduce the legislation or not. The aims of the two pieces of legislation were exactly the same. The accusations levelled at the Borbidge Government were similar to those that, I suppose, the coalition now throws at the Premier.

The fact is that freedom of information is not an issue which ought to be thrown around in politics. The clauses that this Bill amends have far reaching ramifications. These provisions relate to some exemptions from freedom of information in relation to the Cabinet and to the Executive Council. When one understands the power of the Executive Council and the Cabinet and the ability those institutions have to hide information, one can see the reasoning behind the introduction of a Bill such as this.

I agree with the concept of the Bill. I also agree that the Cabinet and the Executive Council should not be excluded from the Freedom of Information Act to such an extent that secrecy and, indeed, corruption, are promoted. The Premier, as the then Opposition Leader, referred in his second-reading speech in 1998 to his scepticism of the Borbidge Government over dishonest means which could be used. He discusses wheeling documents through the Cabinet room so that they would then be covered by the exemptions to the FOI. That is an act that I am sure would shock and disgust many Queenslanders.

I have no doubt that the Opposition, whilst in Government, used many dubious tactics behind closed doors that the people of Queensland would not consider to be becoming of people supposedly representing their interests and their needs. I doubt very much, however, that this type of behaviour occurs only with coalition Governments. Labor Governments also have some issues with regard to secrecy in Cabinet. Naturally, we are sceptical of both sides, as both sides have been in Government and both have shown clear signs of playing your-turn, my-turn politics and of focusing on the benefits of Parliament rather than the reason for Parliament. We are sceptical on behalf of the people of Queensland. I guess it is in their interests that we bring these matters to the attention of the House.

When the member for Brisbane Central produced the first version of this Bill and introduced it into the House back in 1998, he promised that a Labor Government would launch an inquiry into freedom of information. The Labor Government did this. In fact, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee began a review of the Freedom of Information Act in March 1999. That review, however, is still ongoing.

This review has called for submissions, has received and analysed submissions and has examined New Zealand's unique approach to accessing Government-held information first-hand. The committee has now released a discussion paper in order to stimulate a second round of public input—this time on particular issues with regard to which the committee is considering making recommendations. I have some concerns about that level of commitment because I know certain people would love to speak to that committee about some of the recommendations and some of the issues. I do not believe that Mr Lindeberg was invited to speak to the committee.

The Premier did start the review. Submissions on the new discussion paper were due on 7 April this year. It is unlikely that the result of this review, together with the recommendations, will occur any time this year. The wheels of bureaucracy and government turn relatively slowly. If the review is being undertaken correctly, appropriately and with propriety, I guess no-one would be upset about how slowly the wheels were turning. People become a little sceptical when

things move so slowly that it is impossible to see the wheels moving at all.

The Premier introduced an identical Bill in 1998. In view of his Government's commitment to reviewing the Freedom of Information Act, one would assume that this Bill would pass through the House with the support of the Beattie Labor Government.

Dr Prenzler interjected.

Mr FELDMAN: I take that interjection from the honourable member for Lockyer. I guess no-one in Government would be very keen on having Cabinet documents accessed. Some Cabinet documents need to be made somewhat more public than the Government of the day would like. There is no reason why the documents should not be made public.

The Premier believes that his Government already practises the purposes of this Bill. He has made several statements in the House to that effect. Surely, then, making that change in the law should not be a problem. If the Premier is already doing what this Act would put in place, I cannot see why he would be against putting those things into the legislation.

Unfortunately, together with others on this side of the House, I am doubtful that this particular Bill will ever be enacted. I hope that the Labor Party will not use the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee review to justify why this Bill should not be passed. If this Bill provides the answer to improving these particular clauses, why has the Labor Government not already introduced a similar Bill—a Bill it wanted introduced whilst it was in Opposition—and made the changes, even if it were only a small Bill to amend those relevant sections, whilst more thorough changes to legislation followed later, based upon the completed report of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee?

Those are questions that any reasonable person would want answered. When one looks at what has occurred and why it was brought up by the Premier, one sees that they are relevant questions that everyone in the community would expect answers to, and would expect an open, accountable Government to address.

Dr Prenzler: That's the Beattie Government.

Mr FELDMAN: I will take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. That is exactly what the Premier stated that his Government is all about: openness, transparency and accountability. I have actually lost count of the number of times that I have heard those words—openness, accountable and transparent—yet not a lot of legislation has been put into place to give that sort of indication to anyone outside Parliament. The Premier's own words are that his Government puts this Bill into practice, anyway. Why not give the people of Queensland a bit of reassurance in law? Why not force the accountability that the Premier was so keen to advocate whilst he was in Opposition?

I believe that the Beattie Labor Government cannot be taken seriously in its commitment to accountability, as proven by its failure to act in the interests of justice, especially over the Heiner affair. I have not received an interjection from those opposite. I was hoping for an interjection when I said the word "Heiner", because it always raises an interjection from those opposite. Obviously, the lateness of the night has not allowed that to occur. If the Labor Cabinet had not decided to shred evidence in relation to child abuse, when we first came into the House we would not have had to put the Government under so much pressure to actually force some Cabinet documents to be tabled in this House. At times, I do not think that the Premier's word is enough. We still see some of those Ministers from that Cabinet that shredded those documents sitting in this Parliament today—a Cabinet that could be legally functioning today under the amendments contained in this Bill.

The coalition has introduced this Bill with no changes to it. It is exactly the same as the Bill introduced by the Premier whilst he was in Opposition. That took a great deal of creativity. It must have been a wry smile on the face of the Opposition Leader as he introduced this Bill into the House—knowing that it was the very Bill that the then Premier, whilst in Opposition, introduced. I guess that would have been a wry smile indeed.

The Information Commissioner has recommended several times that sections 36 and 37 should be replaced with the provisions that were contained in the original legislation when it was introduced in 1992. The Information Commissioner listed several problems that he had with the Premier's Bill and why he thought that it was unworkable. Yet the coalition took none of that on board and simply introduced the very same Bill. It makes one wonder about the Information Commissioner and the recommendations that he made back then. Is the office of the Information Commissioner politicised? That is a terrible aspersion to make but, when the Information Commissioner says one thing and

then is suddenly expected to say something different, it makes one wonder.

The committee has received many submissions in relation to sections 36 and 37, the majority of them also calling for section 36 to be amended to restore it to its original form when the legislation was enacted in 1992. I wonder if the Opposition Leader took into consideration all of the recommendations and comments that were made about that issue since the Premier's Bill was introduced back in 1998. It appears that the Opposition Leader merely had the Bill reprinted with a different name attached.

However, we have always said that Labor and the coalition are very much two sides of the same coin. Now, in a not so small way, we see that, to a degree, that is perhaps proven. The closing words of the Opposition Leader's second-reading speech were—

> "I commend the Bill, which was introduced by my predecessor, the current Premier, as Labor Party policy, into the House."

We know that the Nationals keep stealing our policies, but it appears that they might also be pinching Labor's. Perhaps the coalition leader is concerned about the number of private member's Bills that the City Country Alliance members have introduced into this House and the coalition's lack of action in that regard. Perhaps that is why he has decided to rehash the Premier's old Bill. That might be one argument to advance at this late hour of the night.

However, regardless of the politics of this Bill, the essence of the Bill is indeed something that the City Country Alliance Queensland members are keen to support. As all members of this House would be well and truly aware, my colleagues and I have always been concerned about the events surrounding the Heiner affair and the order by Cabinet to shred important evidence of child abuse in this State. It is no mean feat that the Forde inquiry was instigated following all that debate in relation to what occurred and what may or may not have been in those documents that were shredded by Cabinet. I think that in no small way we pushed that matter to the point at which the Forde inquiry was set up.

Perhaps the Forde inquiry did not go far enough with respect to a lot of the issues that surrounded the Heiner matter and what occurred with the evidence that was collected. The Premier makes it quite clear that he is sick of hearing about this issue. Well he might be! Unlike the Premier or the Opposition, the City Country Alliance Queensland is representative of the people of Queensland and considers allegations of Government cover-ups to be a very serious matter and a very serious concern to the welfare of this Parliament and the welfare of all Queenslanders.

In an awareness that recommendations arising out of the Government's current committee inquiries into amending those sections of the Freedom of Information Act may be a long time coming, and taking into consideration the fact that this Bill is indeed an improvement on the current situation, we certainly will be supporting the legislation. However, I would certainly like to see one day a House of Parliament in this State that truly does put the people of Queensland above party politics instead of the "your turn, my turn" style of Government.

It is interesting to note the opening comments of the Premier's second-reading speech, made whilst he was in Opposition. He actually stated—

> "Labor will not wait until it is returned to power in order to start restoring some honesty and accountability to Government in Queensland. We are acting now with the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill to ensure that the National/Liberal State coalition Government cannot continue to hide ministerial expenses from public scrutiny."

The public of Queensland believes that many, many things are hidden from the public by the Cabinet process. Indeed, the Premier also said in that speech—

> "This is an abuse of the freedom of information legislation that my Government will not tolerate.
>
> ...
>
> This Bill amounts to a legislative promise that my Government will not sneak documents into Cabinet meetings as a device to hide them from the public."

Debate, on motion of Mr Feldman, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. T. M. MACKENROTH (Chatsworth—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.58 p.m.): I move—

"That the House do now adjourn."

Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (10.58 p.m.): Today the public witnessed for

the first time since 1994 some hundreds of Department of Families, Youth and Community Care staff taking industrial action in protest at the lack of funding and resources for child protection in Queensland. That demonstration occurred outside these precincts, in George Street. However, today was about more than simply a lack of funding and resources; it was about the continuing broken promises of this Government.

This Government made a range of promises whilst in Opposition. I recollect that, on a number of occasions, the Minister tried to stir up industrial action. It is marvellous how these things come around. It came around today. Actions speak louder than words. The Minister is looking more and more like a mime artist every day when it comes to this Government's delivery of election promises.

Since coming into office the Minister has failed her department and the people of Queensland. She has failed to deliver on a range of election commitments and promises, particularly the one about adequately resourcing the department. It is easy to make commitments and promises and to put legislation through this House, but as the Minister and the Government are finding out in a range of areas—and I will not go into the others—it requires funding and resources to deliver on the rhetoric, and that is not happening, particularly in relation to the child protection legislation.

This week alone the Minister has been caught out by departmental employees and by the victims of abuse in children's homes. We have also seen demonstrations from the victims of abuse at those institutions, which was raised during the Forde inquiry. But these are not the only people upset with the poor performance of the Minister and the Government. Every week members receive more and more complaints from people and organisations about the fact that they feel let down by the Government. The industrial action that has occurred today within the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care is regrettable, because strike action does not solve anything. Of more concern is the fact that many needy Queenslanders will be left without the care and assistance that they desperately require. It is unfortunate that they did not have that help today because the staff of the department had to demonstrate on their account.

At the end of the day, the Minister has not been taking responsibility for her actions. As I said, it takes more than simple rhetoric. The Minister seems to expect the departmental officers to turn water into wine and to perform miracles with the limited resources available. This is not possible, and the demands placed on the department by the Minister's new child protection legislation—and this was raised when the legislation was passed through this Parliament—are such that to implement that legislation will require considerable additional resources. These resources have not been delivered as promised. Instead, what we have is more broken Beattie Labor Government promises.

To expect departmental officers to expose themselves to criminal charges because they do not have the resources to properly undertake their responsibilities is mean-spirited and wrong. However, that is what has been happening. The Minister does not seem to understand that delivering on rhetoric is completely different from playing politics, tarting up the media and dreaming of becoming Premier. The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care deals with people's lives and real emotions. The Minister must start to realise this and start taking action to ensure that the department is properly resourced to help the people of Queensland and deliver the promises made by the Government.

Not only is there a problem in this area; today the Minister admitted that the trust fund has not been established for the victims of child abuse in institutions. In addition, the Government has failed to deliver on a number of commitments in relation to the report presented to and endorsed by this Parliament. The report covered a range of areas apart from counselling, such as the facilitation of educational opportunities, including literacy programs, advice regarding access to individual records, documents and archival papers, assistance to migrants for reunification with their families, and specialised counselling services for indigenous victims of abuse. It seems that the only promise that has been delivered concerns some limited counselling areas.

This is not good enough—far from it. In fact, promises are being made that run into tens of millions of dollars in many cases, but the funding is not forthcoming. That is what is happening in this case. We do not have the one-stop shop promised by the Minister—far from it.

Time expired.

Bundaberg Hospital

Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM (Bundaberg—ALP) (11.03 p.m.): Last Wednesday the

Minister for Health, Wendy Edmond, and I joined staff and community members to celebrate the completion of the $27.25m Bundaberg Hospital redevelopment—a great day for Bundaberg and a tremendous achievement for our community, with Bundaberg now boasting one of the best regional hospitals in Queensland. It is regrettable that over the past 18 months during its construction a real vendetta has been waged against our hospital, causing confusion and concern for patients and sometimes torrid abuse for staff members—the sad result of mischievous claims made in this place and in the media.

Therefore, it was indeed a pleasure to be at our hospital for the official opening to see the final results and the wonderful facilities that we now have at our hospital. Public tours were held in conjunction with the official opening, giving the public the opportunity to see for themselves what we have in our hospital. More than 18 groups provided displays to make up a health expo, with these groups showing the wide range of health services that Queensland Health is funding in our community outside the hospital system.

As a result of this redevelopment, the Bundaberg Hospital now has modern and efficient facilities for emergency and acute services, in-patient and outpatient services and palliative care. The mental health unit has expanded. A new child and youth mental health unit now operates on the site. More convenient access to the hospital is provided by the new covered front entrance and car park.

A new $630,000 CT scanner has been installed as part of an upgrade of medical imaging services at the hospital. To improve efficiency in modern health care delivery, the surgical ward, day surgery, intensive care and the theatres are now on the one floor. Surgical services have been designed to provide a smooth flow of patients between theatre and intensive care, with both being equipped with state-of-the-art monitoring systems. There is a day procedure unit close to theatre, allowing day patients the benefit of surgery in the hospital's main operating rooms, and the surgical ward has comfortable airconditioned accommodation for patients recovering from surgery.

The children's ward has blended the latest medical technology with modern ward design to provide a quality healing environment for children. Contrary to the Opposition's criticisms, our outpatients clinic has trebled in size and has already treated some 22,500 patients. The accident and emergency section is spacious. The intensive care unit is world class. Recurrent funding for the hospital has been increased by $2m a year. An additional orthopaedic surgeon has started. The number of dentists has been increased to nine. The latest report on waiting times shows a vast improvement. In all, this is a great result for Bundaberg.

It is often difficult to provide quality health care for all ages and all conditions and there will always be complaints within both public and private health systems. Because health is so important to us all, we do have to concentrate on improving it. But our hospital and its staff have met these challenges and provide Bundaberg and its community with quality health care that is second to none. Congratulations are due to the Minister on her initiative and determination to provide top public health services to Bundaberg and throughout Queensland. Congratulations are also due to the hospital manager, Peter Leck; the nursing superintendent, Glenys Goodman; and the staff and consultants on their efforts to ensure that this massive project in Bundaberg was completed on time and within budget. This is a credit to them all.

In spite of the negativity we hear so often from the Opposition about health services in Queensland, Bundaberg has a health service to be proud of. The dedicated staff at our hospital are committed to ongoing continuous improvement to ensure the best possible health care for our community. This massive redevelopment will further enhance services and ensure that quality health care continues to be provided in Bundaberg.

Charters Towers/Daqing Sister City Agreement

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (11.07 p.m.): Saturday, 27 May 2000 was an historic day for the City of Charters Towers. It was the day that the Mayor of Charters Towers, Brian Beveridge, and Mr Ma Xialolin, the Executive Vice Mayor of the City of Daqing, north-east China, signed a sister city agreement between the two cities. The Daqing municipal delegation also included Mr Lee Yundi, the Deputy Chief Commissioner of the City of Daqing, Mr Luo Tengfang, the Secretary General, Daqing Political Consultative Conference, Mr Zhang Siwen, the Director, Treasurer and Economic Committee, Daqing People's Congress, and Mr Xu Shengjia, the Vice Director, Daqing Foreign Affairs Office, and Jenny King, the Director of

Kangloong Australia Pty Ltd, based in Regents Park, New South Wales.

The intent of the agreement between the two cities is to enhance mutual understanding and friendship and to consolidate and develop friendly cooperation between the two cities. The two cities will also carry out, in accordance with the principles of equality and mutual benefit, exchanges and cooperation in various forms in the field of economy, trade, science and technology, culture, education, sport, health, personnel, and promote common prosperity and development. Regular contact shall be maintained between the leaders of the relevant departments of both cities. I am confident that both cities can benefit from the mutual agreement.

While the delegation was visiting Charters Towers, they were able to attend and inspect a prime beef cattle sale. The sale handled both store cattle and live export cattle. Members of the delegation showed a huge interest in the cattle industry. They were also treated to a fine lunch of roast beef and corned beef sandwiches, along with damper and honey, followed by lamingtons. It was a great eye-opener to most of these people as it was their first visit ever to Australia.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr MITCHELL: It was. It was great tucker and we showed them just what beef can really taste like. It was great.

The tour of the School of Distance Education campus of Charters Towers was of huge interest to our visitors. In fact, all educational institutions, such as our boarding schools and boarding colleges, were of great interest to the party. The visit also included, of course, a tour of Mount Leyshon mine, one of the biggest goldmines in Australia; the new primary industry building opened that day, fortunately, by the Minister for Primary Industries; the weeds and seeds research centre; the old people's homes of Eventide and Dalrymple Villa; and the interesting heritage and tourism areas of Charters Towers.

The delegation was very intrigued with the tourism aspects of Charters Towers and the Dalrymple Shire. I must make special mention of Sue McCelland of the Charters Towers and Dalrymple tourism development bureau for a marvellous presentation to our visitors in the afternoon and also of Mrs Rhonda Smith, who gave a presentation on the farm-stay concepts in and around the Charters Towers/Dalrymple area.

Daqing is located about 150 kilometres north-west of Harbin, the capital of the province. Unlike Charters Towers, Daqing has an urban population of more than one million and services four rural counties and five urban districts. The total population is 2.4 million. In common with Charters Towers, though, Daqing's growth was established from natural resources, boasting the first oilfields discovered in China in 1959. Daqing is still the largest producer of oil in China and still accounts for more than 40% of China's total output. In fact, Daqing is capable of processing over 14 million metric tonnes of crude oil and producing 165 categories of petrochemical products. Daqing is also very rich in science and technology, agriculture, culture development, education and transport.

I saw a video of the city and it seems a very beautiful, civilised, progressive and prosperous city, and it is now presenting itself for many trade opportunities not only to Charters Towers but I believe to Queensland and Australia as a whole. Members of the Daqing municipal delegation were very pleasant and were a friendly group, and I thank them very sincerely for their visit to my part of Queensland. Along with members of the Charters Towers City Council and Mayor, Brian Beveridge, I do look forward to accepting the invitation to visit Daqing that they issued to us while they were here.

Time expired.

Boondall Wetlands

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (11.12 p.m.): Environmental education is an issue often associated with the Wet Tropics, the Great Barrier Reef, Fraser Island and the like. But environmental education is also a key service in my suburban electorate of Nudgee. My electorate covers the wetland area encompassing Nudgee Beach and the Boondall Wetlands, which as part of Moreton Bay is listed as a site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

The Boondall Wetlands and Nudgee Beach area are a source of outstanding biological diversity, covering both marine and forest wetlands. Aspects of its flora and fauna are unique and some is vulnerable or endangered. Many thousands of migratory waterbirds use the wetlands areas for wintering or staging. These wetlands are crucial to maintaining the health of Moreton Bay and surrounding waters. Their value is not just measured in environmental terms. For instance, the intertidal flats at Nudgee Beach are credited with producing thousands of

dollars per hectare of commercial fishing and crab catch.

The importance of these wetland areas has long been recognised by a small group of local residents and supporters. Two local organisations in particular have contributed greatly to protecting the wetlands, educating the general community about their value and fostering environmental awareness. I refer to the Nudgee Beach Environmental Education Centre and the Boondall Wetlands Management Committee.

The Nudgee Beach Environmental Education Centre opened in 1988 following the closure of the local school. The Nudgee Beach Progress Association, through Anne Beasley and others, was instrumental in initiating discussions with Education Queensland that eventually led to the establishment of the centre. The key objective of the centre is encapsulated in its mission statement, which says in part—

> "Environmental education's purpose is to promote effective learning and teaching, helping students to acquire the understanding, skills and values which will enable them to participate as active and informed citizens in the development and maintenance of an ecologically sustainable, socially just and democratic society."

The centre is staffed by the principal, Mary-Ann Pattison; teacher, Ross Coe; unit support officer, Marshal Scott; and teacher aide and Administrative Support Officer, Kathleen Carmont. The centre is a specialist environmental education facility for schools and the community. It provides a range of experiences, each designed to the needs and capabilities of students from preschool to high school and provides professional development for teachers. Each year the centre caters for over 4,000 visits from school students from throughout south-east Queensland. Its waiting list for bookings is indicative of its popularity and success.

The centre also plays a key role in fostering community partnerships in the local area. It is a centre of knowledge and expertise on local environmental issues. It is a model example of how an educational facility can involve and foster community participation on a reciprocal basis. A good example of this is the recently published Down Amongst the Mangroves, an excellent field guide to the flora and fauna found at Nudgee Beach and Boondall Wetlands Reserve, written by Sue Quinnell and illustrated by Karleen Gwinner.

The Boondall Wetlands Management Committee grew out of a community group that lobbied for many years to dissuade previous BCC administrations from transforming the Boondall Wetlands area into a residential development. The group's unequalled knowledge of and expertise on the wetlands led to its direct involvement in the planning and management of the Boondall Wetlands when it was declared a conservation area in 1990. This was all done on a voluntary basis and has involved an untold number of hours from the participants. Anne Beasley, John Bowden, Eddie Hegerl, Laurie Jeays and the staff of the environmental education centre, amongst others, were instrumental in this process.

This community-based management committee was so successful that Brisbane earned the right to host a Ramsar Convention in 1996 focusing on community participation in wetlands management. The Boondall Wetlands Management Committee has played a key role in protecting and enhancing the magnificent natural beauty and biodiversity of the Boondall Wetlands. This focus on encouraging community environmental education and awareness complements the work of the Nudgee Beach Environmental Education Centre. Together they have made environmental education through community partnerships a key feature of my electorate. I praise them accordingly.

Molongle Creek Boat Facility

Mr KNUTH (Burdekin—CCAQ) (11.17 p.m.): The current situation at the Molongle Creek boat facility at Upstart Bay in the Burdekin electorate is a serious safety concern and a prime example of the nonsense of Government bureaucracy. The Molongle Creek boat facility was developed by the Molongle Creek Boat Club back in the early 1960s and is today the most used boating facility in this region. In a survey conducted recently by the club over the Easter long weekend, the facility was used far in excess of facilities of a higher standard in Townsville.

Townsville's Ross Creek, which has eight boat ramp lanes, and Ross River ramps had a combined total of 92 parked cars counted there on Easter Sunday. This compares with the Molongle Creek facility, where 313 vehicles were counted even though the closest towns to Molongle Creek are 50 kilometres away. In the Easter survey, 26.6% of boats were four metres or less in length, 25.2% of boats were five metres, and 22.6% of boats were six metres or over in length. This shows an even

spread and size of vessels that utilise the Molongle Creek facility. Even though it is classified as a private facility, 55.2% of the users were not members of the Molongle Creek Boat Club. Of those surveyed, 68.8% said that they used the Molongle Creek facility 100% of the time, with only 7.7% using the facility only 10% of the time.

In essence, this facility is utilised frequently by a large number of people from a broad surrounding area, yet serious safety issues have been ignored for some time. The facility poses safety threats due to the tidal restrictions on channel use and the blocking of the channel as large tides or floods move banks at the mouth of the creek into the channel path. The potential safety risk for people being caught at sea when the existing channel is experiencing a major flood event is high. There have been several instances in which there has been a delay in medical assistance owing to a low tide. Like most seaside areas in the north, Molongle Creek contains stingers as well as other natural hazards, yet help for people affected, stung or injured by these creatures is dependent upon a low tide access.

Although the helicopter service is of some assistance, it cannot be relied upon completely. It is reported that recently a chest pain victim had to wait at the cape for nearly four hours before receiving medical attention because the tide was out. The current vice commodore of the boat club, Mr Linton, is a strong campaigner for some action in this regard. Some 20 years ago, his father died from a heart attack as a result of having to wait for the tide to rise before being able to seek medical assistance. Although communication technology and a helicopter service is available these days, the safety risk posed by this channel is far too high. Governments cannot ignore such a safety risk.

The Molongle Creek Boat Club has fought for almost 16 years for this channel to be made into an all tidal access channel. Ideally, the channel needs to be made deeper and moved a little to the right to avoid blockage caused by the movement of sand at the mouth of the creek. However, Government bureaucracy seems determined to inhibit the channel upgrade at all costs, blatantly ignoring the potential safety risks posed by the current situation. Government departments have provided nothing but technical excuses and false arguments in response to the community's push for action. The Department of Transport's Maritime Division has provided funding for maintenance for 20 years. The club has provided the existing channel with the full knowledge of Government departments for the same length of time, yet now they have been told that it is illegal.

The club even had to implore the department to be allowed to rebuild the wall between the creek and the channel before the wet season. Should not public safety be of more concern than bureaucratic self-importance and legislative ignorance? Recent environmental legislation has restricted maintenance of this facility and threatened any safety upgrade. The club is not allowed to continue to push the spoil to the side of the channel—which is by far the most cost-effective method—on the grounds that this soil could be covering potential seagrass beds. The club was told there is a section in the legislation to that effect.

It is deplorable that the electorate of Burdekin has the highest boat ownership per capita in Queensland, yet it is the only electorate that still does not have full access to the sea, and all tidal access. Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table the remaining contents of my speech.

An honourable member: We would need to see the document.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member will need to seek leave from the Speaker if he wishes to incorporate it. Has the member spoken to the Speaker?

Mr KNUTH: No, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: It cannot be incorporated. The member can table it.

Cape York Partnership Plan

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (11.23 p.m.): Tonight I take the opportunity to commend the Beattie Government on the Cape York Partnerships document and commend Noel Pearson on his initiative in bringing this issue to the Queensland Government. This document was tabled by the Premier yesterday morning in Parliament. I believe that this document is a very forward looking and progressive document as to how central Governments can work with the indigenous communities of Cape York. The goals of the Cape York Partnerships document are as follows—

> "To form partnerships between the Government and the Indigenous people of Cape York.
>
> To work with families and communities to overcome the disadvantaged position of the Indigenous

people of Cape York in comparison to other Queenslanders.

To narrow the 20 year gap in life expectancy between the Indigenous people of Cape York and the wider community.

To achieve better health through partnerships between communities and Government agencies responsible for those factors which influence health."

Other goals in the document are the following—

"To reach better educational outcomes through improved education services.

To build better family support networks that recognise traditional indigenous values.

To build a skilled labour force.

To generate jobs through economic development."

I have been very impressed by some of the key concepts incorporated in the Cape York Partnerships document. It includes responsibility and accountability for the respective parties to the document, that is, the Government and the indigenous communities. Partnership agreements are also included. The document states—

"Policy 'solutions' will not be imposed upon the people of Cape York. Rather the Government will engage in active, real and fair relations with Cape York people based on respect and goodwill."

An interesting concept in the agreement is the idea of negotiation being undertaken through what is called negotiation tables. The idea of these negotiation tables is that representatives of communities can sit down and negotiate with representatives of Government departments. The document states—

"These negotiations may then result in partnership agreements. Communities will have the opportunity to shape these agreements so they fit community priorities and circumstances."

Tonight I want to talk about the vision planning process on Palm Island and how we could work towards a similar partnerships document. The vision planning exercise has been very successful. There has been empowerment of the Palm Island community with the community working closely with the Palm Island Aboriginal council. Indeed, that vision planning exercise has produced a very good working relationship with the Queensland Government, in particular the Office of the Premier in Townsville and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. What we have seen through the vision planning exercise is a very important agreement that has been reached between the Government and the Palm Island community. Whole-of-Government meetings take place involving the key stakeholders on Palm Island. They are coordinated by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in Townsville. I commend the officers of that department for the excellent work that they have done in that regard.

An inclusion in this partnerships document is the fact that the Government will invite Commonwealth Government agencies and ATSIC to participate at negotiation tables. One of the dilemmas that we face in Australia is the Federal structure under which we work and the fact that quite often we cannot get bipartisan agreements between Commonwealth, State and local governments and in this case ATSIC as well. In relation to that Federal structure, what I would like to see with regard to the economic and social development of indigenous communities in Queensland is a true bipartisan approach that incorporates the three spheres of Government and the individual communities as well.

I believe that the Cape York Partnerships agreement is a great start to the partnerships document needed between central Government—in this case, the Queensland Government—and individual indigenous communities. Palm Island is on the way to a great partnerships document. I believe that the work we are doing is groundbreaking. I look forward to the day when we can put forward a similar document not only for Palm Island but also for the other 28 DOGIT communities that represent indigenous views. This is a progressive document. I again commend this document to the House. I congratulate the Premier and the Cabinet on bringing it forward, and I again congratulate Noel Pearson for putting forward this very important idea.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 11.30 p.m.