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FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT

Wednesday, 4 August 2010

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The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.
Mr Speaker (Hon. John Mickel, Logan) read prayers and took the chair.

SPEAKER’S STATEMENTS

Legal Advice from Senior Counsel

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, on 10 June 2010 the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee tabled report No. 105, which recommended charges of contempt against a former member. Given that there are other current criminal proceedings involving that former member, I have decided to obtain, on behalf of the parliament, separate legal advice from Senior Counsel as to whether recommendations of the committee should be implemented prior to the criminal proceedings being concluded. I trust the House will accept my course of action as being prudent.

142nd Anniversary of Parliament’s First Sitting in Parliament House

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, today is the 142nd anniversary of the parliament’s first sitting in this Parliament House. It was on 4 August 1868 that the parliament moved into its newly constructed premises—and I understand still not altogether finished premises—having met for the previous eight years in the former convict barracks building in Queen Street, which was located where the Allan and Stark department store used to be—that is, roughly opposite where the Myer Centre is today but closer towards Albert Street.

I mention the anniversary today of the first sitting of the parliament in its current location in the context of the parliament celebrating its 150th year this year. To mark the occasion, I am later this morning being presented with a framed linocut print of Parliament House by Warwick artist Mr David Woodford. Mr Woodford, who specialises in linocut works of sandstone buildings, will produce a limited number of prints of the Parliament House linocut—150 prints in fact to commemorate the parliament’s 150th year. I understand David will be presenting to me, and I will be receiving on behalf of the parliament, print No. 142 to indicate the parliament’s 142nd year in this location in the 150th year of its operation. The prints will be available for sale. Details will be available on the parliament’s website. I invite any honourable members to join with the local member and with me on the front lawn of Parliament House at 11.30 am for this presentation.

PETITIONS

The Clerk presented the following paper petitions, lodged by the honourable members indicated—

Sunshine Coast University Hospital

Mr Bleijie, 4 petitions, from 26,189 petitioners in total, requesting the House to oppose the delay of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital and adhere to the original promise that stage one of the project be completed by 2014 [2663, 2664, 2665, 2666].

Carina, Go Card Top-up Outlet

Ms Farmer, from 425 petitioners, requesting the House to arrange for Go Card top-up facilities to be made available to Carina News, Old Cleveland Road, Carina [2667].

Gold Coast Hospital

Dr Douglas, from 2,632 petitioners, requesting the House to retain the Gold Coast Hospital at Southport to help the local bed shortage and live up to the promise of a substantial increase in bed numbers [2668].

Cyclists, Overtaking Distances

Mrs Attwood, from 326 petitioners, requesting the House to enact legislation to modify existing regulations requiring that a motorist maintain a minimum safe distance of one metre between their vehicle and a cyclist whilst overtaking [2669].

Gympie Cemetery Trust

Mr Gibson, from 48 petitioners, requesting the House to prevent Gympie Cemetery Trust from altering existing bases under headstones at the Gympie Cemetery [2670].

Petitions received.
The following ministerial paper was tabled by the Clerk—

Minister for Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Hinchliffe)—

State Planning Regulatory Provision (Adult Stores): Final—July 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Tourism Queensland

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.35 am): As members in this House know, tourism is one of Queensland’s most important industries. It is worth $9.2 billion to our economy and it employs 222,000 Queenslanders in direct and indirect jobs. There is no denying that in the past 18 months we have seen some very tough times for our tourism industry, due in no small part to the global financial crisis and its effect largely on other countries and therefore its impact on international tourism. But our government has made a strong commitment to support and protect tourism jobs and steer the industry through these tough times. So it is with great pleasure that I report to the House that Tourism Queensland has not only met this challenge but risen above it.

Tourism Queensland is amassing an exceptional number of global awards for its recent campaigns, and it is doing it in the toughest of times when competition is fierce. I am happy to report that the efforts of Tourism Queensland and the Best Job in the World campaign have now won more than 110 global awards. These include eight Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival awards in June 2009—the advertising industry’s equivalent of the Oscars—and four awards at the D&AD design and advertising awards in London in June 2010, including two coveted Black Pencil awards and two Yellow Pencil awards. This is the first time, I am advised, that a Black Pencil has ever been won by any Australian campaign.

On top of these awards, in October 2009 Tourism Queensland was listed in online advertising magazine Creativity’s top 10 advertising brands for the year. And just two weeks ago Tourism Queensland was voted Best Tourist Office for the third year in a row at the Australian Federation of Travel Agents’ National Travel Industry Awards. That means that Queensland has therefore been inducted into the National Travel Industry Awards Hall of Fame. On top of this, Tourism Queensland has also been voted best Australian state tourism organisation three years in a row by the Australian Society of Travel Writers.

These awards all show that Tourism Queensland is acknowledged as both a leader in its field and as one of the world’s leading creative organisations. All Queenslanders can be proud of these achievements and I congratulate the board, the executive and hardworking staff on their efforts to support the Queensland tourism industry and, importantly, support tourism jobs.

Arts Events

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.39 am): South-East Queensland has truly come of age as the location for the country’s big arts events, and that has never been more evident than the fact that as one blockbuster exhibition closes another is about to open hot on its heels. Last week the intriguing work of Ron Mueck left Brisbane’s Galley of Modern Art after an overwhelmingly successful exhibition. This fascinating and confronting exhibition was seen by more than 187,000 Queenslanders and interstate visitors. That far exceeds the 119,000 visitors who attended the same exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria earlier this year. This exhibition is a partnership between GoMA and the NGV—the only two galleries where it will be shown in the country. Queensland sourced almost 70,000 more visitors than the Melbourne show.

I am personally sorry to see this exhibition leave our capital city and I know that is a sentiment shared by many other Queenslanders, but as one blockbuster closes another opens. This Friday, 6 August, will see the opening of a unique international exhibition that has not only Queensland’s but the nation’s art and fashion world in what can only be described as a frenzy of excitement. I am sure this major event, which features the exclusive and matchless works of fashion icon Valentino, will be the latest success for GoMA.

Mr Lucas: I didn’t even know who he was.

Ms BLIGH: We would never have guessed that. The Valentino, Retrospective: Past/Present/Future is another Queensland exclusive that will run until 14 November. I think it is a testament to Brisbane’s reputation for staging a successful exhibition that this show is an Australian exclusive and it has not been seen anywhere outside of Paris. In addition, for two weeks at the end of September, Brisbane will host extraordinary back-to-back performances by the Contemporary Dance Co. of Cuba.
and the Cuban Ballet. The Cuban Ballet came to world prominence after Fidel Castro began to put massive investment into the company as part of a policy to bring high arts to the people. I am advised by the Cuban ambassador that the people of Cuba have three great loves—ballet, boxing and baseball—and he says in that order.

Mr Lucas: You guys don’t mind a bit of boxing. We know that.

Mr Gibson interjected.

Honourable members interjected.

Ms BLIGH: They are all culture vultures this morning, Mr Speaker. These two dance companies have never before performed at the same event and on the same stage. Brisbane will be the first time anywhere outside of Cuba that these two dance companies will perform together. It will happen 18 months later in New York, so New York will be riding on Brisbane’s coat-tails in that regard. For three weekends in September, Brisbane will be host to the world exclusive of Valentino and the best dance and ballet from Cuba. No other city will be able to claim that.

The Valentino exhibition is a selection of 100 exquisite dresses and gowns reflecting the House of Valentino’s classically beautiful approach to design over the last 50 years. Through a period when the sewing machine was king, the entire collection is hand stitched—every seam, every hem, every bead.

While we are talking fashion, our government is committed to building our state’s role in recognising and developing good design. In October Brisbane will host Australia’s first international design triennial, Unlimited: Designing for the Asia Pacific. Fashion is an important and growing element of Queensland’s creative industries sector which is worth $3.4 billion annually and is responsible for generating $1.1 billion in annual exports and 74,000 jobs for Queenslanders. The work of Easton Pearson, Kerrie Craig, Lisa Ho and Daniel Lightfoot to name a few are part of the leadership of the strong fashion component of this creative industries wave. The success of Mueck and the opening of Valentino are both proof that Queensland is at the epicentre of a cultural tourism revolution. Cultural tourism is flourishing. With that in mind, Brisbane hotels are offering Valentino packages from $150 to $250 that will give visitors the chance to join in the culture fest. I urge all Queenslanders—including those in the House here—

Mr Hinchliffe: The sartorially challenged.

Ms BLIGH: The sartorially challenged—to visit Valentino.

South-East Queensland, Tourism

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.43 am): On the question of our domestic tourism market, we have one of the strongest domestic tourism markets in the country and South-East Queensland has rapidly evolved as a major Australian arts and cultural hub. So it only makes sense that we should capitalise on both of these major contributors to our economy and entice more and more tourists across our border to enjoy our galleries, our eateries and our events.

Our government will launch a $550,000 tourism marketing campaign that will see Brisbane’s art, cultural, entertainment, dining and sporting experiences profiled to southerners to actively get them across the border and into our capital city. This campaign called Brisbane’s Red Hot Right Now centres on a range of experiences for visitors to Brisbane while at the same time developing our region’s reputation as a cultural hub. It rightly promotes Brisbane as a unique and affordable getaway and focuses on a series of upcoming events at such landmark venues as GoMA and the Performing Arts Centre. Its aim is to get even more southern tourists to come to South-East Queensland than the 4.1 million who visited our city last year and spent $2.2 billion.

The campaign includes print and online components and is an initiative of our government in collaboration with Tourism Queensland, Queensland Events, Brisbane Marketing, the South Bank Corporation, the Brisbane Festival, the Queensland Performing Arts Centre and the Queensland Art Gallery. Instead of each of these organisations separately marketing their own event, for the first time each is collaborating and contributing to a joint comprehensive campaign. The campaign will run throughout August and September, with travel available until November. It will entice southerners to enjoy a weekend in the sun with great art, maybe a great game of football, good food and a world-class event. Ultimately, the key is to position Brisbane as Australia’s new world city, focusing on the diverse range of events and experiences available in and around the region. This campaign coincides with additional promotional activity being carried out by Brisbane Marketing to entice Queenslanders to visit Brisbane over this period, in addition to Tourism Queensland which is rolling out a $370,000 print, outdoor and online campaign centred on the Valentino exhibition.

We have also partnered with online accommodation provider lastminute.com.au, which is renowned for providing holidaymakers with great value deals, to offer some fantastic packages in Brisbane. I encourage members to promote this opportunity over the next couple of months. For those of you who have relatives and friends interstate, there has never been a better time to have them here in Brisbane and there have never been better deals to do it.
Persistent Pain Health Services Strategy; Visiting Medical Specialists

Mr SPEAKER: Speaking of Valentino, I now call the honourable the Deputy Premier.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health) (9.47 am): Thank you, Mr Speaker. All I can say is that I do not know a lot about fashion.

Honourable members: Ha, ha!

Mr LUCAS: I will have to take the lead from the member for Gregory in that regard. I do know this: Alison tells me that Valentino is very big beer so I am sure that the exhibition will be very much appreciated by the people of Queensland. It is a great pleasure to see the Gallery of Modern Art with that exhibition. I see that the Minister for Public Works is wearing a Calvin Klein suit, so he is a picture of sartorial elegance.

Leading a healthy and active life would appear to be the Queensland way and probably something we take for granted, but for more than half a million Queenslanders that is not the case as pain is part and parcel of their everyday existence. I think I can speak for most people who have suffered serious pain at one time or another. For most of us, it has been a fleeting experience following surgery or an injury, with life returning to normal after a period of recovery. The ever-present shroud of persistent pain must be intolerable.

Chronic pain is deemed as ‘persistent’ if it is experienced every day for three months or more in the previous six months. One in five Australians will suffer persistent pain in their lifetime. It is estimated that 576,000 Queenslanders suffer from persistent pain, and this number is expected to steadily increase as the population ages and grows.

Persistent pain has a wide range of causes, with 30 per cent to 50 per cent of postoperative patients suffering ongoing pain and a substantial percentage of cancer survivors enduring pain significant enough to prevent them returning to work or their home. Also in the category are the people suffering from arthritis and other musculoskeletal and connective tissue ailments, diabetic neuropathy and the victims of serious injury as a result of motor vehicle accidents. The cost to the Australian economy is enormous, with Access Economics putting the figure at about $34 billion per annum.

In March this year the National Pain Summit at Parliament House in Canberra called for chronic pain to be recognised as a condition in its own right. In June the Bligh government’s response was significant. We announced $39.1 million in operational funding over four years to implement the state-wide Persistent Pain Health Services Strategy 2010-15, which has been developed by Queensland Health. The state’s only public dedicated persistent pain treatment centre, which is very successfully run out of the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital, will now be complemented by the staged implementation of a hub-and-spoke network across the state.

The Gold Coast, Townsville, Princess Alexandra hospitals and Nambour General Hospital have been identified for the rollout of the pilot program this financial year. This is about giving patients the best opportunity of functioning at a level that will enable them to continue to participate in the workforce. It will extend access to evidence based specialist interventions across the state, and the expectation is that more than 6,000 occasions of care will be provided by each hub each year.

As we know, most persistent pain can be managed with medication, education and support by GPs, private allied health providers, nurses and complementary or alternative therapists. For complex patients, there is a need for pain medicine specialist services staffed by multidisciplinary teams who have the skills to assess and treat patients with persistent pain problems. The pilot program will provide hospital based specialist services and support GPs so they can continue to manage the persistent pain of their patients.

The Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists and the Australian Pain Management Association were two groups that were quick to indicate their wholehearted support for the initiative. The most recent newsletter states—

APMA applauded the budget initiative and called on other state governments and the Commonwealth government to similarly commit to addressing persistent pain.

The organisation applauds the Queensland government, saying that we have ‘listened to senior clinicians, health professionals and, most of all, patients’. APMA’s national secretary, Elizabeth Carrigan, praises Queensland for being the first state to adopt a state-wide consistent approach to persistent pain services as advised in the National Pain Strategy, saying that chronic pain sufferers can take heart from the Queensland budget that they are no longer forgotten. Professor Michael Cousins, chair of the steering committee for the National Pain Strategy, said—

This is a much-needed investment in a very neglected area of health care and sets a precedent to which we hope other governments will respond.

The APMA is a voluntary organisation which performs a wonderful service through the Pain Link helpline and other endeavours which support those people suffering chronic pain. I am extremely pleased to have their support in this endeavour. Improved access to these services will improve people’s prospects of returning to a purposeful life where pain management is not their primary concern.
On another matter, I refer to media reports this morning that the AMAQ has again refused to accept the wages deal on behalf of its members who are visiting specialists. The government has been in negotiations with the AMAQ for a long time. Essentially, the government reached agreement with the AMAQ last year on pay increases for visiting specialists and then it reneged on the deal. The deal sees specialist doctors paid about $140,000 a year for 15 hours work a week in our public health system on a pro rata basis. That is over and above what they earn in their private practices. They have been offered a 4½ per cent, a four per cent and a four per cent pay increase, which is the same as that offered to our teachers, nurses and full-time doctors. The AMA had a deal and Dr Cartmill and the AMA walked away.

Today’s threat is the same threat we see from the doctors union every time it is negotiating a pay deal. The AMA had a good deal for visiting specialists but it reneged on it. So for more than 18 months it is the AMA’s own members who have lost out because the AMA is more interested in political posturing than securing a pay deal. I urge the AMA to do the right thing as the union that represents visiting specialists. Last year we settled the pay arrangements with our staff doctors, which again put them amongst the top, if not the top, of pay for doctors in Australia.

**Business Investment**

*Hon. AP FRASER* (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (9.53 am): This government has overseen nine consecutive financial years of growth in business investment in excess of 10 per cent per annum. The value of business investment in Queensland tripled in the decade to 2008-09, in the period before the global financial crisis. Investment has been challenged, as commentators such as Access Economics have noted, by credit conditions in Queensland. It noted last week that it is harder to access bank finance in Queensland than in other states.

Yesterday’s detailed state accounts provide the evidence and the data that underscores the soundness of our economic strategy. We were right as a government to prioritise jobs and to prioritise our building program. For the record, the accounts showed growth as the economic recovery we are constructing builds strength. They showed an economy that is ahead of the rest of Australia and ahead of the nation’s economy in the quarter. That is the fact.

The quarterly result for business investment that those opposite were so gleeful to see is forecast to return strongly this financial year in the budget with growth of 10.75 per cent forecast. Through a determination to maintain a competitive taxation regime—with taxes per capita $417 below the rest of Australia on average, the lowest payroll tax in the nation and programs to attract investment through direct incentives—this is a government with the policies to attract business to this state. People around Australia are voting with their feet, and businesses are voting with their balance sheet.

Today I can announce that we have attracted one of Canada’s largest listed companies, the resources and energy giant Talisman, to set up its regional headquarters here in Brisbane. The government, together with Brisbane Marketing and Austrade, has attracted this global firm to Queensland. That is three levels of government working together. It is currently recruiting and planning to employ more than 50 new staff by the end of this year.

Talisman operates large oil and gas fields in Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia, and Talisman will now base its Australasian headquarters at the AMP tower in Brisbane. Brisbane is the perfect location for Talisman to oversee its expanding portfolio that now includes gas fields in the western province of Papua New Guinea and other assets here in Australia. Talisman will provide a wide range of support services to the company’s PNG and Australian operations from its new Brisbane headquarters. This underscores our reputation as a hub for international operations looking to get a foothold in the Asia-Pacific region.

This coup did not happen through our actions alone. It occurred through a strong partnership with Brisbane Marketing. That is this government’s approach—the policies to attract investment, as our record shows, and a commitment to work with local governments that are willing to invest in their own economies. I welcome Talisman’s investment and its vote of confidence in the state and in our economy. I welcome its commitment to jobs, and perhaps some others should, too.

**CSG to LNG Industry**

*Hon. S ROBERTSON* (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade) (9.56 am): The emerging CSG to LNG industry has the potential to generate thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in investment for our state including rural and regional Queensland, but we want to make sure we strike the right balance between economic growth and environmental sustainability. Our No. 1 priority is the health and safety of the community and our environment. That is why today I am announcing that the Bligh government will ban the use of BTEX chemicals in coal seam gas extraction or ‘fracking’. These banned chemicals include those containing the hydrocarbons benzene and toluene or any chemical compounds which would produce BTEX chemicals as they break down.
I have already sought and received assurances from industry that these chemicals are currently not being used. Further to that, to ensure the protection of the community and the environment, there is our commitment to legislate to ban them from ever being used in Queensland. The message is very clear: no-one is allowed to use these chemicals in the extraction of coal seam gas. I will also be writing to all companies involved in CSG extraction advising them of these new requirements and regulations and of my expectation that the current nonuse of BTEX chemicals will continue until such time as the new legislation is in place.

In recent times there have been changes in techniques used to extract the gas from coal seams both here and overseas. In the United States certain hydrocarbon chemicals are used to stimulate the fracturing of oil shale and coal seams to help release gas for extraction. Concerns about the chemicals used in fracking have understandably been mirrored here in Queensland. However, I am advised that it is not appropriate to draw comparisons between what is done in America and standards and practices here in Queensland.

I recently visited South-West Queensland and spoke to landholders firsthand about their concerns. As evidenced by our recent community cabinet in Roma, the Bligh government is listening to their concerns including land access by resource companies. That is why we will also soon introduce laws that give landholders stronger rights and impose additional obligations on resource companies. This will include ensuring that companies seek to minimise any impacts from their activities on landholders' families, land livelihood and lifestyle and that landholders are adequately compensated including for reasonable legal, accounting and other professional costs.

These new laws, which have been developed after detailed consultation with key stakeholders, will give landholders greater protection and security about their rights related to access, compensation and the conduct of companies involved in these activities. These amendments will be about providing certainty for landholders and making it abundantly clear what this government expects of the resources sector when it is dealing with regional communities. At their heart is our commitment to making sure we get the balance right.

**National Broadband Network**

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (9.59 am): Federal opposition leader Tony Abbott’s plan to scrap the National Broadband Network would be a disaster for Queensland, especially regional Queensland. Regional Queenslanders, no matter who they vote for, strongly support the NBN and want it to go ahead. In particular, if we ditch the NBN we can also ditch plans to get people from big cities and into Queensland’s regions.

The only way to get more IT experts, doctors, lawyers, manufacturers and other job creators into our regions is to have fast and reliable broadband. Regional people want improved access to online services, including finance and banking, research and information. Regional companies want to reach new trade partners and opportunities in Australia or across the globe. They do not want Tony Abbott to take them back to the days of the pedal wireless. The $43 billion NBN is the most—

An opposition member interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Do you not want broadband in Queensland or do you not understand it; is that the problem?

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You do not want broadband for your constituents. Let me tell you my friend that your councils out there and Bruce Scott want this. That is what they want and you have not got the guts to stand up for them. You are just kowtowing to Abbott—that is what you are doing.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is what you are doing.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You are laying down like a mongrel dog at the feet of Tony Abbott.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the honourable minister to direct his comments through the chair and that way the disorderly conduct that is going on may cease.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Thanks, Mr Speaker. I was provoked.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Fair enough. I will withdraw them, Mr Speaker. The $43 billion NBN is the most important information and communication technology project in Australia’s history. It will connect 93 per cent of homes, schools and workplaces with broadband speeds of up to 100 megabits per second—up to 100 times faster than many current services. It will give the other seven per cent of
premises—the sorts of places that the honourable member represents; the member is obviously supportive of Tony Abbott’s decision to deny them this—the next generation wireless and satellite broadband access with speeds of up to 12 megabits per second. It will support 25,000 jobs nationally each year of the eight years of the rollout.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I again take the interjections of those people who support Tony Abbott slashing broadband services to Queensland. They are the opposition in this state of Queensland.

Dr Flegg: Saving the taxpayers. You don’t know the difference.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I again take the interjections of the honourable members opposite to place on record their condemnation of broadband services for the people they represent in Queensland.

Dr Flegg interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is what you are doing.

Mr Hobbs: He was talking about water.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You do not know the difference between water and broadband. I can understand that.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable minister will continue with his ministerial statement.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Thanks, Mr Speaker. I place on record that the honourable member opposite does not know the difference between water and broadband. Much of the NBN rollout will be hands-on work laying and connecting cables which will provide work for many people and security for their families. That is another issue that those opposite have no care about.

Tony Abbott wants to replace the NBN with a privately funded scheme. However, the NBN is already up and running. It will be able to cover regional Queensland much more quickly. An opposition scheme could take years to get off the ground, if ever. We saw that under Howard.

Mr Nicholls: How long will it take and how much will it cost?

Mr SCHWARTEN: This is what the argument was from the tories back in the days when rail was going through Queensland. You will never change.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You will never change. Read the old debates in Queensland about rail going to Cairns. You rotten low tories were doing it then and you are still doing it now.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the minister to confine himself to the ministerial statement. I am not sure that expression ‘rotten low’ is adding to the decorum of the parliament.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Oh, well, Mr Speaker.

Mr Seeney: You’ve never been guilty of adding to the decorum of anything, Robert.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Let us get back to the ministerial statement.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You cannot be condemned for calling a giraffe a giraffe. Liberals in Tasmania have seen the light—

An opposition member: If it looks like a duck et cetera.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I have all day, Mr Speaker. I have plenty more to say to you, old silver spoon there.

Mr Nicholls interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: No prizes for second. You are not at Churchie now bullying other kids.

Mr Nicholls: Did the member for Greenslopes tell you what he used to do?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I would ask the minister to confine himself to the ministerial statement, direct his comments through the chair and we will carry on from there.

Mr Johnson: Hey, Robbie, once you pull the saddlecloth off you don’t shake it in the burrs.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is true too. You ought to give them a bit of that good old bush advice. Liberals in Tasmania have seen the light and support the NBN. They are opposed to any attempt by Tony Abbott to tamper with it. If tories in a state the size of Tasmania can do it, surely the tories can here—but they obviously cannot.

LNP members and candidates in both regional and urban Queensland, including those for Dawson, Dickson and Groom, have also supported the universal rollout. I challenge the ICT shadow minister, the member for Currumbin, to do the same thing—to stand up and join with those colleagues of hers and support broadband for Queenslanders.
Ministerial Statements 04 Aug 2010

Mining Industry, Environmental Authorities

Hon. KJ JONES (Ashgrove—ALP) (Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability) (10.06 am):

Our government takes regulation of the mining and gas industry very seriously. We know that the community has concerns about the expansion of the coal seam gas to liquefied natural gas industry. We are listening to their concerns and are committed to working with landholders and all community members to ensure we get this right for everyone involved.

This is a new and growing industry with great potential to deliver real benefits for Queensland. But its growth cannot come at any cost. Our environment and our communities must be protected. That is why we are continuing to build a framework that ensures that all the appropriate safeguards are in place.

Small scale CSG operations have been underway in Queensland for about a decade. However, the current growth of the industry to meet the demands of a future LNG industry means expansion is occurring in communities that have never before interacted with mining companies.

It is important to understand that the two major companies seeking to expand in the Surat Basin are yet to receive the green light to their management of groundwater impacts and other environmental issues. An environmental impact statement is not a rubber stamp. The Coordinator-General has provided strict conditions which must be met before they can begin large scale operations in Queensland. The companies have to prove they have the necessary management plans in place to protect the environment and, in particular, groundwater supplies. If they cannot prove their operations are sustainable, they will not be given an environmental authority to commence production.

As part of this process we are continuing to build on our existing staff of inspectors and environmental officers—that is, to put more people on the ground where this industry is being developed. We already have 22 environmental officers dedicated to the regulation of the petroleum and gas industry, including three new officers appointed solely to the Toowoomba and Roma region, which we announced recently at the community cabinet. I am pleased to inform the House that we will be further building on this team this financial year by employing an additional 11 environmental officers to undertake approvals and compliance functions in the CSG sector.

Our government feels very strongly that Queensland’s unique landscape is something that we must protect. That is why we are determined to get this right to ensure the growth of this industry is not only safe, but is sustainable now and into the future.

Go Card

Hon. RG NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (Minister for Transport) (10.08 am): In just two years since the go card was launched, 1.3 million cards have been issued and they are now being used for two-thirds of all public transport trips. The Bligh government has long believed the go card is the best in the country, and now respected national industry group the Tourism and Transport Forum has backed that claim. In a comprehensive report released yesterday, TTF ranked the go card as ‘the best there is’ and suggests other jurisdictions could learn from our example, and there is a lot for them to learn.

Mr Nicholls: They’re comparing it to the Labor failure in New South Wales.

Ms NOLAN: Victoria’s $1.3 million myki system still is not fully operational and New South Wales is being sued by the proponents of its original system.

Mr Nicholls: Yours barely worked. That’s got to make it better than theirs.

Ms NOLAN: In Queensland we successfully rolled out a system on buses, trains and ferries across the largest geographic area in the world. This independent assessment makes the opposition’s claims, repeated just now by the member for Clayfield, look utterly ridiculous.

The opposition has constantly criticised the go card. Just last week the member for Maroochydore described the go card as ‘plagued by problems, inefficiencies and failures’. In the real world, 2.52 million trips were taken by go card last week and its success is being nationally recognised. We want to get even more people on go card, and that is why we committed to giving away 400,000 go cards with $10 credit. The giveaway is continuing to be a huge success. Almost 300,000 free go cards were handed out through newspapers, online and at events across the region.

Mr Gibson: You shoved them in the newspaper. That’s not giving them away.

Ms NOLAN: Additional adult and child go cards will be available after they proved the most popular categories. I note the member for Gympie’s claim that these cannot be given away when what I have just told the House is that 300,000 go cards have been taken up in recent months.
The opposition’s constant criticism of this looks, quite frankly, absurd and entirely divorced from reality, and the go card giveaway is continuing. There are cards still available for seniors, students and other concessions. That is why in the coming weeks the remaining go cards will be distributed to not-for-profit and charitable organisations for their clients and volunteer staff members. We hope to be able to make it that much easier for volunteers and disadvantaged Queenslanders to get access to public transport. Details of how charities can register their interest for go cards will be available next week and I will write to all members of the House with the information. I hope all members will get on board with the great success that is the go card.

Fine Defaulters

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.12 am): Last month I provided the community with an update on the Bligh government’s progress in collecting unpaid fines from fine defaulters. I reported that the government’s crackdown on fine defaulters was paying significant dividends, with a record total of $166.4 million in unpaid fines collected in 2009-10. This was a new record and the highest annual collection total since the State Penalties Enforcement Registry was introduced by the Labor government 10 years ago. This total, which represents an increase of 15 per cent on the $143.8 million recovered in 2008-09, was a direct result of our tough new laws that took effect on 1 January this year.

I am pleased to advise the House that our record collection of unpaid fines has continued in the new financial year. I have been advised this week by the State Penalties Enforcement Registry that a new record for monthly collections was set in July 2010. Our efforts to ensure that fine defaulters meet their obligations to society have reaped rewards, with a staggering $16.6 million collected in July. This total represents a $1 million increase on the previous monthly record of $15.6 million set in March this year. Even more interesting is the fact that the figure for July 2010 is $2.2 million higher than the $14.4 million collected in July last year. That figure was a record in itself at the time, the first time that SPER collections had exceeded the $14 million mark in a month.

This 15 per cent increase in the month-to-month comparison is further evidence that the Bligh government’s new laws that took effect this year are working well. We make no apologies for our blitz on fine defaulters, particularly those who are long-term fine defaulters with debts of $5,000 or more. The reason the government has adopted this approach is so that the money, rightfully owed to Queenslanders, can be invested back into services such as health, education and important state infrastructure. Queenslanders expect people who incur fines for breaking the law to do the right thing and pay their debt in full. That is the right thing to do.

Weapons Licensing

Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (10.14 am): Queensland has a tough, fair and effective weapons licensing regime. The Weapons Act 1990 provides the vast majority of administrative tools used by police officers on a daily basis to manage the weapons laws of Queensland. A 2008 review recommended amendments to the act to make it more user friendly and, as a result, a ministerial Weapons Act review committee was formed and the act and its regulations were rewritten. Given the extensive range of proposed amendments arising from this first review, earlier this year I reconvened that same committee to ensure the legislation addressed the needs of the community, with public safety being the main priority. I am pleased today to release a discussion draft of the Weapons Bill and Regulations 2010 for public comment, and I seek leave to table a copy of the draft bill and regulations.

Leave granted.

Tabled paper: Weapons Bill 2010, discussion draft [2672].
Tabled paper: Weapons Regulation 2010, discussion draft [2673].

Mr ROBERTS: The revised bill includes a number of changes to the existing legislation, including doubling the maximum penalty for behavioural offences, including possessing a knife in a public place or discharging a weapon in a public place; the introduction of tougher knife laws, including an expanded definition of bladed weapons; a tightening of the regulation of rifles that use high-capacity magazines; a tightening of the regulation of imitation weapons; removal of requirements for certain categories of permanently deactivated weapons on public monuments to be registered or licensed; the introduction of a requirement for prospective weapons licensees to complete an approved safety training course; the regulation of the use of laser pointers greater than one milliwatt; and the clarification of the legislation in respect of a Sikh possessing a kirpan in a public place for genuine religious purposes.

As part of these reforms, the government has already announced new fees for certain weapons transactions and will be introducing online processing of licence applications and permits with its new online weapons licensing system. The changes proposed will further strengthen Queensland’s tough weapons regime. I urge all interested Queenslanders to obtain a copy of the proposed legislation from the Queensland Police Service website and have their say on the proposed changes. The consultation period will continue until 14 September.
Road Infrastructure

Hon. CA WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (Minister for Main Roads) (10.16 am): Our $3.3 billion Main Roads budget—three times more than the entire budget of the tories when they sat on the treasury benches—is top of the range.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr WALLACE: I said that yesterday—that is right, member for Gregory—because it is the truth. It is the truth—three times more. I was at the top of the range last week to see work start on the major $115 million upgrade of the Cardwell Range road. It is about road safety and it is about jobs—around 420 jobs for local workers. It comes at a time when jobs and job security are more important than ever before. This new alignment on a busy four-kilometre stretch of the highway will make it flatter and straighter. We will have climbing lanes for heavy vehicles and an overpass—all measures designed to boost road safety. We are working shoulder to shoulder with the Gillard Labor government to deliver better roads and more jobs for Queenslanders.

It is time to hit the highway again, and don’t those opposite hate it? There is stage 1 of the Stuart Bypass at $190 million—signed, sealed, delivered. There is the new $48 million Mulgrave River bridge, delivered eight months ahead of schedule. Work has started on the $110 million Douglas Arterial duplication in the great city of Townsville. That is good news for the Far North, and there is more good news. I joined the federal transport minister in Cairns recently to unveil plans for the southern access corridor into Cairns—$150 million on the table. We are working; they are whingeing. It is about planning for growth and building a bigger and better road network that will take Cairns well into the future. And again it is about jobs—400 jobs for locals.

The opposition has no policies in place for the north’s road network, just like its federal colleagues in Canberra. Queensland roads were starved by the Howard government—11 long years of neglect—but we are making up for it now and working with the federal Labor government. We are on a roll in Queensland. We are rolling out road projects from Cooktown to Coolangatta.

Unlike the opposition, we deliver; they dither. We work; they whinge. We make them; they break them. They ripped up the rail line to the Gold Coast and the last time they were there they ripped up the Greenvale line in North Queensland as well. I will remind the House of their plans for roads at the last election. They wanted to slash jobs. They are the job destroyers. The LNP is like DDT. They are TNT. I have real worries about Tony Abbott. He had the gall to say that transport infrastructure is a state responsibility and the Commonwealth should not fund it. We know what he is going to do for roads if he gets in. There will be zip, zero, zilch for roads. Be afraid, be very afraid for our roads if things go bad on the 21st.

Kindergartens

Hon. GJ WILSON (Ferny Grove—ALP) (Minister for Education and Training) (10.20 am): I am pleased to announce the opening of three new kindergarten services at Woodford State School, Oonoonba State School and Mudgeeraba State School. These services are part of the Bligh government’s commitment to delivering up to 240 extra kindergarten services across Queensland. The new services will be operated by the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland.

We are ensuring that all Queensland children can access a quality early learning program anywhere in Queensland, because that is an important commitment of the Bligh government. A quality education is the key to unlocking a child’s potential. Co-locating kindergarten services on school sites will mean added convenience for parents and improvements to children’s school readiness.

The kindergarten services at Woodford and Oonoonba will each cater for up to 44 children with a qualified early childhood teacher for 15 hours per week. These services would not have been delivered if Lawrence Springborg had been elected as Premier. The kindergarten at Mudgeeraba—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister will help the House if he refers—

Mr WILSON: The member for Southern Downs.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr WILSON: The kindergarten at Mudgeeraba, co-funded by C&K, will cater for C&K’s relocated Kooka’s Nest service as well as a new service providing an extra 44 places. This service would have been cut under a Liberal National Party state government.

On 16 August a new kindergarten service will open at Beaconsfield State School near Mackay, with a further 15 services to open for the start of term 1 in 2011, with another in mid 2011. These services would not have been delivered if the member for Surfers Paradise had been elected as Premier.
While it is clear that the Bligh Labor government stands for best practice education and world-class facilities, the Liberal National Party remains committed to cutting funding and jobs. At the last election the Liberal National Party wanted to block young Queenslanders from accessing kindy and child-care services. They committed to cutting $300 million for the 240 kindergarten services across Queensland. That is what they committed to do. They promised to cut funding to C&K by about $13 million a year, leaving Queensland families to pick up the costs. They wanted to deny Queensland kids the opportunity to access 15 hours per week of quality teaching provided by an early childhood teacher and they promised to scrap the 850 early childhood teachers and 2,500 possible construction jobs required to build the 240 kindergarten services. The election of Tony Abbott as Prime Minister would bring about equal disaster for parents and young children across Queensland. The Bligh government will continue to stand up for Queensland and will continue its commitment to giving young children a flying start in education for life.

Tourism Queensland Competition

Hon. PJ LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading) (10.24 am): We have teamed up with renowned Queensland authors Nick Earls and Rebecca Sparrow, along with tourism ambassador Ben Southall, to give budding travel writers the opportunity to win a Queensland holiday by telling the world what a Queensland holiday means to them. The competition closes this Friday, 6 August, at 1 pm. So I urge everyone to get writing.

The competition is being run through Tourism Queensland’s Facebook page and it has already received great support, with 363 entries on display. About 800 people have signed up as a Queensland Facebook fan since the campaign commenced about two weeks ago. That brings the total number of Tourism Queensland Facebook fans up to 30,000. The competition is open to a global audience and the winners will be announced next week.

It is about sharing Queensland holiday stories and experiences. The stories which are already up there on the Facebook page show a passion for Queensland—‘A Queensland Holiday is ...?’ Here is what people are saying—

A bloody good idea, having a Bundy in Bundy, a surf in Surfers, a swim on the Great Barrier Reef.

Mr Lucas: A win in Wynnum.

Mr LAWLOR: Possibly a win in Wynnum, yes. Another one said—

A dream, once taken, never forgotten.

Another one—

A Masterchef’s delight!

The ‘A Queensland Holiday is ...’ Facebook competition is the latest digital marketing initiative by Tourism Queensland and followed the recent State of Origin themed ‘make your own Queensland jersey’ Facebook competition. This earlier campaign was extremely successful, with more than 14,000 people signing up as a Facebook fan.

Through campaigns such as these, Tourism Queensland is at the leading edge of destination promotion in the digital sphere. It is engaging in modern digital technologies such as YouTube, iTunes, Twitter and Facebook to promote Queensland, promote the tourism industry and keep the tourism industry strong and competitive.

Fishing Industry, Research

Hon. TS MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland) (10.26 am): As part of Fisheries Queensland’s ongoing awareness campaign around snapper shortages, I am pleased to announce that for the first time Queensland scientists will be using underwater cameras to further their research into juvenile pearl perch, teraglin and snapper. Baited remote underwater videos will film action offshore in Moreton Bay to depths of up to 100 metres. Using these cameras will allow researchers to assess the numbers of juvenile fish, identify important habitats and provide estimates of biomass. This information is important in understanding the status of these fish stocks as well as increasing our understanding of the ecology of these species. This research method is environmentally friendly, with minimal impact on both habitat and fish.

This is another research tool that the Bligh government is using to gather information into species such as snapper to ensure fishing rules and practices adequately protect the fish stock. Fisheries officers will also be at 28 popular boat ramps from Mackay to the Gold Coast over the next four weeks, raising awareness about the shortage of snapper. They will be handing out general information about the recently released stock status report, which shows that snapper is currently fished at unsustainable levels in Queensland waters. Fisheries officers will also be telling anglers where they can register online to receive more information about the government’s consultation process for the future of the snapper fishery in Queensland.
The recent stock status report showed snapper at less than 35 per cent of its unfished levels. It is internationally recognised that fish stocks at 40 per cent or less of their unfished levels are classed as overfished. This means that snapper in Queensland is being harvested at unsustainable levels. This is alarming and we will need to take steps to reduce fishing pressure on this stock to ensure its future sustainability. Snapper is one of the most popular commercial and recreational fish species. We want to make sure that commercial and recreational anglers are adequately informed about the snapper shortages before any specific changes to fishing management are consulted upon. We need to save our snapper now to protect it for future generations.

MINISTERIAL PAPER

Legal Advice from Solicitor-General

Hon. JC SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (Leader of the House) (10.28 am): The government has obtained legal advice from the Solicitor-General regarding the contempt issues concerning a former member. The government has shared this advice with the opposition. This morning I table this advice for the benefit of all members of parliament.

Tabled paper: Memorandum of advice, dated 5 July 2010, from Mr Walter Sofronoff QC, Solicitor-General, regarding report No. 105 of the Integrity, Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee [2675].

NOTICES OF MOTION

Sale of Public Assets

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (10.28 am): I give notice that I shall move—

That this House calls on the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal opposition to represent the 85 per cent of Queenslanders opposed to the sale of Queensland state assets and intervene to prevent the proposed sale.

Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (10.28 am): I give notice that I shall move—

That this House:

Calls on the Premier to take all steps necessary, including lobbying Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott, for funds to immediately facilitate an increase in PTSS payments for all regional and rural Queenslanders so that regional and rural patient travel subsidies equal the travel subsidies granted to state politicians and senior public servants.

SPEAKER’S STATEMENTS

Notices of Motion

Mr SPEAKER: I am now placed in a difficult position. I now have four notices of motion already on the Notice Paper. Would any honourable member assist me and advise which motion is to be moved this afternoon?

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I advise that it will be the motion in the notice of motion that I just gave.

Mr SPEAKER: Leader of the House, will the government accept that as the motion?

Ms SPENCE: We will accept that.

Mr SPEAKER: I advise that the motion in the notice of motion for Gladstone will be discussed this afternoon and therefore the rule of anticipation will apply to the member for Gladstone’s motion.

Mr NICHOLLS: I rise to a point of order. For clarity could we have that motion restated?

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Gladstone, would you read out your notice of motion again, please? We need that to assist all members in framing their questions for question time.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I give notice that I shall move—

That this House calls on the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal opposition to represent the 85 per cent of Queenslanders opposed to the sale of Queensland State assets and intervene to prevent the proposed sale.

School Group Tours

Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I would like to welcome to the gallery this morning the school principals, school captains and leadership team from the Pacific Pines State High School; the leadership team from the Hillcrest Christian College in the electorate of Mudgeeraba; students, teachers and parents from the Patricks Road State School in the electorate of Ferny Grove; and students, teachers and parents from the Woodridge State High School in the electorate of Woodridge.
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Aged Care

Mr LANGBROEK (10.30 am): My first question without notice is to the Premier. I refer to the health minister’s charter of goals of 31 March this year—page 30, item 50—which under the title ‘Measure’ clearly states that the minister is expected to complete the transfer of aged-care licences to non-government and private sector facilities. I table a copy.

Tabled paper: Document titled ‘RTI Document No. 30 Ministerial Charter of Goals Deputy Premier, as at Wednesday 31 March 2010’ [2676].
Tabled paper: Document titled ‘Queensland Health run nursing homes to be privatised (identified by Queensland Parliamentary Library)’ [2690].

It also includes the 15 Queensland Health run homes that are to be privatised, and I ask: will the Premier confirm that Labor has reached a new low with its plans to privatise to sell off nursing homes?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. The government has absolutely no intention of privatising any of the state owned nursing homes. That is a policy that has been put on the record and repeated over and over again. There is, however, some interest from some nursing home operators in the non-government, not-for-profit community sector and there have been discussions with them. Why are they looking at assistance from the state government? Because they have not been able to secure the finance they need to access the places available through the Commonwealth government. In fact, as I recall, the last time the Commonwealth government issued a round of licences for new aged-care beds there were very few operators in Queensland who put forward any proposal to take up those beds. There were surplus that were not bid for. That seems to me an extraordinary thing in one of the fastest growing states in Australia. It speaks to the importance of both sides of politics revisiting the issue of how we provide for aged-care facilities. We know that not only do we have a growing population but also we have an ageing population and it has to be remedied.

How did we get into the situation in Australia where needed facilities in aged care are so far behind? Labor has been in power federally for 2½ years. How long was Tony Abbott in a portfolio looking after some of these issues? More than a decade. Everybody in this House knows that if there was one area of underfunding in the Howard government it was health. Not only was it underfunded; $1 billion was taken out of the Commonwealth-state health agreement. When Tony Abbott had a chance in government he ripped the guts out of the health portfolio. He took Commonwealth investment out of health. Anybody who believes he will not do the same thing again in areas like aged care, in areas like hospitals—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms BLIGH: Those opposite do not want to hear it, but it is true and they know it. He has already gone to the electorate and talked about the things he will cut. He will be like every other Liberal leader federally: he will cut spending in social services like aged care and health. The member for Surfers Paradise coming in here feigning care for people in aged-care facilities is nothing short of a fraud. Their side of politics has an absolutely shocking record in this regard. The Queensland government does have ownership of some aged-care facilities and we will retain them.

Federal Election, Use of Queensland Health Facilities

Mr LANGBROEK: My second question without notice is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. At the last federal election the then Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, was given permission to film election advertisements at Queensland Health facilities talking to paid Queensland Health workers. Will the minister allow the current Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, to film election advertisements at Queensland Health facilities talking to unpaid Queensland Health workers?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. Yesterday the Premier outlined for the benefit of the House and other political parties the basis upon which access will be granted to health and other facilities in relation to this. The honourable member has a cheek wanting to talk about Tony Abbott and health. He has a damn cheek when he talks about that because we know that one thing Kevin Rudd and now, after him, Julia Gillard have done is make the most fundamental change of all to the health system in this country. What did we get from Tony Abbott? Health funding that never matched growth. We were faced with a situation, with an ever-increasing population and need for health services, where we had a federal government that would say, ‘Here is X dollars for your emergency departments. If you have a high demand, even if it has nothing to do with your staff or anything like that, you get no more money.’ That is the way they conducted themselves.

Then we saw the pièce de résistance in terms of federal health policy when we saw Tony Abbott intervene to take over the Mersey Hospital. It made Costello go berserk. That was the standard of health policy under the coalition. Time after time we talk in this House and in the media about the shortage of doctors in this country. Which was the party that consigned Australia, and in particular regional
Australia, whom those opposite purport to represent, to fewer and fewer doctors? It was not until Peter Beattie in Queensland actually took on a federal responsibility and funded additional doctor training places that we started to address that, and then when Kevin Rudd came to power he took that over.

It is a sad, sad disgrace. I was in Roma the other day talking to general practitioners there who cannot get other GPs to work with them. The blame is fairly and squarely on Tony Abbott as health minister. In 2005 we had 250 interns in Queensland Health. This year we have 556; next year we will have 644. The greatest indictment of all—and there are so many—on Tony Abbott in relation to health is the one in relation to doctor numbers. They did it because they did not want people bulk-billing and they did not want people having access to doctors. It turned regional Australians in particular into second-class citizens.

I hope that Tony Abbott goes to every site of every GP superclinic that he has threatened to ban and to all the sites where telehealth will not happen so that people have to travel further, and apologises to them.

**Economy**

**Mrs KIERNAN:** My question without notice is to the Premier and Minister for the Arts. Can the Premier inform the House of initiatives that the Bligh government supports that will make the Queensland economy stronger in the future and any alternative policies?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for her question. As members know, like economies around Australia and the world, the Queensland economy has come through some tough times. I am pleased that we are starting to see the beginnings of recovery and the first glimmers of a return to prosperity. We know that that is not shared equally around every part of industry and every sector is not yet feeling the full impact of it. However, we are poised on the edge of a major move forward in the Queensland economy. What do we need to take full advantage of the opportunities that are there for us? Firstly, we need a strong investment in skills. We do not want to see opportunities emerge without the skills available to take up those opportunities and companies held back because they cannot get the skilled workers that they need.

What will Tony Abbott offer in the way of skills? An Abbott-led government will cut trade training centres in Queensland. Under an Abbott government, trade training centres currently under construction at Longreach, Charleville, Stanthorpe, Mackay, Moranfield and Mount Isa, among others, would be unfunded. Centres that have been approved but would not go ahead were to be located at Bundaberg, the Sunshine Coast, Palm Beach and North Burnett. Where are the champions of those regions? Why aren’t the member for Bundaberg, the member for Southern Downs and the member for Currumbin standing up for the trade centres in their areas? There will be no skill development under Tony Abbott.

What else does the Queensland economy need? We need to be connected to the information superhighway. Under Tony Abbott there would be no information superhighway and Queensland’s regions would be the poorer for it. What else do we need? We need Commonwealth investment to match state investment in infrastructure. What would happen under an Abbott government? Tony Abbott has already announced that he would cut the regional infrastructure fund, so $1.4 billion would be gone and the state infrastructure fund of $400 million would be gone.

What we hear from those opposite is deathly silence. They will not stand up for Queensland. They will not even champion their own electorates and the people whom they represent. It is little wonder, because we all know that Tinker Bell has to look after all the Lost Boys, such as the member for Warrego who has been lost for a long time and the member for Gregory who is lost in Neverland. Tinker Bell is trying to round them up. What do we have? The member for Toowoomba South has been lost for a long time. The poor old member for Callide leads the Lost Boys. Queensland needs people who will stick up for this state and that is what we will do.

*(Time expired)*

**Federal Election, Signage**

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My question without notice is to the Premier. I ask: are there any local government regulations that ban people from displaying election signs in the federal seat of Griffith or is the Premier’s refusal to display the election sign of Kevin Rudd at her own Griffith home a personal decision made by the Premier who is also national president of Julia Gillard’s Labor Party?

**Honourable members interjected.**

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Those on my right will cease interjecting. Premier, the first part of the question asked for an opinion, so it is out of order. As near as I can gather, the second part goes to your role either as Premier or as leader of the Labor Party. That is why I am allowing that part of the question.
Ms BLIGH: I am happy to answer the question. My understanding of the local government rules in relation to the displaying of signs in the city of Brisbane, and I stand to be corrected, is that it allows for 500 electoral signs within the electoral boundaries. Therefore, the campaign team will pick the best sites for those 500 signs. I am very happy to advise the House that I have advised the office of my federal member, Mr Kevin Rudd, that I would be happy to have a sign in my frontyard. I happen to live on a very quiet road, but if he wants to put a sign there I am happy to have it.

In this campaign, as in any campaign, the 500 signs will be displayed in the most prominent places. On polling day I will be very happy to cast a vote for the federal Labor Party, and I will tell the House why. A federal Labor government will deliver to Queensland. A federal Labor government—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Those on my left will cease interjecting.

Ms BLIGH: On polling day I will be very happy to cast a vote for a federal Labor government, unlike those opposite. We know what Tony Abbott thinks of the LNP in Queensland. He is keeping as far away from them as he can. And after yesterday we know what the LNP thinks of Tony Abbott. They think and their chief of staff believes that the screaming banshees have taken over.

A federal Labor government would deliver infrastructure, which is needed in every region of Queensland. It would deliver a national broadband network, connecting the regions and the rural constituency of Queensland, which is the most decentralised state. Members opposite are a bit quiet now. What do they think about the NBN being cut? Do they support it? Does the member for Southern Downs support it? I think he does, because he is not prepared to stand up for it. Does the member for Southern Downs support the cutting of the trade training centre in his electorate? I am waiting. He is campaigning for a cut to his own trade training centre. I wonder if the member for Gregory will tell the people of his area that the trade training centre in Longreach would be cut. I wonder whether the member for Warrego will tell the people in Charleville that he will be voting for a government that would cut their trade training centre and funding for their roads. I do not know how they can hold their heads up in their own electorates.

Mr Johnson: I'll be telling them alright, don't worry.

Mr SPEAKER: Order, member for Gregory!

Mr Johnson: She provoked me, Mr Speaker.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will demand an apology to the chair for that.

Mr Johnson: Mr Speaker, I apologise.

Mr SPEAKER: Thank you. The Premier’s time has expired.

(Time expired)

Community Cabinet Meetings

Ms O’NEILL: My question without notice is to the Premier. Can the Premier please update the House on the success of the recent community cabinet meetings?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. Since the last sitting of parliament we have had a number of opportunities to hold community cabinets. The most recent community cabinet was held in Roma, which was the 26th community cabinet held under my leadership and the 132nd community cabinet of our government. It is a very important part of a strong and healthy democracy. The last time that we held a community cabinet in Roma was in 2000 and we had 67 deputations. How many did we have this time? We had 129 formal deputations, which is a record for any of our outback community cabinets. What does this tell us? It tells us that, far from the community tiring of those sorts of events, their enthusiasm and appetite for them are increasing. So far this year there have been 598 formal deputations at the community cabinets that we have held. I will quote from the editorial in last week’s Roma Western Star newspaper. It stated—

It was a great chance for people with local issues to discuss them directly with decision makers. It is forums like these when the government comes to the people that give those affected by decisions 500 kilometres away the chance to make themselves known to administrators, so they can humanise the policies that affect them.

That is exactly what happens. At Roma we had delegations to me and all of the other ministers in relation to matters affecting rural Queenslanders. We had delegations from farmers. We had people talking to us about important issues such as the protection of cropping land, how we can get a better balance between the issues of mining companies, particularly in the gas sector, and the legitimate important interests of landowners and rural producers. These are absolutely critical issues for Queensland and we will make better decisions in relation to them because we have sat down and talked personally to those people who will be affected by them.
I was astonished when one of the other things that Mr Abbott said he would cut and remove from the public life of Australia and Queensland is the federal government's program of community cabinets. They will have no community cabinets. Kevin Rudd and the Labor government introduced them. We have Tony Abbott saying, 'You'll get no infrastructure. You'll get no broadband. You'll get no skills. And I don't even want to talk to you. I don't even want to meet with you. I'll be so busy cutting and slashing your services that the last thing I want as Prime Minister is to be out there hearing about the pain that those cuts are causing.'

Tony Abbott, make no mistake, is going to be bad for the Queensland economy. No wonder he wants to cut community cabinets. Why would he want to go and talk to those people whose lives are going to be disrupted by all of his cuts—his cuts to health, his cuts to education, his cuts to skills, his cuts to the digital economy. Every one of those cuts will affect Queenslanders. No wonder he does not want to come and talk to them.

Queensland Health, Media Coverage

Mr McARDLE: My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the minister's charter of goals which directs the minister to ensure better media coverage for Queensland Health. That report shows that Queensland Health staff are required to spend time collecting and counting media clippings and reporting to the minister on the percentage of good and bad media stories. With almost 200,000 people on the waiting list for the waiting list, did the minister raise any objections when told that Queensland Health staff were to be diverted from their critical work to count the number of good and bad media stories in his department?

Mr LUCAS: We actually employ more gardeners in Queensland Health than we employ media staff, just to put that into perspective. Each day we perform about 50,000 occasions of customer service in Queensland Health. Our doctors, nurses and allied health professionals and all of the other workers do a wonderful job of that.

It is very important that we tell the good news stories about people who are getting good outcomes in our health system. It is also very important that we know about the stories that are not so good because we know from experience that when people in the past have raised issues that those negative issues should have been brought to the attention of those higher up so that they could be dealt with. I make no apology for wanting to know and for saying that we should be reporting on those things where Queensland Health is going the right way and on those things where people are saying the standard is not up to scratch. What happens is that the member for Caloundra comes in here with those stories and asks me a question about them. So it is totally legitimate.

Mr McArdle: What about the 200,000 people on the waiting list for the waiting list? When is their good story coming?

Mr LUCAS: Let us talk about waiting lists. We will not talk about the performance of the member for Caloundra on Madonna King's program which has to go down in history as one of the greatest performances. It has guaranteed that he will never go on Madonna King's program ever again after that purler.

Mr McArdle interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I can understand a bit of burring up because you have been mentioned, but you have been at it even before you were buried up. Let's have a little bit of quiet and we will just see how we go.

Mr LUCAS: None of my time was held then when you were dealing with him.

Mr SPEAKER: Quite right. The honourable the Deputy Premier.

Mr LUCAS: Mr Speaker, I make this point: most of the outpatient waiting times—and I have made this repeatedly clear—are as a result of the shortage of doctors. We know what is the cause of the shortage of doctors—a failure and a deliberate attempt by past Howard governments to restrict the numbers of doctors.

Mr McArdle: Absolute rubbish. That's rubbish.

Mr SPEAKER: Order!

Mr LUCAS: Why is it then that we have gone from 250 interns in 2005 to 556 this year to 644 next year? Why is it that in southern states we have medical graduates from overseas countries and Australian university graduates complaining about the inability to get internships? Because we finally have a government that understands that if you want to have people treated by doctors you have to train them. That is what it is about. And you never, ever, ever put the wood on Howard and Abbott. The sad thing about Abbott is that he does not give two hoots about people who cannot afford to pay for medical treatment. If you go to the private sector, that is fine. But most people go to the public sector. The waiting list is merely a function of not enough doctors. That is a federal government issue and it is finally an issue that Rudd and now Gillard have addressed, and you ought to hang your head in shame.
Smoking Rates

Mr MOORHEAD: My question is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health. Can the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health please update the House about the Bligh government’s effort to cut smoking rates in Queensland?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. On this side of the House we see tobacco smoking as a very, very serious issue—15½ per cent of Queensland adults smoke daily, and it is the leading cause of preventable deaths in Queensland. It causes 84 per cent of lung cancer in males and 77 per cent in females. It costs the Queensland healthcare system directly more than $63 million every year and massively more indirectly because so many things knock on as a result of it.

We know that this government and its predecessor have taken a very serious view in relation to smoking. From 1998, sales were banned to minors; there were restrictions on smoking areas which led to more smoke-free areas and smoke-free cars with kids; and there was our announcement of a complete ban on retail displays next year. That will make us the toughest state in Australia.

What is news today in the media? The tobacco industry is secretly funding a $5 million anti-Labor advertising blitz, cooked up with the help of Liberal strategists for the final two weeks of the campaign. Who are putting the money up? British American Tobacco and Philip Morris, starting this weekend with full-page advertisements. They are going to rope in the service station attendants and the Independent Retailers Association to give them an air of respectability. Who are those campaign masterminds? Former Howard government advisers Mark Domitrak and Chris Argent. How much have big tobacco—BAT and Philip Morris—given over the past 10 years to the Liberal Party? $2½ million in filthy lucre from filthy tobacco that will go to seeking to elect Tony Abbott as Prime Minister.

I say to Queenslanders who do not want to pay and who do not want to suffer from lung cancer that they should put a stop to this now. Tony Abbott told a debate at Sydney university that smoking in front of kids is a trivial issue. What deals were done? We know in the past that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition had his $20,000 a plate function. Was big tobacco at that, because the money is going into the bankroll now? The money will be spent in seeking to elect Tony Abbott. I say to everyone who is worried that their child will take up smoking, I say to everyone who has lost a loved one as a result of smoking, I say to everyone who objects to paying money for unnecessary medical treatment because people smoke that the coalition, the LNP, have their hands out in a secret deal for money from big tobacco that will go to seeking to elect Tony Abbott. It is time to take a stand.

You will take money from anyone. You took 2½ million bucks over 10 years from dirty tobacco. You had your secret $20,000 a plate function that no doubt big tobacco attended. It is about time you fessed up. You have been caught red-handed, not just with your hand in the till but with your hand in the tobacco showcase as well.

Ministerial Accountability

Mr SEENEY: My question without notice is to the Premier. On 26 February I wrote to the health minister regarding the death of Mr Brian Slater, who died in Rockhampton Hospital on 15 February 2010. Today, almost six months later, I have not received a reply to that letter. I table a copy of the letter that I wrote to the health minister.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 26 February 2010, to Hon. Paul Lucas MP, Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, regarding representations on behalf of the family and friends of Mr Brian Slater [2677].

I also table a selection of letters that I have written to the health minister on other constituent issues that have not been replied to for more than three months.

Tabled paper: Bundle of letters from the member for Caliloe to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health [2678].

I also table a similar selection of letters written to the health minister on constituent issues raised by the member for Glass House, Mr Powell.

Tabled paper: Bundle of letters from the member for Glass House to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health on behalf of constituents [2679].

I also table a similar selection of letters written by the member for Noosa to the health minister about constituent health issues that have not been replied to for more than three months.

Tabled paper: Bundle of letters from the member for Noosa to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health on behalf of constituents [2680].

I also table letters from the member for Mudgeeraba written to the Minister for Health that have not been replied to for more than three months.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 27 May 2010, from the member for Mudgeeraba to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health on behalf of a constituent [2681].

I also table letters from the member for Cleveland that have also not been replied to for more than three months.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 25 March 2010, from the member for Cleveland to the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health concerning the Redland Hospital [2682].
I could continue but I think the point has been made. The question then to the Premier is: does the Premier recognise the damage that is being done to the Queensland health system by her deputy, who cannot even respond to correspondence because he hates being the health minister so much?

Mr Springborg: At least Stephen Robertson used to—

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am sure that he, like other members of the House, would recognise that the Health portfolio, by its nature, involves a lot of issues that are necessarily complex and require not only careful consideration but also the assessment and assistance of people right across Queensland in districts. Obviously, without looking at all of these letters I cannot comment on them. I just randomly picked up the first one from the state member for Cleveland, and what does it say? It says—

Dear Mr Lucas
I write to thank you for taking the time to meet with me personally yesterday to clarify the points I have raised in relation to the Redland Hospital.

That does not seem to me like a minister who is doing anything other than paying personal attention to cases being brought to his attention, even by members of the opposition. So I thank the member for Cleveland for taking the opportunity to thank the Deputy Premier for his hard work.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Stop the clock. There is too much conversation. I call the Premier.

Mr Dick: Another tactical lie.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I will ask the Attorney-General to withdraw that comment. It is unparliamentary.

Mr Dick: I withdraw.

Ms BLIGH: We were invited by the theatrical performance of the member for Callide to believe that in his hand he had piles of letters from some of these people. A selection of 'letters' from the member for Mudgeeraba is in fact one page, one letter, but it does still have the paperclip on it, implying that it might in fact be a big wad. I have no doubt that there are issues. As always from the member for Callide we have half-truth, dishonesty—

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Both sides of the House will come to order.

Ms BLIGH: I have no doubt that some members of the opposition, just like some members of the government, have written to the health minister about matters which are very complex. What I expect from the health minister and from the health department is that they will investigate them thoroughly, they will take the time to get the answer right and they will get back within a reasonable time. All I can say is that, despite the theatrical and dishonest performance from the member for Callide, the bundle of material I have here does not add up to the case that he tried to make out—and who would be surprised?

I think the question here is: was it the member for Callide who whispered into the ear of the member for Surfers Paradise, 'Employ Ross Musgrove'? I do not think so. I think it came from the member for Southern Downs and the de facto leader of the opposition, Jake Smith, and he believed them again. What a fool!

Mr SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Pumicestone, I recognise in the gallery students from schools in the Pumicestone electorate, including the captains and vice-captains of Bribie Island State High School, Caboolture State High School, Tullawong State High School and Grace Lutheran College.

Economy, Government Investment

Mrs SULLIVAN: I would also like to acknowledge some of the students from the great schools in the electorate of Pumicestone who are visiting today. My question without notice is to the Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development. Can the Treasurer update the House on examples of government investment that is stimulating the economy?

Mr FRASER: I thank the member for Pumicestone for her question. This morning Access Economics released its Investment Monitor, but we have not had any questions from the opposition about this Access Economics report, and I wonder why. What it says is that the known value of investments in Queensland has increased in the last quarter such that in Queensland over the last year we have had the second highest increase of all states of eight per cent, up to $151 billion. That $151 billion makes us the second highest state for private sector investment, unlike yesterday. So where are we? We are at $110 billion of the $150 billion as private sector investment, which is miles ahead of the next states after us, which are Victoria at $39 billion and New South Wales at $35 billion. Why? Because this government has got the policies and the commitment, as this Access Economics report demonstrates and as Talisman’s decision demonstrates, to attract private investment to this state.
We on this side of the House have the policies. What do those on the other side have? Nought. But what has the Leader of the Opposition done? He has reverted to his old trick of more glamour shots. He has been out getting glamour shots, and they are absolutely fantastic. I table them for all members of the House.

Tabled paper: A photograph of the member for Surfers Paradise [2683].
Tabled paper: A photograph of the member for Surfers Paradise and another person [2684].

There he is. He has got the new boots—the pristine RM Williams—the brand-new Akubra, which has never been marked by sweat, and the polished belt buckle and he is out there saying that he is the real man to lead the LNP. He is just appealing to the good old boys in the National Party because he is under threat from the deputy, as ever, and from the urbane shadow Treasurer in his new bespoke shirt, on the march ready to get him.

So what has he done? He has ditched the lady-scented body wash and he has gone all Old Spice. He has gone and raided the member for Warrego’s kitchen cabinet and splashed on the Old Spice, saying that he is the real man to lead the National Party. He is there saying, ‘Look at me. Don’t look at him. Don’t look at Tim. Look at me. I’m the real man. I’m the man with the Old Spice. What have I got now? I’ve got the policies. What are the policies? I don’t know. They’re anything you want them to be.’ The fact is that he has gone on a cattle drive, not a policy drive, and there he is being anything you want him to be—and look, he is next to a horse.

The reality here is that you have a leader of the opposition who is pretending—pretending to be an Old Spice man, pretending not to support privatisation, pretending to be a good old boy of the National Party, pretending that he can just slip and slide his way along. Well, we know that the deputy leader is coming—’Don’t look at him. Look at him. Then look at Tim.’ The deputy is coming with the member for Caloundra; that is the ticket. What is the other ticket? It is the member for Clayfield with the member for Gympie. When is the clock counting? The clock is counting again. The clock is counting because it is time for a real man to ditch the lady-scented body wash and get all Old Spice once again.

Coal Seam Gas Industry

Mr HOBBS: I think the Treasurer missed his pills this morning. I have a question for the Premier. I refer the Premier to the ongoing concerns and uncertainty for residents and property owners in regional Queensland that have resulted from Labor’s mishandling of coal seam gas and underground gasification approvals. Does the Premier finally agree that Labor’s Minister for Natural Resources has once again failed in his handling of these critical issues? Will Labor now support the LNP’s policy of fiercely protecting the Great Artesian Basin and give bipartisan support to our charter of property rights legislation?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the honourable member for his question. As I indicated in my answer to an earlier question, this was an issue that we spent a lot of time talking about with the people from the Surat Basin in the south-west at the recent Roma community cabinet. By and large, overwhelmingly the views put to us by people in this area were, firstly, that they recognised the extraordinary opportunity that is there for them and their communities to grow and prosper in an unprecedented way through the development of a new export industry with liquefied natural gas. Equally, quite rightly and quite legitimately, they are concerned to make sure that that industry, while it is encouraged and fostered, does not occur at a pace that cannot be managed by them and their communities and does not occur on their properties in a way that interferes with their ability in the long term to continue as thriving primary producers.

I am acutely aware of the policy issues and the policy challenges that confront us as a government and, indeed, the communities that are affected by it. I will continue to meet with these communities. What our government has said from day one is that we are firmly behind the development of a new export industry, and we remain so. That is why we have spent so much time, effort and work on developing entirely new regulatory frameworks. This does not exist anywhere in Australia. This is an entirely new industry. We are saying yes to this industry but not at any price.

An incident having occurred in the public gallery—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Premier, please resume your seat. Could that person or persons please be removed from the gallery.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House itself will now come to order. I call the honourable the Premier.

Ms BLIGH: I put on the parliamentary record that the member for Warrego just winked at the Treasurer at the suggestion that he was part of that stunt. Everybody saw it. There is no respect for the parliament; you are a disgrace. If there was another reason you were winking at the Treasurer, you might want to share it with us. There is more to the Old Spice than we might think.

This is a serious issue. We will deal with it seriously, unlike the frauds opposite who say one thing when they are out in their cowboy boots and another thing when in the boardrooms of the gas companies. I know what they are saying to the gas companies and I know what they are saying out west, and it is not the same thing. We have the usual fraudulent dishonesty that we expect to see.
Mr Hobbs: You’ve done nothing about this at all.
Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable member for Warrego! I call the Premier.

Ms BLIGH: The member for Warrego sought in his question my agreement to adopt LNP policy on this issue. The LNP has no policy on this issue. It does not know if it wants the industry. It does not know if it wants to support farmers.
Mr Hopper interjected.

Ms BLIGH: One page with four photos is not a policy.

Building Industry

Mrs SMITH: My question is to the Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology. I know from speaking to many tradespeople in my electorate that there is a lot of unease in the building and construction industry. Will the minister advise of any trends that he is aware of in the building industry on the Gold Coast?

Mr SCHWARTEN: I thank the honourable member for her question and for her interest in the building industry on the Gold Coast. It is something that she has raised with me on a number of occasions. Obviously constituents are concerned about a loss of jobs. I notice in the Gold Coast Bulletin today there is a report of 700 people on the waiting list to get jobs at the Gold Coast Hospital. That tells you quite clearly, Mr Speaker, the human face of job loss in the construction industry. Something like 16,000 construction workers—or 39 per cent of the industry on the Gold Coast—have lost jobs over the last 18 months. That is a colossal cost on the Gold Coast.

Mr Horan: Under Labor.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That poor unfortunate fellow.
Ms Bligh: He is a lost boy. He needs Tinker Bell to help him find his happy thought.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Was that an echo of a past day gone? Under Labor there is a 10,000-job project—a project which that lot opposite opposed. The reality is very simple here: without the stimulus products provided by our government, there would be 10,000 more people on the Gold Coast without employment. That is well known. Yesterday we heard the opposition raise the issue of the BER. Again, if every school on the Gold Coast were without a project, how many more chippies on the Gold Coast would be without work?

My very good friend Susie Douglas, a councillor on the Gold Coast City Council, announced today that the council is so seriously concerned about it that it is going to put together a stimulus package, and I welcome that. Susie Douglas calls it ‘mark 2’ of a stimulus package. Who is the only one out of step? The opposition. It is the opposition which said last year that it would cut capital works, so none of those projects would have gone ahead. Who else is out of step? Tony Abbott is, because he is going to cut that project. What will be the fate of the building industry on the Gold Coast? There have been 291 cancellations of licences on the Gold Coast, and the reality is that that situation would be much graver if it had not been for the intervention of the Labor government federally and the Labor government at a state level. The only show in town, as Peter Cameron writes about in his column—

Dr Douglas: Local contractors on the Gold Coast missed out. You know that.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That is not true. I invite the honourable member to go to the—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The honourable minister’s time has expired.

Alcohol Fuelled Violence

Mr CRIPPS: My question without notice is to the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading. The report of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee, of which I am the deputy chair, into alcohol fuelled violence was tabled in this House on 18 March this year. Considering that alcohol fuelled violence has continued to increase, will the minister explain why he has failed to fully respond to the recommendations contained in the committee’s report by the 30 June deadline? How many more serious assaults will have to occur before he takes action to address this serious issue?

Mr LAWLOR: I thank the member for the question. This is an initiative of the Bligh government. It is part of the attack on alcohol fuelled violence. It is something that the government cannot stand by and put up with. We have instituted various measures including the banning of regular glass, the moratorium on extended licences and the inquiry which you are involved in.

Mr Cripps interjected.

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

Mr LAWLOR: It is a very complicated report. As you are well aware, there are 68 recommendations.
Mr SPEAKER: Order! Minister, it would help if you directed your comments to the chair.

Mr LAWLOR: I am sorry, Mr Speaker. There are 68 recommendations which cover about eight agencies of the government. It includes transport, Liquor Licensing, the police, health, Attorney-General, communities and so on. It is a very complicated response which is required. We also gave an undertaking that we would consult with the community. That has been done over the last three months. We have consulted with community groups and with stakeholders. We had a youth forum. As recently as last week I again consulted with stakeholders from the Valley. Two weeks before that I consulted with the Police Union. There is wide consultation required for this very serious issue, and that is exactly what we are doing.

The response has been collated. We have written to the Clerk and advised that a response will be forthcoming, and that is being worked on now. What is the LNP’s policy on liquor licensing? We have a response from the Leader of the Opposition that he was not interested in replacing regular glass because it would be too much expense for the licensees. We had the issue which was raised by the member for Currumbin and the member for Noosa, begging for something to be done about applications for extended licences. What did the Leader of the Opposition have to say? He said that the moratorium which we introduced to address this issue was a political stunt. So those opposite should start by getting their story straight. They should talk amongst themselves a bit more and get some sort of coherent position on this issue.

Mr Cripps: More than four months later.

Mr LAWLOR: We are going to get it right. It is a very serious issue. A chaplain who assists in the Valley on the weekends is quoted in this morning’s paper as saying, ‘We don’t want to see a knee-jerk reaction in relation to this report.’ There will not be a knee-jerk reaction to this report. There will be a considered response by the government.

(Time expired)

Renewable Energy

Mr WATT: My question is directed to the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade. Would the minister inform the House of Queensland government initiatives which are contributing to a cleaner energy future through investment in renewable energies?

Mr ROBERTSON: I thank the member for the question. As we know, the centrepiece of this year’s budget was record investment in a range of renewable energy technologies here in Queensland. We want to make Queensland the solar state. That is why we are investing over $115 million over the next five years in practical programs, such as our Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme and other schemes, to ensure that we embrace a renewable future.

But that future is now at risk as a result of Tony Abbott’s announcements about what he sees as the practical response to climate change. What does that practical response include? For example, there is the $653 million Renewable Energy Future Fund. What is Tony Abbott going to do with that? He has announced that he is going to cut it; he is going to slash it. That means there will be no focus on energy efficiency to help businesses and householders save on their energy bills.

He does not stop there. Programs such as the Green Building Fund worth $5 million would go under Tony Abbott. In addition, he has already announced that he would discontinue the carbon trust and climate change foundation campaign worth $256 million—gone. Then there is reduced funding for the Carbon Capture and Storage Flagship Program worth some $200 million. That program is about guaranteeing the future of the coal industry in this state—a coal industry which members opposite time and time again get up on their feet in this place and profess to support. The thing that will give the coal industry a future in this state and enable them to develop carbon capture and storage technologies is going to be defunded by Tony Abbott.

The question is: prior to Abbott’s announcement to cut $200 million from that program did he consult with the LNP in Queensland? I suspect not because no sensible person would think that slashing funding for carbon capture and storage technologies makes one bit of sense when it comes to a practical response to climate change.

What is the announcement he made yesterday about responding to climate change. He was up in Cairns and was asked on radio whether he was aware of the issue of rising sea levels and their possible impact on the Torres Strait. What was his response? It was that he suspected that there was to be an engineering solution. What? He is going to build dykes around the islands in the Torres Strait? Is that the practical response to climate change that Tony Abbott so professes? This man is quite unbalanced on the issue of climate change. Fancy going down the path of building dykes around the Torres Strait Islands. If that is a practical solution or response to climate change we want nothing to do with that.

Honourable members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order.
**Sale of Public Assets**

Mr McLINDON: My question without notice is to the Treasurer. With reference to the remaining state assets, can the Treasurer please detail for the House what percentage of these assets will be sold off after the next state election under (a) an ALP government and (b) under an LNP government?

Mr SPEAKER: Order! I am struggling with that question. It sounds pretty close to anticipation. I would like to see the motion again to make sure that it is not captured by that question. I rule the question out of order on the basis of anticipation. I call the honourable member for Redcliffe.

**Redcliffe Rails**

Ms van LITSENBURG: My question is to the Minister for Transport. My community is excited that the Moreton Bay rail link will finally become a reality. Can the minister outline the commitment to this project and is it bipartisan?

Ms NOLAN: I thank the member for Redcliffe for her question and for her consistent advocacy for this project along with the member for Kallangur and the member for Murrumba and other Labor members in that part of the world over many years. The Labor government will deliver the Moreton Bay rail link and we will do it in conjunction with a Gillard Labor government and with the funded support through a $105 million commitment of the Moreton Bay Regional Council. We will do this because the time for this project has come.

There has now been such growth along that critical corridor that this rail project is very much ready to happen. There will be thousands of people to support that project and catch those trains when the rail line is built in 2016. This project, while it has been talked about for a number of years, now has committed support from three levels of government for the very first time. The federal government has a commitment of more than $700 million on the table, the state $300 million and, as I said, the council $105 million. Detailed planning will happen next year. Work will start and this line is set to open in 2016.

So the question is: how bipartisan is this commitment? When this commitment was announced, what did the local LNP candidate for Petrie have to say. Mr Teasdale said about a commitment in his part of the world, ‘Now is not the time.’

Ms Bligh: Twelve hours later.

Ms NOLAN: Twelve hours later. The time was not in the morning. It turned out that from the LNP’s perspective the time was in the afternoon. The LNP raced after the government to catch-up and make a commitment along similar lines.

The question for the people of Redcliffe then is: should they believe them? What do we know? We know that in government down at City Hall the Brisbane City Council LNP has failed to keep up with public transport funding growth. We know that that side of the House committed to three percent cuts. We know that Tony Abbott does not think that transport is a federal responsibility. In a recent brochure put out to his electorate he said—

Transport infrastructure is a state responsibility. The Commonwealth Government should no more have to fund a Warringah tunnel—

that is a project in his electorate—

than the State Government should have to buy new tanks for the army.

Following 12 years of failure to commit to any public transport projects in Queensland, they remain exactly the same.

(Time expired)

**Patel, Dr J**

Mr MESSENGER: My question without notice is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to comments made by a widow whose husband died after having surgery performed by Dr Patel and who received just enough money in special compensation—around $5,000—from this government to cover the cost of her spouse’s funeral. She says—

For my family and I there was no real mediation. It has already been decided no offer was going to be made. The so called mediator Ian Hanger met with us when we arrived, after telling us how good he was and where he had been said I am not sure but I don’t think they are going to make an offer. My son, my daughter and myself were so shocked so angry I cried and just could not talk.

Does the Premier believe that the cost of a husband’s funeral is fair compensation for a Patel widow?

Ms BLIGH: I thank the member for the question. I think it is important for us to understand what the special compensation process was and why it was set up. There is no doubt that many people who were involved in the Bundaberg Hospital issues had some very difficult experiences and, without doubt, had legitimate claims for compensation against the state.
How do those people normally exercise that right? They take a case through the courts. In our system of government that is how people who have a case against the state exercise that right. Of course we all know that taking matters through the court can sometimes be a very lengthy experience. Because of the length of that experience, it can sometimes be quite traumatic. It can also be quite expensive. What the government did was set up a separate process where claims could be assessed in a much less legalistic way much more quickly in order to give people some access to compensation and some ability for closure. But we did not make it compulsory. We gave it as an option to those people who felt they had a claim, and if they wanted to progress their claim through the special process they could do so. If, however, they felt that what they were offered through that process did not in their view match what they believed they were entitled to, then of course they had a right to say, ‘No, thank you,’ and take their matter through the courts.

I do not think it is appropriate for me to comment individually on any particular case. The member will appreciate that I do not know the person concerned and I do not know the circumstances of the experience that she and her family have had. Given that this woman in this case has lost her husband, I of course offer her my condolences and understand that that would be a very traumatic experience for her and indeed for anybody. But I think it is important to remember that this process was set up to streamline the process and give people a less legalistic way of dealing with their claim. But it was never made compulsory. It is open to any person who feels they have a claim against the state to exercise their legal rights in the usual way through the court process.

If this family made the decision to accept the offer, then that is a decision open to them, not one which the government would have forced upon them. The government's negotiators would have said, ‘This is what we believe is a fair compensation given your circumstances.’ Whether or not the individual feels it is fair compensation is entirely a judgement for them, their family and, if they have a lawyer, their lawyer. I do not think it is appropriate for me, as I said, to comment on an individual case. In terms of the process, I think it is important that the parliament understands that this was a separate special process to provide an alternative way for victims to seek compensation. Some chose it. Some did not.

(Time expired)

Mr SPEAKER: The time for question time has ended.

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ STATEMENTS

Labor Governments, Election Promises

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.32 am): Again in question time this morning we saw what the federal Labor government will do—say anything before an election and do something completely different after it—after I asked a question of the Premier about whether there is going to be a sell-off of Queensland Health run nursing homes. A right to information document we received says in the health minister’s charter of goals—

Promote the role of non-Government and private sector in the delivery of residential aged care services and where appropriate consider the transfer of Queensland Health facilities to those providers

That is confirmation of more privatisations on the horizon. These nursing homes are Ashworth House Nursing Home in Zillmere, Cooinda House at Redcliffe and others located in the areas of Charters Towers, Rockhampton, Sandgate, Kingaroy, Dalby, Wynnnum West, Nambour, North Rockhampton, Roma, Maryborough and Cleveland, the Woorabinda Multipurpose Health Service and the Yumba Binda Aged Persons Hostel in Woorabinda. That is what this government will do. The state government did this after an election last year and the federal government will do exactly the same. Julia Gillard will say anything to get elected and then do anything afterwards, as we have seen from this state Labor government.

Again this morning the Treasurer claimed that today’s report says that there is more private sector investment in Queensland—greater than anywhere else in the country—yet yesterday he said that private sector investment remains challenged and that the banks should unlock that finance. But suddenly overnight the banks have obviously unlocked that finance because today he is quoting from another report that says that private sector finance has been unlocked and there is more private sector investment.

Mr Fraser: What’s your point?

Mr LANGBROEK: The point is that he changes his position from one day to the next. The Treasurer of course talks about data, but I want to talk about people—the people of Queensland. Under Labor we just have lots of economic data which the Treasurer says indicates that we are going better, but commercial vacancies are up, there is heavy discounting in retail, falling trade in department stores, falling numbers of dwelling approvals and price deflation in many sectors. It is only this Treasurer who says that things are great, because he has no idea because he has not had a real job. He just tells Queenslanders what he thinks is happening because he has no idea.
Townsville, Cruise Ship Terminal

Ms JOHNSTONE (Townsville—ALP) (11.34 am): I want to put on the record some comments relating to the proposed Townsville cruise ship terminal. The facts are that we have a strong business case to build an important piece of infrastructure that will support small business and tourism operators, that will create and sustain employment—a project that currently has $62.5 million out of $90 million on the table. All levels of government are on the record about how important a cruise ship terminal would be for Townsville. I quote the mayor himself from August 2009, when he said—

It’s time for a change of thinking, for the government to work with council, the port, Defence Force and other stakeholders on how the ocean terminal can now proceed.

So what did the state do in response to this? We put over $30 million on the table. I will always support what is best for Townsville. It is not important who owns or controls the assets. What is important is what they will do for our city. That is why I assess each project on its merits—that is, how does this benefit the city, what is the return on investment and will this assist in enhancing Townsville’s lifestyle and liveability?

The council should be reminded that the state supports council projects all of the time. I have recently asked the Minister for Local Government to support council to upgrade the Mather Street sewage pump station. This is certainly not as high-profile or sexy a topic as cruise ship terminals or convention centres, but these projects are essential to assist the city cope with growth in growth suburbs like Mount Louisa in my electorate.

The state government is not holding the Townsville City Council to ransom. If my lobbying is successful, the state’s contribution towards the council controlled Mather Street pump station could actually be higher than our contribution to the cruise ship terminal. We have $62.5 million on the table that will allow us to take advantage of a growing new tourist industry. I ask the council to come back to the table so that this opportunity is not lost to our great city. Council should also be reminded that it has received over $133 million from the state over the past four years and now I am asking us to provide tens of millions more towards this pump station for which the total cost could in fact exceed $100 million.

Visiting Medical Officers

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—LNP) (11.36 am): Visiting medical officers are a very important element in delivering on-time, quality health services to thousands of Queenslanders each year. These dedicated doctors also provide critical training to junior doctors in regional Queensland, where there is an acknowledged shortage of medical practitioners. Today Dr Ross Cartmill, as chairman of the Australian Medical Association Queensland’s VMO committee, has raised the serious issue that for 18 months it has been trying to negotiate a new contract with Queensland Health. It is threatening that if a resolution is not achieved we will see 60 senior doctors quit the public health system. If that occurs, it will be a disaster for all Queenslanders at a time when we have about 200,000 people on the waiting list.

Visiting medical officers are those doctors who we hope can achieve reductions in waiting lists, ramping, access block and elective surgery long waits. The Deputy Premier today, as I recall, said that an agreement had been reached. If that is so, the minister should table the document in the parliament.

But how seriously does the minister actually take his portfolio? How much interest does he or his staff take in what happens with the doctors of this state? The peak body in Queensland is the AMA, of which the new president is Dr Gino Pecoraro. But the minister is not even aware of this. On 27 July 2010 the minister signed a letter addressed not to Dr Pecoraro or to his predecessor, Dr Stevenson, but to Dr Chris Davis, who has not held the position for over 12 months. This speaks loudly of the attitude of this minister and his department to the hardworking doctors who work daily in our public hospital system. Is it that the minister cannot pay his own employees and will not negotiate with the VMOs to suit his own ends? I table a copy of the letter.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 27 July 2010, from the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health to Dr Chris Davis, President, Australian Medical Association (Queensland), regarding the appointment of the panel of assessors [2685].

Burpengary Railway Station

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (11.38 am): Last week I was very pleased to be able to officially open the new car park at Burpengary train station. I have a long connection with Burpengary train station. It has been my local train station for over 20 years, and I can remember that my first day of high school started at Burpengary train station, my first day of university started at Burpengary train station and my first day as a lawyer started at Burpengary train station.

So it is with some excitement that I join with other Burpengary train station passengers in welcoming an additional 92 car-parking spaces on the western side of the station. But that is not all. The car park extension is fully fenced, is covered by CCTV and has good lighting. New and secure bicycle shelters will also be installed by October this year to encourage people to ride to the station.
But wait, there is more. Work to widen the outbound platform near the new car park has also been completed. Additional footpaths will also be completed later this year. In total, $1.5 million worth of improvements will be delivered at Burpengary train station. Not only will these improvements make the journey to and from this station a lot more comfortable for commuters; these improvements will give people a real reason to catch public transport and give local people something to be proud of.

I made a commitment at the last state election to get more car parking installed at Burpengary train station. Whilst I am pleased that the Queensland Labor government is delivering on this commitment, I am committed to fighting for more public transport services and infrastructure for the people of the Morayfield state electorate.

The total number of car-parking spaces available at Burpengary train station is now more than 500 and, with this new car park extension now open, people from Burpengary in particular have 92 more reasons to use public transport. Importantly, the people of the Morayfield state electorate have 92 more examples of how this Labor state government is delivering better public transport.

(Time expired)

Sunshine Coast University Hospital

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (11.40 am): This morning I tabled further parliamentary petitions with respect to the delay of the Sunshine Coast University Hospital. This brings the total number of petitioners to some 30,000—a sign that the Sunshine Coast community is telling the health minister, ‘Hospital delay? No way!’ This petition represents the anger and neglect that many Sunshine Coast residents feel following the Labor government’s decision to delay the 450-bed public hospital. The anger follows the contempt that this government and this Deputy Premier have towards the health system and those people on the Sunshine Coast.

To top it off, yesterday we had the health minister attacking me in this place for actually having a petition tabled in this place. I say: shame on this health minister for such a deliberate attack on the democratic right of each and every Queenslander to petition this parliament. With that performance yesterday, is it any wonder that the real Julia Gillard has asked the real Premier and the real Deputy Premier and Minister for Health to go into hiding for the next three weeks?

The neglect that this government has shown in delaying these vital additional beds, nurses and doctors is a slap in the face for all Sunshine Coast residents—

Mr Ryan interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: And for the member for Morayfield. It is a direct slap in the face of 73-year-old Mr Brian Ginn, who led the protest march in his wheelchair, with 2,000 people behind him, fighting for our public hospital. Put quite simply, we need more beds, we need more doctors and nurses and we need them now, not in 2016.

I say to the Minister for Health, who has a reputation of being all huff and puff: Minister, it is a Labor government that delayed the hospital, it is a Labor government that has overseen the worst waiting times in emergency departments, it is a Labor government that thinks fit to put patients in storage cupboards and classify chairs as beds and it is a Labor government and a health minister who cannot pay our great nurses and doctors. For that the minister should be ashamed.

The Premier talks about accountability and responsibility. If this health minister were in any other parliament in Australia he would be sacked, and he should be sacked.

(Time expired)

Cole, Mr M

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (11.43 am): The people of Brisbane’s south side are used to strong representation from their elected representatives, and people living in my local suburbs and the federal electorate of Moreton expect straight talking and honesty from their representatives. That is why Graham Perrett won the last federal election in Moreton. He worked hard in his local community before his election and he has continued to do so since.

However, residents have been disappointed to read of the LNP candidate for Moreton falsely claiming that he lives in the electorate. Two pieces of material, 10 days apart, have arrived in my letterbox from Malcolm Cole stating that Malcolm is a fourth-generation resident of Moreton, where he lives with his wife and three children. It says ‘where he lives with his wife and three children’, but the truth is that he does not actually live in the electorate. When exposed on this false claim he said that it was the fault of the printers. In my experience, printers do not write untruths in material for you; they print what you ask them to. So he then blamed his political staff for making this up. Local residents are familiar with this strategy from LNP candidates. The state LNP candidate against me in 2006, Marie Jackson, claimed that she lived in the electorate, only to blame staff for the error when exposed in the local paper.
Claims by the LNP federal candidate are made worse when his parental home has only recently come into the Moreton electorate, having previously been in the electorates of Forde, Ryan and Oxley.

Ms Bates interjected.

Mr FINN: No, his family’s home. He does not live in the electorate in his own house, and his claim that he is a fourth-generation Moreton resident is false. That is a spin. It is misleading and it seeks to hide the fact that his interest in Moreton is only a few weeks old.

But as often happens, people can learn from the exposure of their untruths and I welcome the honesty of Mr Cole’s statement that he will not live in the Moreton electorate should he win on 21 August. It is a matter for candidates and their constituencies whether representatives live in the electorates they seek to represent, but it is unacceptable to mislead the community for political opportunism.

(Time expired)

State Schools, Personal Accident Insurance

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (11.45 am): When a child from a Queensland state school takes the field in sport, or does the high ropes or climbs on rocks, he or she runs a small but serious risk of having a serious injury such as a spinal injury, an acquired brain injury and the like. I am talking about rare but catastrophic injuries that occur that encompass massive medical bills, massive rehabilitation bills, home modifications and implications for a lifetime of reduced earnings.

I am pleased that since the LNP focused on this issue in April of this year it has heightened awareness. A letter sent to students at Tullawong State High School for their Indigenous camp concludes with this statement—

> Physical activity and physical education, particularly contact sport, carry inherent risks of injury. Parents are advised that the Department of Education, Training and the Arts does not have personal accident insurance cover for students.

Awareness is a step forward, but it is not far enough. That letter would have been even better if the government was making parents aware of where they could obtain such insurance or, better still, if the insurance was provided. We live in an insured world for these sort of risks.

On 24 July this year the Courier-Mail carried an article which talked about payments for small injuries in childhood—what some people call shut-up money—in a bizarre and inconsistent system. But we really need to ensure that Queensland children have a caring system that cares enough to make sure they are not dragged through the courts for years to try to prove negligence to meet their basic needs if they are subject to a catastrophic injury. If a broke state government cannot afford insurance, it should at least be making an effort to parents—

(Time expired)

Daintree State School

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (11.47 am): I was surprised and disappointed to learn that the Daintree State School was earmarked for mothballing due to low enrolment numbers and concerns about the school’s ongoing viability. The letter from the department to the school community sent a shock wave through this small remote community, which, under the leadership of the parents and citizens committee president Hillary Simmons, immediately began to rally and organise and ensure that the school’s doors remained open in 2011 and beyond.

A community meeting was held, with well over 200 people attending. A working group of volunteers was established to ensure that the detailed information that Education Queensland requires before making a decision on the future of the school receives a comprehensive response. The community organised a petition. It is a non-conforming petition signed by 1,239 people and I table it for the benefit of the House.

Tabled paper: Non-conforming petition from 1,239 petitioners opposing the review of the Daintree State School to determine its viability as an educational facility [2686].

Even though the petition is non-conforming, I would ask that the minister accept it as a properly made petition and respond to it in the proper way and in a timely way. In that response, I urge the minister to reject in the strongest terms possible any suggestion that the school be mothballed now and into the future.

As the school community has made it clear to the minister, the school stands at the centre of this community and provides more than just a place for kids to come and learn; it is the hub and the heart of the Daintree village. The school provides a central hub for all manner of community activity, but, more important than that, mothballing the school would place an enormous burden on some families’ ability to get their children to the next nearest state school, which is 25 kilometres or so away. In fact, some families would have to travel over 30 kilometres and would have great difficulty accessing that school in the wet season, when certain creeks and streams rise quickly. It can take hours or even days for them to be safely traversable again. That is why it is critical that the school remains open. The Daintree State School has a long and proud history in this state and I urge the minister to ensure it remains open.
Racing Queensland Constitution

Mr STEVENS (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (11.49 am): On 1 July, after Racing Queensland was born of illegitimate parents and failed birth control by the Bligh Labor government, we have finally had a Racing Queensland constitution put in place just in time for estimates committee questioning. What a coincidence! Of particular note in this new constitution is clause 25.1 where it clearly states that all the directors of Racing Queensland are indemnified against any liability which may extend to costs and expenses incurred even by a director in defending criminal proceedings which find the director guilty. Which director does the minister feel will commit a criminal offence and why are they indemnified if they are found guilty? Someone should have told Gordon Nutchall about this rort so he would not have to pay his own costs.

Secondly, the constitution specifically provides that the board directors are encouraged to do business with the Racing Queensland company by virtue of clause 20.1 regardless of conflicts of interest or proprietary issues. The amount of profit the directors make out of these dealings is not allowed to be disclosed and, amazingly, these business dealings and conflicts of interest must not be disclosed until after the deal has been done. I take it this clause is to make sure other board directors cannot veto the deal before it is consummated. Will the minister advise the House which board members intend doing business with the racing industry’s peak power body in their own interests, why is a specific protection and hush clause included in the constitution of a body that is not subject to freedom of information scrutiny and why bother declaring a conflict of interest after a deal has been done which may be against the best interests of the racing industry?

Is this Racing Queensland constitution in sympathy with the Bligh Labor government’s determination to cover up shonky business deals, hide financial failings from public scrutiny and in the event of getting caught have your court costs paid for by the public purse?

Redcliffe Rail Line

Ms O’NEILL (Kallangur—ALP) (11.50 am): We have had an historic announcement that demonstrates our commitment to the people of Queensland and public transport infrastructure. The Bligh government and the federal Gillard Labor government, in partnership with the Moreton Bay Regional Council, will deliver the Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail link. A re-elected Gillard government will invest $742 million, the Bligh government $300 million and the land for the line, and the Moreton Bay Regional Council $105 million to build the new rail line by 2016 with construction starting in 2012.

Residents of Kallangur, Murrumba and Redcliffe have been waiting for this announcement for 115 years. This is a great win for our community and will help us build a sustainable future. When I was elected last year I was able to join the member for Murrumba and the member for Redcliffe in their longstanding campaign for the provision of this rail link. The Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail link was like the Holy Grail: eagerly sought but just out of reach. But last year this project was put within our reach because the Bligh government and the Moreton Bay Regional Council put $4 million into getting the plans ready and making sure that we stood ready to act should federal funding become available—and now it has, delivered by Labor governments working in partnership. It is historic because for the first time three levels of government have committed to building the rail link. It is wonderful news.

It is hard to list all the benefits of such infrastructure but some will be taking 600 cars off the road per full train, much needed access for employment both in and out of our fast-growing region, reduced carbon emissions, reduced congestion on the Bruce Highway, safer travel, a cheaper alternative to driving and schools will have more accessible excursions to the city because they can travel by train.

Thank you to the Premier, the Minister for Transport, Mayor Allan Sutherland, member for Murrumba, Dean Wells, and member for Redcliffe, Lillian van Litsenburg, and to our federal colleagues for their tireless efforts in providing this much needed link. I am very proud to have been involved in a campaign that will deliver so much to this outstanding part of South-East Queensland.

Drivers’ Licences, Fee Increases

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (11.52 am): Yesterday I tabled an e-petition of 75,000 Queenslanders who are having their say because they are fed up with the costs that this Labor government has foisted upon them—75,000 angry Queensland motorists who have been hit with increasing fees. Already in the last 12 months we have seen two petitions that combined listed more than 200,000 Queenslanders protesting against the increase in registration costs in this state. This latest petition of 75,000 Queenslanders is protesting against the proposed increase in the new Queensland driver’s licence which will more than double the cost of a five-year driver’s licence over the next few years.

Debt, waste and taxes are in Labor’s DNA. Labor just cannot manage money. What we have seen now is yet another project that has blown out from $20 million up to $112 million and has been branded as a new Queensland driver’s licence. The government has tried to say that it is all about preventing fraud but, in fact, it is committing the fraud. It is the one that has now made Queensland the heaviest taxed and highest cost state in Australia to run a car.
Is it any wonder that Queenslanders have had enough? They have spoken out with these petitions and they want the government to listen. But has this government listened to date to the strong voice of these petitions? No. It is now blowing yet more money without careful management to ensure that the value of taxpayers’ dollars is taken into account. Queenslanders are hurting. In my own electorate I am seeing businesses that are closing down because business confidence and money is not flowing. This government continues to pat itself on the back, look through rose-coloured glasses and say that nothing is wrong. It is time it stopped increasing taxes that are making this state so expensive to do business in and to live in.

Affordable Housing

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (11.54 am): Affordable housing is what is needed in my electorate of Brisbane Central and throughout Queensland and that is what the state and federal governments, with Brisbane Housing Co., are delivering. On 30 June I attended with Ministers Plibersek and Struthers and member for Brisbane Arch Bevis the practical completion inspection of BHC’s landmark Aris project in Master Street, Newstead, in my electorate. This project is the first of its kind in Queensland and Australia and comprises 95 apartments, 30 National Rental Affordability Scheme homes, 26 social housing dwellings funded by the Nation Building—Economic Stimulus Plan and 39 privately owned units. This project truly represents a mixed living development and has not only delivered exceptional quality apartments but also supported many local jobs during the global recession.

This project alone supported 350 jobs which was great news for the construction industry and its suppliers in my electorate of Brisbane Central. The rental market in my electorate is both tight and expensive and it is important to increase the supply of affordable housing in this fast-growing area of Brisbane. It is terrific that the Gillard government, with the support of the Bligh government, is making such a big investment in affordable housing not only in Brisbane Central but throughout Queensland.

For some time the Brisbane Housing Co. has led the way with its innovative approach to affordable housing and the Newstead Aris development is no exception. The Aris complex is a great example of all three levels of government working together and what great results can be achieved with local industry to deliver real benefits to low-paid workers and those in need. I welcome the ongoing commitment of the $5.7 billion social housing initiative of the Gillard government—the single largest investment in social housing ever undertaken by a federal government in this country’s history. It is delivering on jobs during the downturn, much needed affordable housing in this state and quality accommodation at well below market rate. This is good news for Brisbane Central and for those who are benefiting from this unprecedented investment. This is great news; it is putting roofs over people’s heads.

Warrego Highway; Land Rent Tax; Weapons Licensing

Mr RICKUSS (Lockyer—LNP) (11.57 am): Unfortunately, I rise again to highlight the issue of the Warrego Highway. Recently, another person was killed in an accident. That brings the number of people killed to six this year on a stretch of road about 10 kilometres in the area of Crowley Vale. It is rather disappointing. Some of it is the fault of the condition of the road and some is the fault of the driver. I urge drivers to take the utmost care.

There has been an allocation of money this year for improvements to the highway, particularly the intersections. I urge the minister to bring that forward as quickly as possible to get these safety precautions put in place. We cannot continue to have people making minor errors of judgement that end up costing them their lives. It is a high-risk road with thousands of heavy vehicles mixed with normal commuter traffic travelling on it every day. It becomes a problem for the local constituents as well. Some of the accesses to the highway definitely need to be closed. There will be some political flak from that but we have to wear some of that and close off some of the accesses and make the ones we do have safer. It is of much concern to us all.

It is good to see the minister for natural resources in the chamber. I raised with him yesterday that land rent tax has gone from $82.50 to $407. The department has faxed through some correspondence to my office saying it did send out some mail in late June 2010 advising of this. Of the 20-odd people so far who have contacted my office, none of them appear to have received this mail. I ask the minister to look into that mailout to see whether that actually happened. From the amount of angst I am getting at my office, it does not appear to have happened.

Another issue that is of concern is amendments to the Weapons Act. It is an enormous bill. I hope the government undertakes proper consultation on those amendments as it is of concern to some of the people who use weapons for business and in their lifestyle.
Koala Habitat

Mr KILBURN (Chatsworth—ALP) (11.59 am): The Bligh government is providing real leadership on the issue of koala habitat protection. Recently, Minister Jones announced the purchase of a 7.6 hectare property at Capalaba West, bordering on my electorate. This property has now been protected for koalas as part of the government’s $15 million koala habitat protection strategy. The protection of koala habitat is important and, as such, all levels of government should work together to ensure that we maintain proper corridors that will allow our koala populations to flourish. In the Chatsworth electorate we are fortunate to have two reserves in particular, the Belmont Reserve and the Mount Petrie Reserve, that are great examples of those habitat areas. The government provided significant funding to build wildlife underpasses along the Gateway Motorway to ensure that those vital connections are protected.

Unfortunately, recently the Brisbane City Council allowed a development at 58 Ridgeview Street, Carindale, and another application has been lodged for 20A Alderbury Place, Carindale, that will sever this important link. I have raised this issue with the council and, unfortunately, all I get is the blame game, ‘It’s not our fault; it’s the state government’s fault’ and vice versa. It is pathetic and I am sick and tired of it. I acknowledge that both the Brisbane City Council and previous state governments should have done a better job to ensure that the corridor is protected. I want to get over the blame game and actually fix the problem.

Mr Bleijie: How long has Labor been in power for?

Mr KILBURN: I said it was our state government. Get over yourself. I make it clear that I do not care who was to blame or how the problem arose; I want it fixed. I urge the minister to get together with the Brisbane City Council and find a solution to this problem. It is important that we maintain this vital corridor. I am happy that recently the minister visited the area and spoke with members of the local environment group, which has put together a fantastic plan that I believe, with goodwill between the Brisbane City Council and the state government, will develop an environmental best-practice plan for corridors and connections that will save this valuable piece of land in my electorate.

Queensland Party

Mr McLINDON (Beaudesert—Ind) (12.00 pm): Tomorrow will be an exciting day in Queensland politics with the registration of a political party called the Queensland Party. The process allows 28 days for the lodgement of objections, but not one objection was lodged. And who would want to object to a party that is rational, has common sense and is the middle of the road? The Queensland Party is neither left nor right and that is what Queenslanders are after. Queenslanders have had an absolute gutfull of the primitive two-party system that we have. Without an upper house there is no true accountability. We are going to run candidates in 84 of the 89 seats. They will be innovative, they will clamp down on regulation, they will be rational, they will be full of common sense and they will be able to truly represent their local electorates in this chamber.

In April last year, in my maiden speech, I said that I am not left wing and I am not right wing. It takes two wings to fly a bird, to make sure it goes in a straight direction and not around in circles. Last week the first policy cab off the rank was sent out to the 73 mayors and they have two months, until 10 September, to contribute towards it. The policy is for the reinstatement of an upper house, which will consist of 45 mayors from across this great state. Nine of those 45 seats will be rotated between 36 of the local councils, which will allow an Indigenous voice into this parliament. It will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities to have a check point of accountability in this chamber.

These are not token gestures. I challenge the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to come up with their draft model of accountability. We know that our estimates committee system is a joke. We also know that the committee system is rigged at four to three. It is a winner-takes-all approach. For 88 years we have lacked an upper house and that is why our state is the only state with a AA credit rating. We will be a rational, moderate party of true local leaders. Tomorrow the Queensland Party will be here so that at the next state election people will have another option. There is very little difference between the LNP and the ALP. They have become two heads of the same creature. I am proud to lead the Queensland Party to the next state election without any hidden agendas, with less regulation and with more innovation, because Queenslanders have had a gutfull. I look forward to rolling out my team in the coming months before Christmas and the launch of the Queensland Party.
Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms van Litsenburg): Order! The House will consider the Appropriation Bill first. I have been informed of the intention to consider Estimates Committee A report No. 2, then to defer consideration of the Appropriation Bill in order to consider the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill. I have been further informed that it is then the intention to resume consideration of the remainder of the Appropriation Bill. Of course, the exact process is in the hands of the House.

The question is—

That report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (12.04 pm): I rise to support report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A following scrutiny of expenditure in the portfolios of the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Public Works. I was pleased to be appointed as the chair of this committee and I thank my fellow committee members for their work on this committee. Having chaired the committee now for three years, I was pleased to be able to continue the functioning of estimates scrutiny in these portfolios with appropriate rigour, with some robust debate during the hearing and, in the main, with civility and respect. However, I am a bit disappointed that this year’s hearing continued the shift of non-government questioning away from the budget detail and the prioritisation and policy base of expenditure allocations towards developing the political spin of the issue of the day. Non-government members increasingly used the opportunity provided by the estimates scrutiny process to advance a political line or attempt to trip up a minister on issues reported in the press in the week or two leading up to the hearing.

I do not argue that non-government members should not be able to do this and, whilst during the hearing I reminded members of the intent of the scrutiny to focus on the appropriation, I did not rule any questions out of order. However, I do find it a bit rich that each opposition member chose to complain in their statement of reservations of insufficient time to pursue their issues. The estimates committee hearings are the in-committee phase of the appropriation. If you like, the clauses under debate are the detail of the budget going forward for the next year. Frequently, ministers were asked questions without reference to Service Delivery Statements or were asked questions that relied loosely on a broad statement in departmental aims with an even looser connection to the appropriation. It is my view that the estimates process does provide an adequate opportunity to scrutinise the appropriation, but the LNP would like more time to fill with prosecuting political argument and spinning for a headline.

Whilst on the statements of reservation, the contradicting positions of opposition members regarding the questioning of departmental officials is flummoxing. On the one hand, they want to be able to directly question officials and, on the other hand, they criticise ministers who refer to officials to provide detail in answering questions. I do not believe the LNP’s desire to interrogate public officials directly during the estimates will benefit the appropriation scrutiny process. The relevant minister is the responsible person to face scrutiny on the proposed expenditure in the portfolio. It is my view that the estimates process does provide an adequate opportunity to scrutinise the appropriation, but the LNP would like more time to fill with prosecuting political argument and spinning for a headline.

Finally, on the statements of reservation, I do not accept that the ministers did not answer questions fully, directly and honestly. Ministers responded to all questions asked, took a very small number of items on notice and sought the assistance of public officials on a very small number of questions. Examination in the appropriation considered a range of issues across the three ministers’ portfolio responsibilities. These issues are outlined in the report and the list indicates exploration of a wide range of issues, including several that have been subject to significant public attention; a focus on both macro- and micro-economic details; and an examination of issues at the core of the government’s economic strategy, including the commitment to the infrastructure building program, the bold job creation target, managing massive population growth, particularly in South-East Queensland, solar energy, and skills development and training for young Queenslanders.
One matter I will touch on briefly is the announcement by the Premier in response to a question on the Cross River Rail project regarding the construction of a new CBD railway station at Albert Street. This is a great announcement for the revitalisation of our city. The Cross River Rail team that is undertaking the feasibility work for this project is part funded through the appropriation and construction work will continue into the future years of budget allocations.

There was some tough questioning of ministers during the estimates committee, as expected. This government was elected on a platform of making the tough economic decisions while keeping Queenslanders in work through the global financial downturn. A government committed to making the tough decisions must accept that this brings with it a responsibility to face tough examination. The estimates process provides the forum and the procedures for this, and it is central to the scrutiny of the expenditure of public funds.

I thank my committee members for their work. I particularly thank the parliamentary staff who ensured that the work of Estimates Committee A was undertaken in a professional and timely manner. I commend Report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A to the House.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.09 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak about Estimates Committee A. I note the comments of the chairman. I was the deputy chairman of that committee. In his speech just concluded the chairman made reference to the issues of shadow ministers and members of the committee asking questions not to do with the appropriations. I note the standing orders relating to estimates committees that are part of this parliament. There is no rule that questions have to be directed to the Service Delivery Statements. Discussions may be wide-ranging on a number of policy issues. If the government wants to change the rules, it can change the rules. Because it has the numbers it can do whatever it likes. We were very clearly following the standing orders that say that, if there are certain matters that can be prosecuted, those questions should be wide-ranging and there can be wide-ranging policy discussions. It does not say that every question has to have a specific reference to the SDS. It is up to the chairman to do that.

It is interesting that the Premier did not even know how many books there were in the budget papers. When I made reference to book 5, the Premier made out in her typical way that there were not five books. But she then had to acknowledge that there was such a book, that there was a book 5. So that was typical of the Premier, who was not even aware of the fact that there are five books in the budget process.

Mr Fraser interjected.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: Now that they have woken up we can talk about the structure of the budget papers. They do not contain sufficient detailed information to provide for proper scrutiny of activities. We do not have enough opportunities for hearings by estimates committees when considering particular portfolios or for more hearings throughout the year. We understand, too, that there are issues about ministers and their knowledge of portfolios and whether they allow public servants and statutory officials who exercise direct responsibility for the conduct of activities to directly answer questions posed by members.

Our domestic economy remains in the doldrums. We got report after report last week, followed up by reports this week, that show the demand for capital investment in the private sector. One day the Treasurer says that the banks are not lending enough. Well, that may be because Queenslanders are under pressure from all the costs that have gone up in the last year and a half—whether it is electricity, water or tolls. In terms of selling our assets, the Treasurer and the Premier are giving different reasons for that. Last year it was to fill the budget black hole; this year it is to get back the AAA credit rating. Queenslanders are tired of this.

When we look at the budget from 1998, which was a $14 billion budget under the last years of the Borbidge-Sheldon government, we see that it was a budget of a government that had money in the bank, no deficit and no fuel tax. Fast-forward to 2010 and we have $40 billion in income and $42½ billion of expenditure, and of course we have a new waste tax and an $85 billion debt going forward. We have a budget that is likely to stay in deficit for another five or six years. This budget clearly has a structural deficit. It is obvious that revenues are clearly not keeping up with expenses, and that is something this government refuses to do anything about.

I prosecuted a number of issues including ministerial accountability, the perceptions of corruption and cronyism in the government, and the appointment of the Police Commissioner. That was interesting. We had the Premier having to read a letter from the CMC chairman, who confirmed that best practice would be to advertise the position. But, in the course of her answer, the Premier said that the Fitzgerald inquiry recommendations should be read with a heavy dose of common sense. Wasn’t that great coming from a Premier who likes to say that they are open and accountable but that the Fitzgerald inquiry should be read with a dose of common sense and interpretation! Of course we know that the chairman of the CMC says that we do not know if we have the best Police Commissioner, because the government has not followed best practice, as recommended by him, in advertising for the position.
The ministerial charter of goals did not even have the restoration of the AAA credit rating as one of its main planks and it had to be inserted subsequently. Today’s charter of goals for the health minister confirms more privatisations, including nursing homes owned by Queensland Health. So very clearly it says one thing before an election and will do anything after. I am very concerned that on issues such as its plans to recover the AAA credit rating very obviously the Premier is unable to explain when exactly that will happen. We have four or five different options for that from 2011 through to 2015. We know that in the past there have been lots of questions that the Premier has been unable to answer about the cost of the assets sale process and about the cost of living that is crippling Queenslanders.

(Time expired)

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (12.14 pm): I thank Estimates Committee A for the examination it has undertaken, and I acknowledge the importance of the estimates process. I thank every member of the committee for their diligence and for their service to this parliament in what I believe is a very important accountability mechanism in any government.

I do note, however, that the Leader of the Opposition and his deputy continue the opposition’s practice—it is an annual event now—of coming to the estimates committees having done no work, of asking no questions of any significance and then saying that it was not worth it. To the extent that it lacks value, they are responsible for that. As I said, they continue the practice of criticising the estimates process, and perhaps it is because it exposes their own ineptitude. An all-party committee, as members know, is currently reviewing the parliamentary committee system. If opposition members have some constructive suggestions for the estimates process, then I trust that they will raise them constructively with that committee.

I dispute any claim of a lack of ministerial accountability by my government and my ministers and instead wish to raise my own reservations about the opposition leader’s deliberate attempt to mislead the estimates committee. It is of great concern to me that, while the Leader of the Opposition was ranting about his desire for a royal commission into everything—into the vibe of government, if you like—he chose to use selective quotes to verbal the chair of the CMC. This, in my view, was a very serious matter. It was not until I pressed the Leader of the Opposition to table the entire letter that he received from the chair of the CMC—not just the first page, as he had initially tried to do—that the true context of the CMC chair’s comments were revealed. Vital sentences left out from the Leader of the Opposition’s quotes completely altered the meaning of the CMC chair’s comments.

It has to be questioned whether the full truth of the advice from Martin Moynihan to the Leader of the Opposition would ever have been revealed if the full letter had not been tabled and the opposition was allowed to hide behind its selective quotes. I do not think we will ever hear again of that letter to the Leader of the Opposition because of course it completely dismisses out of hand the constant suggestion made by the Leader of the Opposition that the CMC lacks the powers of a royal commission. In fact—and I am happy to put it again on the record—what did the chair of the CMC say? He said—

So there is no doubt about that from that quote.

While our government leads the country in our integrity and accountability reforms, what can we expect from the opposition? Record levels of nondisclosure. These are the people and this is the party that will not ban their own MPs from exclusive political fundraisers with big business. Remember the $16,500 leaders club? These are the people who will not tell the public who attended their exclusive $20,000-a-plate dinner on the eve of the last election. And, as the Deputy Premier said today, were any of them from the big tobacco companies? These are the people who will not commit to meeting annually with the Integrity Commissioner to go through their pecuniary interests. Remember the attempt of their former leader to prevent disclosure of his frequent use of private aircraft and then write it off as an ‘office expense’, not a political donation?

For the opposition leader to question the estimates process is nothing short of fraudulent, coming from the same side of politics which tried to abolish the CMC through the Connolly-Ryan inquiry and did a dirty deal with the Queensland Police Union, with the Mundingburra MOU, over the appointment of the Police Commissioner. What we see is posturing from the Leader of the Opposition on the question of the appointment of the Queensland Police Commissioner. I think it is important for the House to remember that that side of politics signed a memorandum of understanding with the Queensland Police Union that would have given the Police Union veto over the appointment of the Police Commissioner.

They would like you to think that that was all years ago and water under the bridge. But who are the people who were part of that government and in that cabinet? One of the people who was in that cabinet is the member for Gregory, and what has the Leader of the Opposition made him? The shadow minister for police. He is one of the people who signed up to the MOU and authorised in cabinet the Connolly-Ryan inquiry. Similarly, who would they make Attorney-General? The member for Southern Downs, who was a part of that government.
I thank the parliamentary staff who were part of Estimates Committee A and all of the staff of the parliament who contributed to the estimates process. It is something the Labor government will continue. I cannot say the same for those opposite.

Mr Nicholls (Clayfield—LNP) (12.19 pm): After that nice little verballing from the Premier, it is nice to stand up and record the facts of the committee meeting. Obviously, the Premier was living in that fantasy land that she inhabits that did not reflect what actually occurred in the committee meeting.

Firstly, I want to start by acknowledging and thanking the chairman of the committee, the member for Yeerongpilly, for the civility and the way in which the committee worked. I think it is fair to say, as he has, that the committee did work exceptionally well. It is my second year on Estimates Committee A and I think all members showed each other the necessary courtesy and respect to make sure that the committee had the best opportunity it could to investigate the expenditure of government.

I do take issue with some of the chairman’s comments in relation to the statements of reservations that were made and also some of the points he made in his report on the committee affairs. He talked about full and frank answers being given to questions. There was a period during the question time when I was asking the Treasurer a number of questions in relation to the mineral resources rent tax and, despite some six questions in a row, he came out with no answer. I do not believe that anyone looking at that particular record of the proceedings could claim that they are any clearer about the Treasurer’s position on that mineral resources rent tax.

I understand that. I think all of us understand that process and what occurs in those committees. I tried my best to get an answer out of him and he tried his best to avoid giving me that answer. Eventually, exhaustion overtook us and we moved to the next item. The chairman made the point about our statements of reservations, but I think it is equally important that we make the point that the Premier, the Treasurer and the public works minister made their, if you like, political contributions to the committee process on the way through.

I also want to comment on the areas that have been covered under the Premier and Minister for the Arts portfolio as well as predominantly my own portfolio responsibility of Treasury, employment and economic development. There are two areas that came up under the Premier’s responses that I think people ought to be concerned about and ought to know a little bit more about. They are the areas that have been covered in the Leader of the Opposition’s statement of reservations, particularly regarding the appointment of the Commissioner of Police. Irrespective of the merits of the person in that role, there is a very clear process laid out to ensure that there is public confidence in the process of the appointment of the Police Commissioner. It is also quite clear that that process has not been followed and has not been properly and strictly adhered to in the best interests of public administration. That came out clearly in the interchange between the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier at that time. At the very least, it is clear that the government is on the defensive about the hasty and rushed reappointment of the commissioner.

It is also interesting to note that the Premier, when faced with the question regarding Minister Schwarten—who at that time was facing some scrutiny in relation to the Health payroll system—responded with the fact that on the day that the Auditor-General was delivering a report into the failures of that system, which are widespread and acknowledged by the government, Minister Schwarten was taking the opportunity to dine at an exclusive Brisbane restaurant with friends in the union movement rather than actually attending to the issues covered by the Auditor-General’s report. I think that is of significance to the people as well.

Turning to the Treasury aspects of the committee investigation and again the chairman’s comments in relation to there being adequate time, I note that we had in effect about an hour and a half to question the Treasurer on his portfolio. This is a $40 billion budget and it covers a lot of areas. In his own area, the allocated funding is in the hundreds of millions of dollars. When you break that down, that is 45 minutes for the opposition and 45 minutes for the government, which is fair and it was allocated efficiently, but it came down to something like 11 questions that could be asked in that period for that budget. That is the issue that we raise in terms of the adequacy of the scrutiny of the expenditure.

Oftentimes you do not get sufficient time to ask the follow-up questions you would like to be able to ask. For example, we spoke at some length in the debate about the sale of Forestry Plantations Queensland and the sale of that $1.2 billion book value asset for $603 million. There were a number of additional questions we would have liked to have asked about that issue that were not able to be asked. We needed further time in order to be able to do that. I support the review that is being conducted by the government, and I commend the statement of reservations to the House.

(Time expired)

Mr Wundt (Ipswich West—ALP) (12.25 pm): I rise today to speak briefly on the report of Estimates Committee A and particularly the expenditure of the organisational units within the portfolios of the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Public Works and ICT. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Premier’s and both ministers’ departmental staff from each of the portfolio areas. Judging from the information provided on the day, I have no doubt that the
accompanying officers had worked for many hours and undertaken a great deal of research to ensure that they were well prepared to assist their various ministers should the need arise. I also think it would be appropriate at this time for me to pass on my congratulations to the parliamentary research staff and in particular the research director for their assistance and guidance during this important process. I found them very attentive.

Finally, it would be remiss of me if I did not take the opportunity to congratulate my fellow members of the committee from both sides of politics on the professional manner in which they conducted themselves, and that has already been spoken about. The conduct of the chair, Mr Simon Finn, in particular and all of the committee members during the process made the job very pleasant. For that, I am very appreciative.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as you would be aware, being on Estimates Committee A gave our committee the opportunity of challenging and grilling the Labor government’s most senior leaders on how they spent their departmental budgets in previous years compared to how they plan to spend their budgets in the future. I am aware that not everyone is totally happy with the way that the estimates committee process operates, which we have just heard, but I do not think anyone could argue with the fact that the committee process is a very important part of our parliamentary system.

I am happy to advise that it is my belief that it provides an assurance that all expenditure from the public purse is scrutinised and that all responsible portfolios are being properly administered. This cannot be better displayed than by the fact that I understand around 30 hours of question time overall was allowed for opposition questions, which is equivalent to about 60 normal question times—and we just heard one of the opposition members discuss the fact that they did not believe that was adequate—and it is for this reason that I consider that the estimates process provides an excellent opportunity for opposition members to demonstrate to Queenslanders how well they have researched their portfolios and how ready they are to be taken seriously as the alternative government.

Due to time constraints today, I will try to confine my comments to the Premier’s appearance before the committee. This is due to the fact that as head of the government I believe that the buck starts and stops with her. That is why it was pleasing to hear the Premier recall the government’s plan to get our state through the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The Premier was able to succinctly explain how her plan is squarely focused not just on keeping Queenslanders in jobs but on creating new jobs and thus seeing the economy grow. It was also pleasing to see that this was not just about re-engineering the structure of our public finances but about building the Queensland of tomorrow by investing in the infrastructure needed for a growing population, investing in the education and skills of our Queenslanders to drive productivity and of course investing in new and emerging industries to diversify our economy.

The Premier recalled for the committee the fact that tough decisions were taken in last year’s budget and a clear and decisive plan was put in place to meet those objectives in the toughest of economic times. By undertaking those economic and structural reforms and maintaining that investment in infrastructure, the plan would now appear to be delivering what the Premier set out to achieve. I suppose there can be no better indicator of this than by the Premier’s reference on the day to the latest ABS job data which showed that Queensland was well on the way to meeting the government’s target of 100,000 jobs. In fact, the Premier reminded us that the government was more than halfway, with fewer than 40,000 to go at that time. I think that has reduced even further now.

Another important aspect that the Premier touched on involved the fact that she is committed to returning the budget to surplus as quickly as possible. That is something I know the Treasurer is also keenly focused on. To prove this, the Premier advised that last year’s forecast for a return to surplus had been revised and that as a result it had been brought forward in this budget.

The Premier seemed to take delight in advising the committee that the government’s decisive action and responsible management of the state’s finances had meant that they could invest in things that would make Queensland stronger in the future. With this, the Premier went on to announce that in this budget the government would continue its investment in the industries of the future, such as LNG and solar energy. It was pleasing to see the Premier provide a great example of this, being the $35 million investment in a carbon reduction program that will be spent on the 44 megawatt solar thermal plant at Kogan Creek. All of our future generations will be thankful for that. In case members are not aware, this will be the largest solar thermal installation in the Southern Hemisphere.

In this budget the government has continued our investment in the education and skills of all Queenslanders, such as early learning and industry focused skills.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (12.30 pm): I begin my contribution to the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill and report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A by thanking the chair, other committee members and the research staff for their combined efforts.

The Minister for Public Works has once again shown an approach to government that hides its mistakes by moving the area from department to department, adopting the philosophy of plausible deniability as he is wont to do, though I suspect this plausible deniability is much more of a widespread practice. Premier Bligh did it with CorpTech, dispatching the severely haemorrhaging organ
from Treasury to Public Works in 2008. With a cost burn of $400 million, Minister Schwarten was not astute enough to realise that he had been sold a dud. However, it is the 'department of public waste' with its grab bag structure of works that lends itself more readily to unconnected responsibilities. Premier Bligh, just like Julia Gillard, needed to cover up yet another disaster under her watch so she flicked it to the poor member for Rockhampton.

As I, together with other non-government members, have specified in our statement of reservations, the time given to estimates committee review is unnecessarily short. There are no good reasons why substantially more time cannot be given to this process, especially with issues as important as the Health payroll fiasco begging answers. However, I can inform the House that the minister’s record for answering questions improved ever so slightly this year, with a grand total of five that he managed all by himself compared with two last estimates. That is five out of a total of 19 questions I asked the minister last month—a stark contrast to the Premier, Treasurer and other senior ministers. In the very same estimates committee the Premier stated—

The rules require me as the responsible minister to answer your questions.

In 2008 the Premier was out spruiking that questions should not be asked directly of public servants, because she expected her ministers to be on top of their portfolios. Yet this minister responsible for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology says that he likes to involve all of his department. If that is the case, why am I not permitted to direct my questions to the relevant public servant? It would save a lot of time and protect us from the minister’s hapless efforts at a reply. Instead, the minister tried to turn estimates into a circus, employing diversionary tactics in order to hide the fact that he could not answer questions. What transpired was a mockery of the estimates process designed to bamboozle, bewilder and confound—anything to deflect from the truth.

The minister has consistently failed to take any responsibility for the Health payroll. Despite damning reports ordered by CorpTech, the minister denied any prior knowledge of them. Furthermore, the Auditor-General’s findings of poor governance reinforce this minister’s inability to oversee his department. One former employee commented that the CorpTech and shared services fiasco will undoubtedly be recorded as one of the greatest ICT failures in Queensland government and Australian history—not much of a legacy to leave behind.

Last month the Financial Review called the Shared Service Initiative a toxic project. Perhaps now the minister will be forced to admit that the ICT sector was right when it repeatedly advised against embarking upon a shared services model across all agencies. This government’s unacceptable bunglings have cast an undeserved cloud over the whole ICT industry, which it understandably is most angry about as Labor pointed fingers of blame everywhere but at itself. No wonder tales of terrified staff were filling the corridors in George Street. They knew the minister would handball anything tricky to them, and he did. He squibbed it on numerous occasions, refusing to accept any responsibility.

The minister has said that he welcomes the annual estimates process as an opportunity to spring clean. This year he said it was a chance for the parliament to run a ruler over the department, but in reality it was little more than a pantomime with words. This minister has form. I refer honourable members to the minister’s reply to Estimates Committee A in 2009 where he again abused the process of parliament by bending the rules to table his response to my statement of reservation. Members are allowed five minutes for this reply, but the minister exploited this process by seeking to incorporate what the rest of us had to deliver as a speech into Hansard. His reply to my reservations amounted to over 1,700 words, which would take at least 10 minutes to read aloud. The Speaker yesterday reminded honourable members of the rules regarding incorporating material into Hansard. But this minister does not know how to play fair. I wonder what he will accuse me of this year—not covering capital works when payroll issues and behind schedule ICT projects deserved answers?

*(Time expired)*

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (12:35 pm): I sat in silence and listened to the honourable member, and I trust she will show the same courtesy to me. An interesting statement made by the honourable member about not answering questions puts her at direct odds with the leader, the deputy leader and Mr Nicholls, because they say ‘there is a continued failure by government ministers to allow public servants and statutory officials who exercise direct responsibility for this conduct of activities to directly answer questions posed by members’.

When I allow that to happen, I get criticised. Clearly the left hand does not know what the right hand is saying over there. On the one hand, there is the leadership team saying, ‘We want public servants to answer questions,’ and Mr Springborg has said to my face on a number of occasions that he believes that is a good idea. I do not believe in the idea of directly singling out public servants, but I have enough confidence in the people who work for me and I have enough knowledge of the department to allow those people to exercise that right. I will keep doing it. I have been doing it for 12 years and I will keep doing it for the next 12 years, because it is the proper thing to do.
However, I note that the honourable member has been unable to point a finger at any question that I failed to answer that was not an appropriate answer to be given. Despite her insulting behaviour where she continued to accuse me of lacking courage, expecting me to interfere and sack people in the Public Service and a whole range of inappropriate comments made by her—

Ms Grace interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Exactly. There is one set of rules for the member for Currumbin and one set of rules for everybody else. I have learned to live with that over a period of time. However, despite all her allegations, she was not able to ask one question which proved that I had in any way been negligent over the payroll issue—not at any time. The few questions that she did ask about it were well short of the mark. They showed an absolute sloppy disregard for the estimates procedure, as far as I am concerned. They also showed a lack of research, a lack of understanding of what the whole payroll issue is about and, quite frankly, made a laughing stock of herself in front of all the public servants who were there because of her behaviour. I allowed them to judge it for themselves. I know from talking to people in the ICT industry that they get it. They understand where the problem is in payroll. The honourable member should talk to them. The honourable member still points at me as being the problem.

Mrs Stuckey interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Notice how rude she is. I did not interject on her. I heard her in silence, but she is a pluperfect example of a badly behaved Tory who is born to rule, and who thinks they can say and do anything they like.

Mrs Stuckey interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: You can laugh about it. Go and look up ‘pluperfect’ in the dictionary, because that is what you are: a pluperfect example of a rude, arrogant Tory—badly behaved, badly mannered and badly equipped for hard work. That is the reality.

Mr Fraser: I note that she has not taken offence.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Or a gate, for that matter! The fact is there was not one question on the ICT front that could involve or entangle me in any mismanagement whatsoever, and the industry knows it. The industry knows that the problem is not in the SAP/Workbrain system. The industry has told me that that is the case. I have consistently said that in this parliament and I will continue to say it. Despite the derision from the honourable member opposite about the SAP product, which pays millions of people around the world and which pays the entire staff of Australia Post, she continues to criticise it. It just shows that she does not have a clue what she is talking about, and that became very clear.

I noticed also that there was a complaint that I had to get the questions repeated because I was talking. I was seeking advice from the director-general. On a number of occasions the director-general had to answer questions. He had to sit there and cop a withering attack by the honourable member. He cannot fight back for himself where there is an accusation made about him treating her improperly. I thought it was a particularly cowardly thing to do, to tell members the truth.

Mal Grierson is a well-established, highly respected public servant who has worked for both sides of politics. I would not know what his politics are and I do not care either. He should not have been subjected to that. Again the public servants got a little glimpse of just how this person would behave if she were a minister. She would sack people and insult public servants.

(Time expired)

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (12.40 pm): Honourable members, there is a disconnect between this Labor government’s public statements and what is delivered. The disconnect is so markedly different from the printed press releases and the budget statements that it makes the stewardship of two critical portfolios of Estimates Committee A of concern. Those portfolios are Treasury and Public Works and ICT.

I fully endorse the statements made by the shadow ministers responsible for both portfolios, both the general and specific comments. I wish to address three specific areas. They are, firstly, forward Treasury projections and responses; secondly, unsatisfactory responses regarding CorpTech; and, thirdly, the issue regarding delays by Project Services causing great harm and stimulus funding from the federal government being cancelled.

I would also like to further endorse the comments made by the shadow minister—very pointed remarks—regarding the attitude of staff from the minister down at the estimate hearings for Public Works and ICT. I suspect there is an attitude of ‘You can’t touch us in this department. We are above scrutiny.’ I also suspect waste and wasting time is an endemic problem in this department. As any problem usually starts at the top, the Minister for Public Works must take responsibility for this. The culture appears to be externally so bad that it clearly cannot explain the disaster between CorpTech, IBM and the former Paris now Workbrain Health payroll disaster. I take umbrage at what the minister has said. The Paris system is not exactly what was presented as SAP. It was a Canadian model that was reworked as Workbrain.
I too observed both manifestly rude behaviour and ignorance. These two factors have at their core egocentricity, selfishness, and intolerance of others and their opinions. In that environment, decisions can and will be made that may lead to poorly thought through—balanced—decision making. I am completely underwhelmed by any explanation given by the minister or his advisers about CorpTech awarding the WorkBrain contract and its stewardship of the process.

Unbeknown to the minister, with the shadow minister I attended a previously scheduled detailed discussion with the department, the director-general and Chris Cummins, the minister's adviser. I took notes and asked detailed questions, as doctors do. All my major concerns at the time, except the question regarding the parallel pay run of Lattice and Workbrain together, were raised. I believe that still has not been satisfactorily answered. In fact, the minister's response regarding why parallel processing did not occur before the go-live order was made was completely unsatisfactory. He either does not understand what a terrible error has been made or he absolves himself of any responsibility by attempting to pass it over to the health minister. The shadow minister's questions were entirely correct and deserved further answers. I believe they still deserve further answers. I would ask that minister, in view of his final comments, to come back and explain himself.

Similarly, I remain very concerned that the minister could provide no explanation regarding the behaviour of Project Services in causing delay primarily in the area of public housing where there is a need to respond to the tight deadlines of significant grants from the federal government under the stimulus package. Without doubt, there is no satisfactory reason that can be given when Project Services, rather than asking valid questions, chose not to reply and the deadlines came and went. In my seat of Gaven many very needy families needed those homes that would have been built. I believe the minister should apologise to each and every one of them. I believe the Premier should do that too.

In conclusion, I wish to address the Treasurer's responses to specific questioning by the shadow minister, the member for Clayfield. Economic reporting in an accurate and impartial manner is absolutely critical to the success of our state and our nation. There does appear to be either very poor internal reporting or a dearth of significant economic advice. Colin Clark gave Queensland a great start for 30 years under most Labor people until he fell out of favour with Vince Gair in 1953.

Currently, the reports are a manifest paucity of credible forward economic data. This means that under this government we must find another Colin Clark. Labor appears to be unable to function nor escape the scourge of structural debt without such human tools. No wonder the Treasurer's report in such difficult times is such a hodgepodge of nothingness and vacillation.

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (12.44 pm): Imagine if Kurt Gidley said that New South Wales lost the State of Origin because 'We only got to play against the team that Queensland picked and that's not fair.' Imagine if he said, 'It's not fair that we have only had the ball for six tackles just like the other side did.' Or imagine if he said, 'When we tried to tackle them they just ran over the top of us and that's not fair either.' All Queenslanders would have called that for exactly what it is: sookie excuse making for a woeful performance from a team lacking leadership, depth and a sense of purpose.

But that is the conclusion Queenslanders are being asked to draw from another team with the blues—the LNP opposition in this parliament. This year's estimates committee process has been denigrated by the LNP because it is entitled to ask questions of ministers, not tackle the water runner. Those opposite say they want to ask questions of public servants. Funny that every other day in the parliament we hear them demand accountability and ministers sack for ministers to take responsibility for every single action in their agencies. So which is it?

I can only imagine their confected rage if I had spent my three hours under examination palming off questions to the Under Treasurer, his deputies and assistants. They would have been there saying, 'The Treasurer can't answer his own questions.' Give me a break. One could probably hang one's coat on the hypocrisy in the air from the LNP.

Next those opposite said that there is apparently some great injustice in the government and the opposition being allocated equal time. Let us recall here that that is the way the Westminster system works right around the world. Estimates committees in Queensland invite upon the government of the day 30 hours of questioning. That is the equivalent of 60 question times. All this is conducted within a fortnight. This is the most intense period of opposition free range in the parliamentary year. Where are the revelations? Where is the evidence of all that is wrong in this state, all that they claim is wrong? The government of the day and its budget was on trial, as the government of the day and its budget should be each and every year. I invite anyone to read the transcript and conclude that the opposition in this state discharged its duty.

A cursory glance invites one to conclude that this collection of layabouts should donate their salaries to science so humankind can discover just how so many could be so lazy. This year saw those opposite flicking through the budget papers, making up questions as they went, asking about the beach balls and then talking about how long ministers had been preparing. To what end, political or otherwise, no-one could fathom. Should we not prepare? Should ministers disregard accountability to the parliament just because the tories in this state always have? What exactly is their point here? What stopped them asking questions? The answer is nothing.
In fact, on 11 June Mr Langbroek was quoted in the Gold Coast Bulletin as saying that he would not become bogged down in line-by-line detail. We know that—guilty by his own admission; guilty of being as lazy as sin. The LNP asked about trade union land tax exemptions and community ambulance levy exemptions for the Freemasons for the whole first block of the questions dedicated to the breadth of the fiscal position of the state. Is that really their priority? Their old prejudice against the working people of this state and their representatives ain’t dead, buried and cremated; it is most certainly alive, exhumed and rehydrated. Who needs to take a policy approach when one can just resort to prejudice.

The opposition leader could not wait to leave the room so he could leave the country. The vacuum of leadership that he creates and his complete lack of presence on every other day provided the perfect cover for him scurrying out to the airport. No-one even noticed that he was not here for the first two weeks of the federal election campaign. He never walks into a room, just out of the last one. If he walked out of here for the airport he would have left not out but a trace.

Of course absence has not made the pea sized hearts on the other side grow fonder either. While he was away, the shadow Treasurer and the deputy leader were out there smashing up the reputation of the Queensland economy while Old Spice was meant to be out there retailing our wares to the world. What low-rent, policy-free, glory-seeking layabouts they are. How they embarrass this state, its economy, themselves and the institution of this parliament with their indolency. Never a more shameful, shameless shambles has occupied the opposition benches in this state.

I invite all of the new LNP members sitting up the back—the besser brick class of 2009—to look down at the front at the run-on team. This is a mob that makes the New South Wales football side look purposeful and inspiring. Estimates sees the government on trial. But this trial has actually revealed the real criminals, and they are the thieves on the other side who stole their salaries for a midyear holiday. None of them would ever stand condemned. They just wallow there in their seats, condemned and condemnable. This was an episode in the history of the democracy of Queensland which showed once and for all the great crime being committed by the laziness and indolence of the LNP in this state.

Mr BLEIJIE: (Kawana—LNP) (12.49 pm): At the outset I want to give some advice to the Treasurer that it is he who should not be talking about leadership, particularly when we have a Premier with the highest disapproval rating of any Queensland Premier in the history of Queensland polls and when one of the most unpopular elected members of parliament is the Treasurer himself. So my advice is that the Treasurer himself should not be talking about leadership, and the Labor Party should not talk about leadership because on only three weeks ago it decapitated and killed its own Prime Minister in his first term in office.

Government members interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I rise to make a contribution to this debate on report No. 2 tabled by Estimates Committee A pertaining to the Appropriation Bill 2010, with further detailed scrutiny of that legislation. Those opposite certainly do not want to be reminded of the fact that they had their corflutes printed—‘Kevin Rudd 07’ and ‘Kevin Rudd 10’. They certainly do not want to be reminded of the fact that they had to kill all of those posters and reprint them to start campaigning. That is why now we are seeing the real Gillard and the real campaign, because they were not ready for it!

Government members interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: They were not ready for it. Report No. 2 tabled by the committee examined the expenditure in the portfolios of the Premier, the Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development, and the Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology. In terms of the Premier’s portfolio, I want to discuss two issues that were raised at the public hearing. The first issue is the price of electricity and the ever-increasing and huge impact that is having on the family budget of many Queenslanders and on their cost of living. We all remember that it was Labor that privatised the distribution arm of the industry and it was Labor that promised that the privatisation would not result in increased prices for Queensland consumers. Since that time electricity prices have risen, and only last month they rose again. Cost of living increases are hurting, particularly at a time when there are so many who are struggling to get by.

Labor seems to pride itself on looking after those most vulnerable in our community. Yet when it comes to electricity and cost of living expenses, it is Labor that stands for higher taxes and levies and it is Labor that stands for debt and deficit. Without anticipating the debate that we will be having later this afternoon in relation to privatisation, I simply make the point that again it is the Labor Party that is privatising some of the money-making assets of the state. Clearly those on that side of the House are not quick learners. We saw the lemma Labor leader toppled during a privatisation crusade. We will now see the same happen in Queensland. Only time will tell, and I suspect that the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the Treasurer will be rolled shortly after the federal election.

The second point I want to raise is the issue of our much heralded AAA credit rating. In 2009 ratings agency Standard & Poor’s downgraded Queensland’s AAA credit rating. While the Treasurer does not seem bothered by this scathing indictment of his stewardship of the Queensland economy, we on this side of the House understand the extra debt burden this places on all Queenslanders—costing
over $1 billion in extra payments, not to mention the damage it does to our investment potential in an international marketplace. I have heard members opposite congratulate the Premier and the Treasurer on their economic achievements over the past couple of years. Usually when people get congratulated, such as when my daughter receives an award at a ceremony at school, they have something to show for their achievements. But we have nothing to show for the achievements of the Treasurer and the Premier in Queensland apart from a downgraded economic forecast from AAA to AA.

Of course, one federal and state issue that has been prominent in recent months is the resource super profits tax, now renamed and rebadged the minerals resource rent tax. This was the tax that the faceless faction leaders—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: Minister, I would ask you to listen because you really need to hear this.

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: You really need to hear it, Minister.

Mr Shine: It’s not relevant.

Mr BLEIJIE: This was the tax—it was mentioned in the estimates committee report—that the faceless faction leaders of the New South Wales Right used to knock on the Prime Minister’s door in the middle of the night and politically assassinate him at the behest of Julia Gillard. This tax—whether you want to rebrand it, rename it or whatever you want to do—is a great big new tax on Queensland investment potential and it is a disgrace that the Treasurer and the Premier of this state have not stood up to Canberra. This new mining tax will hurt our future investment opportunities and jeopardise the jobs of thousands of mining workers across the state. As Tony Abbott has said, if you want to ease the cost of living and if you want to stop this great big new tax, Queenslanders and Australians have to change the government.

(Time expired)

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (12.54 pm): I was not invited to attend the Estimates Committee A hearing. Other Independent members took limited committee spots. However, I have attended every other Estimates Committee A hearing up until this year. There are a number of parliamentary reforms that could be made to ensure that the expenditure of public funds is more accountable and more transparent. First of all, we could have independent chairs of the estimates committee; the ability to question senior public servants without waiting for approval from the minister, as is allowed in the federal parliament; and of course the establishment of the upper house. Given the failure in the short term to establish an upper house in Queensland, the best way to make this place become more accountable is to make sure that strong Independents hold the balance of power and decide who will be the next Premier and how that Premier will govern.

There were a number of issues covered in the estimates process. There were a number of issues that were not. I will concentrate on one that was not and one that was. During the estimates process in 2006—and there is a precedent for covering this issue—Peter Beattie was Premier and he was questioned then in the same estimates committee process about the total amount of money paid in compensation to Patel victims. Since that estimates committee the government has not released the same sorts of figures that Peter Beattie released, and I wish that the government had released those estimates committee figures during this hearing. What it meant is that we could calculate the average amount of money paid to Patel victims under the government’s special mediation process. I think there were about 69 victims and $1.44 million was paid out then, so it averaged out to just under $21,000 per victim.

The Premier has avoided ever giving a total figure and has given a number of excuses. There is no excuse. The victims were ripped off, and I table correspondence from lawyer Carter Capner to the lady I referred to this morning in a question without notice to the Premier.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 23 June 2010, and attachments from the member for Burnett to the Chairperson, Crime and Misconduct Commission, regarding matters arising from the Queensland public hospitals commission of inquiry report [2688].

That documentation says that this ex gratia payment is for the funeral expenses for the sum of a certain amount, and the lady informed us that it was around $5,000. The Premier did not answer the question this morning properly when I asked her. Is it fair that a Patel widow should receive about $5,000, or the cost of a funeral, as appropriate compensation?

Also this morning the Premier claimed that the Leader of the Opposition was posturing over the appointment of the Police Commissioner. This was a very serious issue that was covered in Estimates Committee A that I want to address. If I had been invited to the estimates committee, I would have also asked questions about this issue. The shadow Treasurer talked about the hasty and rushed reappointment of the Police Commissioner, and I have concerns—very serious concerns—about this issue. I have written to the head of the CMC about that issue, and I table this correspondence to Mr Martin Moynihan, the Chairman of the Crime and Misconduct Commission, and other associated documents.

Tabled paper: Copy of a letter, dated 23 June 2010, and attachments from the member for Burnett to the Chairperson, Crime and Misconduct Commission, regarding matters arising from the Queensland public hospitals commission of inquiry report [2688].
I wrote—

Dr Mr Moynihan,

On behalf of my staff, myself and the people of the Burnett, I congratulate you on your public comments and the CMC Review of the ... 2010 Queensland Police Service’s Palm Island Review.

You have given renewed hope to the people of Queensland that the CMC will become a fearless and impartial force against crime and misconduct, wherever it may be found.

I note that as the head of the CMC, as reported by Madonna King in the Courier-Mail June 19 2010—CMC won't be palmed off:

‘under the Police Service Administration Act 1990, the CMC has to also agree to both the appointment and the conditions on which the appointment is made’

And therefore quite obviously, you have a very important role to play in the appointment of the Queensland Police Commissioner.

In order to assist you to make that decision fully informed, and specifically on behalf of former patients of Jayant Patel and others, I'd like to draw to your attention the behaviour of the QLD Police Service led by Police Commissioner Atkinson, with regard to an employee of Queensland Health Dr Darren Keating.

What I basically did was put documentation and an argument before the CMC head that asked him to look at the way the Queensland Police Service failed to charge Keating and others.

(Time expired)

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (12.59 pm): At the outset I would like to thank our research staff for Estimates Committee A—our research director and executive assistant. I would also like to thank the chair, Mr Simon Finn, the member for Yeerongpilly, and the other members of the committee for their consideration during the estimates.

As was mentioned by the Treasurer, the budget was a budget for all Queenslanders and it was to protect our infrastructure projects and, therefore, to protect jobs. Estimates Committee A in actual fact looked at the expenditure of the portfolios of the Premier and Minister for the Arts, the Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development, and the Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology.

We should know something about the estimates process. We should realise that the estimates process is a public occurrence. Members of this House do not need to be invited—and actually are not invited—but it is open to every member of the House if they feel strongly enough to make application to the committee to ask any questions that they wish.

I would also like to thank the ministers and their departmental staff for their hard work in preparing for estimates. In the face of the hard work that they do to provide the detail, it is a disappointment that LNP members do not even bother to direct questions to spending. In report No. 2 we see statements of reservations by the three non-government members of the committee. It is rather hard to determine what basis they would have to raise any question of reservation, because they did not ask questions about spending. There is comment made about the SDS, but there is no necessity to deal with the SDS. But one of the outcomes of estimates is to ask questions that relate to the departments that we are actually looking at.

It was rather amazing that the member for Currumbin would stand up and make some comment about her financial knowledge, or her input into the estimates. If you have a look at what she asked, I think you will find that her knowledge of the financial and budgetary dealings of government would be able to be written on the head of a pin in four-inch-high letters. She wanted to sit and discuss matters with the Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology in relation to having lunch. He had lunch with the BLF. He freely admitted that and it is in Hansard. Both the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Currumbin, being Gold Coast members, did not take any account of the fact that the meeting with the BLF was to deal with the problem of their members on the Gold Coast, with so many people unemployed.

We also heard questions from the Leader of the Opposition about the CMC and a standing royal commission. I think it is high time that people who stand up in this House and waffle on about something about which they know nothing really read what sort of information was provided to the committee. The member for Surfers Paradise referred to only a small part of his letter but, when pressed—as we heard from the Premier—it was pointed out that he had chosen the parts that suited his question. He talks about some perception—I will read the words—of corruption. As he was told on that day—and I would say to him again—if he has some evidence he should bring it before the CMC. He should put up or shut up. All he wants to do is deal in innuendo.

The committees are appointed for the consideration of budgets. Questions are asked in relation to the expenditure of government and I endorse the findings of the committee in relation to report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A.

Report adopted.

Sitting suspended from 1.04 pm to 2.30 pm.

Debate, on motion of Mr Wallace, adjourned.
Order of Business

Hon. CA WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (2.30 pm), by leave, without notice: I move—

That the House defer its consideration of the Appropriation Bill in order to consider the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Resumed from p. 2408.

Appropriation (Parliament) Bill

Estimates Committee A

Report No. 1

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): The question is—

That report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A be adopted.

Mr FINN (Yeerongpilly—ALP) (2.31 pm): I rise to speak in support of report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A following the scrutiny of expenditure allocations for the Legislative Assembly. I was pleased to be appointed chair of this committee and I thank all of my fellow committee members for their work on the committee. I have chaired this committee three times now and I have worked with each of the non-government members on this committee a couple of times. I acknowledge both the spirit and bipartisanship and the direct cooperation of members in managing the business of the committee.

It is indicative of the maturity of our democracy that the estimates proceedings, perhaps the most challenging, both intellectually and emotionally, of parliamentary proceedings, are undertaken with the decorum and civility that I have experienced in Estimates Committee A. I acknowledge the unanimous report being tabled today and note that there is bipartisan support for the functions of the parliament as overseen by the Speaker and supported through the appropriation for the Legislative Assembly.

The scrutiny of the Legislative Assembly appropriation was undertaken as the first part of the hearing schedule and considered a range of issues relating to the functions of the parliament. This year, the committee heard reports of the 150th anniversary of the parliament and the activities to recognise the first sitting of the House on 22 May 1860. As the Speaker pointed out at the hearing, 150 years of unbroken democracy is a significant milestone for our state and there are relatively few places in the world that share this milestone.

At the core of the 150th year celebrations was the development of the Parliament House Conservation Plan to conserve and protect the building, its contents and other assets of the parliament into the future. Members will be familiar with the ongoing work on the sandstone building blocks of the parliamentary building and the external scaffolding around the place. The conservation plan is more detailed than just the sandstone and considers the various assets of the parliament. An example of this plan, as the committee was informed by the Speaker, was the heritage furniture of the House, and I make specific reference to the big, heavy table in the Legislative Council chamber. This table has enormous heritage value, yet it is frequently moved to accommodate functions and other activities. Under the plan the table will be moved only when it is absolutely necessary, thus minimising the chance of damage. I use this example to highlight the detail of the plan.

The committee explored with the Speaker the continued rollout of electorate office security upgrades and particularly the training provided to electorate office staff. The upgrade program commenced in June 2008 and since then 193 electorate office staff have completed the security training program. I think all members of the House recognise that our electorate staff are often in the public front line and are required to represent positions that may not be popular or may not provide staff with the answers to an individual’s particular concerns. This is important work of the parliament and I acknowledge the efforts to ensure that our staff are adequately trained and supported.
I believe also that all members of this House would join me in recognising the work of the Speaker and the parliamentary staff in welcoming school groups into the parliament and enabling students, teachers and parents to learn about how parliament works. The continued approach of the current Speaker to promote the parliament as the people’s House builds on the work of previous Speakers to ensure that the parliament is accessible and open to all Queenslanders.

As we consider the appropriation bills before the House that form the budget for the coming year, it is important to acknowledge that governments spend the money of the people. No government has its own money; rather, governments have trust over the expenditure of public funds. In exercising the role of allocating public funds, governments must ensure that the legislature and the functions of the parliament are adequately resourced. It is these functions and this expenditure that maintain the core of our democracy and are central to delivering the freedoms that Queenslanders enjoy, deserve and respect.

I thank the Speaker and, indeed, all of the ministers who participated in Estimates Committee A, their staff and departmental officers and all of those who worked to ensure the success of the scrutiny of estimates proceedings. I thank sincerely the parliamentary staff who worked on the estimates proceedings, in particular Ali Jarro and Tamara Vitale, who provided me with support in my role as chairperson and ensured that the work of Estimates Committee A was in accordance with the standing orders and undertaken in a professional and timely manner. I commend report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A to the House.

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.35 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak, as the deputy chair of this committee, to thank other committee members for the contributions and, as the chairman, the member for Yeerongpilly, has already said, to acknowledge the support of Ali Jarro and Tamara Vitale, the research director and executive assistant. The first session of this estimates hearing, which examines the Parliamentary Service, is not quite as willing as what comes subsequently, but it was very interesting to ask the Speaker questions about a number of issues to do with the Parliament House Conservation Plan. I note that today we have been talking about the 142nd anniversary of sitting in this House in the 150th year of parliament being established in the colony.

There were some interesting issues raised. I asked about security, and I think that is particularly salient given what has happened today. It shows that in an ever-changing world these are issues that this parliament is going to have to wrestle with. Last week I was at Westminster in London—the mother of parliament—and it was very poignant to see where an MP had been blown up in 1979. It changed the circumstances at Westminster and the security there is now very intense.

I have mentioned before, in the years that I have been here, that Speaker McGrady started to bring in some major changes, as did Speaker Hollis, in terms of access to many of the floors of parliament. Unfortunately in Queensland, from what we have seen today with people thinking that they can assail the building and do things that are completely inappropriate, we have to make sure that we secure this place. If we have an incident here that leads to some tragedy involving a member of the public or a member of this parliament, it will change the nature of this place forever. I think that, for all that we know we are an egalitarian society, we still need to make sure that this place is secure. I will support, and my side will support, the Speaker in all of his efforts to make sure that we do everything we can to make sure that the parliament and its surrounds are secured as well as they can be.

It was very disappointing to see a member of the public unfurling a banner in the public gallery during question time. The Speaker has already spoken to me about plans to put in place better educational processes in the gallery with perhaps a glassed-in section that will help schoolchildren to learn more about what is happening in front of them instead of just wondering who all the members are and not really knowing all about procedure. That will be a very beneficial educational process that will engage more with the community. The security issues that we saw this morning in question time and then, very disappointingly, the protest that came on top of the building later in the day really need to be addressed. I know that the Speaker will make sure that those issues are addressed. I want to assure him of our support for anything that preserves the institution that we have. For all that it is an egalitarian state, we need to ensure that we have proper security.

One of the issues that did arise in terms of members’ behaviour was that of engagement with members of the community of Queensland. When Queenslanders communicate with MPs there should be appropriate use of that communication. The issue arose after a recent incident in Mount Isa where the member for Mount Isa received an email from a member of the community and then apparently sent that email on to their employer which led to that person losing their job. I raised at the estimates committee whether we should look at our induction program and the code of ethics that we give to parliamentarians and whether we need to have some sort of educational process that deals with those types of situations.

We also spoke about a number of other issues. One issue that is dear to my heart, and I know the Speaker’s heart, is engaging with all Queenslanders, whether they are of multicultural descent or have disabilities. I congratulate the Speaker on his efforts with his advisory committee, the members of whom
are speaking in this debate today. They have asked to do so and I have encouraged them to do so. We are committed to working with the Speaker to make this, as he has, fair to both sides. We appreciate his efforts in that regard. We are committed to working with him in the future.

Mr WENDT (Ipswich West—ALP) (2.40 pm): I rise today to speak briefly to the report of Estimates Committee A. Can I say from the outset that I felt very privileged to be nominated to be on this particular committee which examined the proposed expenditure of organisational units within the portfolios of the Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Public Works and, of course, the Speaker himself.

I will now confine my comments to the estimates questions associated with the role of the Speaker’s office, which I consider were handled extremely well. I am aware that Mr Speaker is only just over 12 months into his role. I noticed on the day that he commented on how, through his role, now more than ever he appreciates the important role that the parliament plays in our democratic system of government and the paramount importance of the funding proposed to be made available through the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill, thus enabling the parliament to perform its role on behalf of the people of Queensland. The Speaker went on to note that the spending of all public money is an important and serious matter and that he wanted to assure taxpayers that in his view it was being spent prudently and properly and, further, they were getting value for money in terms of the services provided.

I also noted, of course, the major milestones that were achieved this year. None was more important than the 150th anniversary of the parliament’s first sitting on 22 May 1860. In fact, the Speaker went on to say that one of the major P150 events was the launch in April—held in the Red Chamber—of the Parliament House Conservation Plan, which I consider to be an outstanding document and which was issued at that time. This plan not only documents what the parliament has by way of buildings and contents and other assets; it also provides the blueprint for the parliament to conserve and protect the buildings, their contents and other assets into the future. I believe that the Speaker and his staff deserve congratulations for this.

Other achievements mentioned on the day concerned the finalisation of security upgrades for electoral offices, as well as security training for electoral staff. I was pleased to hear how the matter of the physical upgrades would seem to be nearing completion. I am sure that I speak for all members when I say that it was timely to see such a review being conducted. On the matter of staff, I think it was very easy for members to falsely believe that our staff can deal adequately with whatever matters come to our respective office doors. I say this because much of the time we are not in the office and our staff therefore have to put up with an increasing number of intolerant and sometimes abusive people. I personally have advised my staff that they should adopt a zero tolerance approach to any member of the public who is disrespectful or abusive. I think this is only fair because our electorate staff are certainly not paid enough to deal with some of our less friendly constituents. This is why I believe that the personal training was timely and, from what I have heard, extremely effective.

I would also like to acknowledge that the Speaker has continued opening up the parliament for a number of public functions. We heard on the day that these have included the inaugural multifaith service held in the Red Chamber last December; a number of citizenship ceremonies, being the first ever held in the parliament I am advised—one was held on Proclamation Day, which was 10 December, and the other in July on Queensland Day; the YMCA youth parliament; the Indigenous parliament and many, many more. I should point out that I have had the pleasure of attending a number of these functions and events to assist the Speaker wherever possible.

I also point out that it was interesting to hear about the sense of enormous frustration the Speaker is experiencing in trying to get the Parliament House artwork upgraded. This is something that many of us take for granted. I for one appreciate the fact that much of the artwork was in fact donated by councils, which I did not know, and that this is in the process of being moved and spilling into other buildings. It is also good to see that the parliament is engaged in an asset audit of the art to see what we have so that better decisions can be made about it in the future. The issue of art acquisitions was also mentioned. It was pleasing to note that the Speaker advised that this would not be based on his tastes alone but considered by a broader group including the Speaker’s Advisory Committee and, of course, a cross-section of members.

I was also pleased to hear that the parliament will be trialling a new initiative in the Redlands at the Sheldon College to better engage our young people in the role and functions of the parliament. I understand that this activity will be a model that can be rolled out to other regions such as Toowoomba, the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. It began when the principal of Sheldon College wrote to the Speaker asking whether parliament would be prepared to conduct a youth activity at Sheldon College as part of the United Nations International Year of Youth. I must say that it is indeed refreshing to note that the Speaker supported this and as such suggested that the parliament conduct a half-day youth parliament at the college in September, something which I am keen to explore in my own area as well.

It was also good to hear about the stonework upgrade, which probably does not get appreciated by members as much as by people who visit the precinct. The Speaker advised that the next stage of the stonework restoration, namely inside the Speaker’s Green, is going to present some problems. This
Mr SPRINGBORG: While I enjoy a little bit of friendly banter with the honourable member for Toowoomba South, the records of the place show that the Warwick East State School School was built in 1850 and the Drayton school was built in 1851. Nevertheless, it is great to have these standing monuments to the history of European settlement in Queensland. Therefore, we must not shy away from their preservation and from ensuring a greater appreciation of their part in our history.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I think in speaking to Estimates Committee A, Report No. 1, I thank the Speaker for his input into our estimates committee process. I am very supportive of many of the policies of the Speaker, particularly in relation to the parliamentary precinct and its preservation, and taking the parliament to the people of Queensland. After all, it is the House of the people of Queensland. All members should be very glad to know that the parliament is being promoted to all the people of Queensland. I also thank the chair of the committee, the honourable member for Yeerongpilly, Simon Finn, the other members of the committee and our secretariat staff, Ms Ali Jarro and Ms Tamara Vitale. They kept everything on track and kept us paying attention to those matters that are part of the estimates operation.

Something that was asked of the Speaker that really resonated with me related to the strategies for engaging with young Queenslanders, to enable them to learn more about the role and functions of parliament. It is very sad that in some areas of our state the youth do not have any understanding of
parliament. It was particularly pleasing—and the member for Ipswich West mentioned this—to hear that Sheldon College was advancing that strategy, with the assistance of Mr Speaker. Our daughter-in-law teaches at Sheldon College and our granddaughter attends kindergarten there. I would like to see that project expanded into other areas of Queensland.

The Office of the Speaker provides funding for the parliamentary staff. I support the comments of the member for Southern Downs in relation to the care and consideration given to members of this House who have to spend time away from home by every person who works within the Parliamentary Service, whether they be cleaners, the floor staff in the House and so on. They do an absolutely tremendous job. I would like to thank every one of them. We spend 14 weeks or so each year in Brisbane and it is pleasing that our home away from home is comfortable and we are well looked after.

An area that has impacted on every one of us is the upgrading of electorate office computer equipment and internet bandwidth. We can discharge our duties fully by having available the best equipment and the best communications. I believe that that augers well for the 89 members of this House. All in all, the estimates procedures in relation to the Legislative Assembly were well received by all members of the committee. The detail provided by the Speaker was satisfactory. I commend the recommendation contained in report No. 1 to the House.

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (2.55 pm): I commence by thanking the chairman of the committee, as I did in my earlier contribution to Report No. 2 of Estimates Committee A, for his forbearance and guidance in terms of the operation of the committee. I think it worked well. I also acknowledge the staff of the committee, whom I did not have time to recognise in my earlier report, for the work that they have done in compiling the report and preparing material. I also acknowledge the assistance provided by the Speaker, the Clerk and officers and the forthrightness with which they provided information when asked by members of the committee.

In recognition of the importance of the parliament of Queensland, as a parliament we deal with the funding for this building, for us, for our staff and for the operations we undertake through a separate piece of legislation, the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill. It is important that we do it that way, because in a very real way it signifies the difference between the executive arm of government and the parliamentary process, or the democracy that we engage in in this place.

This year in excess of $70 million will be spent on the delivery of democracy in Queensland. It will be spent on providing employment and support to 464 people throughout Queensland, including members of parliament, our electorate office staff, the people who provide us with services and support in the parliamentary precinct and throughout the state, and the officers who serve the people of Queensland. It is important that we remember that this money supports service to the people of Queensland. It does not support members or some amorphous group of people who do well out of it; it supports the people of Queensland, that is, the people who come to our offices needing help, whether that be accessing a hospital, filling in a form or dealing with another form of government. That is what that money is spent on.

The funding covers costs such as rent and relocation expenses. Recently there were relocation expenses because of the boundary changes that occurred before the last election. I know that relocation is always an issue for Speakers. In my own case, at the beginning of every year we pull out and update the letter that we wrote the year before, asking for new office space or for something else that will enable us to better provide those services. Speakers have a difficult time managing all of the various requests that are made. The funding meets those obligations. It also pays for our extensive broadcast of parliament. This year will see stage 3 of the delivery of that service rolled out. Queenslanders who want to see what goes on in this place will be able to do so with greater reliability and in better way.

This year’s budget contains expenditure for the maintenance of the magnificent building that we have the privilege to work in. Times have changed and we now recognise the value of conservation plans and a conservation strategy for this building. It is a well-thought-through action and the Speaker ought to be commended for it, as we owe it to all Queenslanders to preserve this House. Can members imagine the history that this House will see over the next 100 years? Can we imagine how much more interesting its history will be in 2110, after 100 years of different characters coming through its doors, decisions being made and challenges being faced by the future representatives of Queensland?

During the committee hearings, we heard discussion regarding the independent officers of parliament and the confusion that sometimes arises with them being called independent officers of parliament, but not being members of the Parliamentary Service. I think there will be more debate around that particular issue and whether those so-called independent officers are, in fact, truly independent. The reality is that they rely on executive government for funding, offices and support services. That is an important issue that we fleshed out during the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, $70 million is a lot of money and no-one, least of all those of us privileged to represent Queenslanders in here, should discount that cost, but increasingly it is fashionable to criticise the cost of our democracy. Know-it-alls and self-appointed guardians in the media and other places take it on themselves to criticise the cost of running this parliament. Often that criticism is informed by nothing more than ignorance and envy.
Mr Deputy Speaker, $70 million is a lot of money and no doubt we can do things better and we will continue to improve the delivery of services, but I often wonder whether those who complain of the cost of running our democracy ever stop to reflect on what the alternative might be. At $70 million our democracy certainly does not come cheap, but for what it delivers it is money well spent, and I do not believe the alternative deserves any consideration.

Ms Farmer (Bulimba—ALP) (3.00 pm): I rise to speak to report No. 1 of Estimates Committee A. Although I was not a member of this committee, I do care very much about the expenditure considerations which were dealt with at that committee hearing. These are matters which affect all of us—which ensure that not only does this parliament uphold the highest standards but also all members of this House are supported in the best possible way in order to carry out their responsibilities to the community.

I congratulate the Speaker on the professional manner in which he carries out his duties. He has the respect of both sides of this House. He has ensured that, while there is integrity and vigilance in our proceedings, there is also humour and a sense of our humanness, and this is a great accomplishment. I also congratulate the Clerk of the Parliament and all the staff who do so much to support the workings of Parliament House and our electorate offices. I have worked in a number of different sectors in my professional life—in the public and private sectors, in the not-for-profit sector, in small and large organisations. I have worked with incredibly professional people whose commitment and work ethic I could not fault. However, I have found the parliamentary staff to work at the highest standards I have encountered—whether it be in HR, information technology, property, community engagement, committee support, or whichever area with which the members of this House deal. I congratulate the Speaker and the Clerk for their efforts in achieving this.

There are several specific areas on which the Speaker reported at the estimates committee which I would like to address in particular. The first of these were the celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the parliament of Queensland. And what a wonderful celebration this was. I had great pleasure in attending the open day for Parliament House, which was one of the key events among the celebrations. Having promoted it through our local schools, I was so happy to see families from local schools such as Norman Park State School, Morningside State School, Bulimba State School and Seven Hills State School, among others, delighted to be here. I still have parents and students coming up to speak to me at school events to tell me what a wonderful experience it was to be here, to understand the history of the place and to feel a sense of ownership over their heritage. I have parents telling me how pleased they were to be able to show their children through such an iconic Queensland building. The event was a tremendous gift to our community.

It was also wonderful to attend the formal dinner which celebrated the 150th anniversary. How good it was to be in the same room as so many generations of members of this House who have made their own important contributions and to hear their stories. It was fitting to have such a formal occasion to mark the anniversary. The wines which were produced to celebrate the anniversary have proven to be extremely popular raffle prizes for local schools and community organisations. They are so excited to receive something which is a limited edition and which records an important occasion in the history of parliament in Queensland.

But what I think is one of the most important outcomes of the Speaker’s stewardship is the strong emphasis on outreach to our community, to educate Queenslanders and young people in particular about the important role that parliament plays in their lives. I think particularly of the school visits, the youth parliaments, the high teas which the Speaker has instituted, including the special high teas, to encourage all members of the public from whatever demographic profile to know and understand what ‘their’ Parliament House is all about. Representatives from our local guides groups were delighted, for instance, to attend a special high tea with me earlier this year at Parliament House to celebrate the 100th anniversary of guiding.

There are so many schools from the Bulimba electorate that have attended the tours of Parliament House including, in 2009, Lourdes Hill College, Seven Hills State School and Bulimba State School. And I know that many of our local schools have appreciated being able to enjoy more informally the hospitality and history of this House, including principals, staff and/or students from all of the schools which I have already mentioned, as well as from others such as St Thomas’s, Saints Peter and Paul’s, and St Oliver Plunkett’s. Norman Park State School and Seven Hills State School have very much valued being able to hold such special occasions as their school graduations here. It was pleasing to hear of the Parliament House Conservation Plan so that these outstanding heritage buildings can be preserved for a long time into the future for Queenslanders.

On another note, it has been of great benefit to me, and I am sure to every member of this House, to be provided with the upgrade of office facilities which has been rolled out this year. In order to respond in a timely fashion to the many constituents who rely on us to respond to their needs and progress their issues, it is imperative that our equipment is efficient and up to date. With the provision of new computers, upgraded internet bandwidth and equipment such as the folding and stuffing machines, we are assisted to do our jobs in the best way possible.
I acknowledge the efforts of the parliamentary staff who supported Estimates Committee A and of the members of this House, particularly the chair, the member for Yeerongpilly, who contributed to the effective running of the committee proceedings.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (3.04 pm): I rise to make some comments about the Estimates Committee A report in its consideration of the expenditure on the parliamentary precinct and the Parliamentary Service, including the electorate offices. Although I was not a member of the estimates committee itself, I take a particular interest especially in the expenditure on the parliamentary precinct as a member of the Speaker’s Advisory Committee. I commend the Speaker on the formation of that Speaker’s Advisory Committee. I think the formation of that committee and the work we have been able to do in the past 12 months has gone a long way to breaking down the problem that always exists in ensuring that a heritage precinct such as this is properly maintained.

It is always a difficult decision for any government to spend the necessary money on a precinct such as this, to maintain it in the way that it should be maintained. It is always easy to find a ready audience for criticism of money spent on buildings such as this and on electorate offices and on politicians generally. That criticism is always shallow and it certainly does not assist in the responsibility that we as parliamentarians have and that the Speaker and his staff have as custodians of this place to ensure that it is maintained for the next 150 years, for generations of Queenslanders who will serve here as parliamentarians and who will visit here at the seat of government in this state.

The parliamentary precinct here in Queensland certainly rates well with its contemporaries throughout the other states of Australia and, indeed, overseas. Since I have been a member of parliament I have visited a number of other parliamentary precincts. I am also very proud to come here as a Queenslander. That is a sense of pride that I would like to think every Queenslander can enjoy. Our parliament here does reflect well on all of us in Queensland. It is certainly a responsibility that all of us as parliamentarians have to ensure that this parliamentary precinct is maintained in a condition that Queenslanders generally can take pride in when they come here. That should be a common aim of all of us.

I express the hope that we can address the issues that face those who seek to maintain this parliamentary precinct and that we can approach those challenges in a bipartisan way, because there are challenges. There is no doubt that there are challenges ahead. The Speaker’s Advisory Committee has certainly become aware of those challenges through the work that we have already done. Those challenges are certainly going to test the people who sit in this chamber in the years to come.

Not only is there the continual maintenance of this heritage building and all of the effects therein—that in itself is a huge challenge—but there is the challenge of meeting the growing requirement for space and maintaining the accommodation facilities at a standard that keeps pace with the expectations of people who will use them. The accommodation facilities were built in the late sixties and early seventies, I think. The day will come when that issue will have to be addressed, as to how those facilities are maintained or brought up to a standard that is more acceptable for today. So there is a whole range of challenges. They are challenges that I think need to be addressed in a bipartisan way, without the cheap shots that will find a ready audience with the media and with, unfortunately, some people in the community who do not understand fully the role of this parliament.

The other comments I would like to make relate to the Q150 celebrations this year. I think they were also an indication of the history of the parliament and the purpose of the parliament. I also think that the work that has been done in the electorate offices generally in relation to the security upgrades has been a major improvement.

My office staff were probably the most critical of the proposals for the security office upgrades, but even they have acknowledged that the security upgrades have been a major improvement and have not brought about the cataclysmic results they predicted when they were first faced with dealing with the change. They, like all electorate office staff, do a great job and I think it would be a mistake for me not to put on record the fact that those security upgrades have been accepted and have been a step in the right direction for our electorate office staff.

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (3.09 pm): I was not privileged to be a member of Estimates Committee A, but I am keen to comment on the work of the Parliamentary Service which supports all members of the Legislative Assembly as we undertake our roles representing the electors of Queensland. It is 150 years since the Parliament of Queensland first met on 22 May 1860. I congratulate the staff of the parliament for the work put into celebrating and commemorating the parliament’s 150th anniversary.

The parliament is the people’s House and the staff of this place all contribute to keeping this a living, breathing and useful building. In May this year, the Parliament House Conservation Plan was launched. The plan will help ensure the preservation of this special part of our state’s history. Most of the members who have had the privilege of serving the people of Queensland can recall the very first time they set foot in this heritage-listed building, which is filled with the history and art of our state and our democracy. We need to protect this sandstone building, this hand-crafted furniture, this historic and modern art and craftsmanship which all belongs to the citizens of Queensland, and I welcome the Parliament House Conservation Plan.
Many staff of the Parliamentary Service dedicate much of their time to not only the preservation of this building and its contents—and I am not talking about us when I say ‘its contents’—but also the preservation of the documentation of the work of the Assembly. The staff of the Parliamentary Library are well known to members and always provide quick and accurate information and research to support our roles as legislators. I thank and acknowledge the professionalism of all of the library staff. I also thank them for constantly striving for continual improvement by seeking the feedback of their customers.

I notice the program to replace the existing parliamentary database has begun as well as the redevelopment of parliament’s internet site. It is so important that we keep up with technological advances, and it is essential that we provide quick and easy access to parliamentary information and transcripts because this is the people’s House and access to it via the internet opens our virtual doors for people all around the state. I know my staff will welcome the upgrade of internet bandwidth currently under way.

When I am out and about talking with people in the electorate about their issues and their needs, I get great feedback about the service provided by my staff. To Di, Leanne and Lewis, I thank you for everything you do for me and for the people of the Sandgate electorate. Many people do not actually realise that the staff in our electorates are also a part of the Parliamentary Service, and I take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the extraordinary work of all of our electorate staff. Their job description is varied and they are all very multiskilled. Their dedication means that as members of parliament we are able to work our varied roles as local champions, legislators, policymakers, committee members, advocates and troubleshooters.

I also enjoy welcoming school groups from my electorate to Parliament House. Most of my primary schools send groups of students every year or every second year, and I know the visits help bring a very dry classroom topic to life. Again, the Community Engagement and education staff do a great job coordinating the visits, conducting the tours and answering some very interesting questions from the students. Legal studies students from my local high schools also make the most of the parliament based curriculum tailored to their particular requirements. My thanks go to the talented team who continue to refine and improve our Community Engagement services to open up access to parliament for all Queenslanders.

Let me finish my list of thanks with some very important services provided by parliamentary staff. Catering staff at parliament are often far too good and the choice of fresh food is continually getting better. Parliament House is used for functions by many groups. I always enjoy seeing the senior formals that are held here at the end of the year. Of course, the cleaning, maintenance and property staff, our technical experts, security staff, the switchboard team and attendants are always quietly going about their work and I thank them too.

Hansard staff always calmly and professionally record our every word. I do not know how they follow some of the feistier debates in here, but they all do a wonderful job. The committee and research staff support our regular parliamentary committees as well as this estimates process, and I congratulate them all on their work. I thank human resources and travel services staff for the prompt and professional way that you assist my staff. Finally, well done to Mr Speaker and the Clerk of the Parliament for your leadership of this well-oiled machine.

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—LNP) (3.14 pm): As a member of the Speaker’s Advisory Committee, I am pleased to speak to the report of Estimates Committee A. This budget allocation is for the hub of democracy in our state, be it the physical signs of our democracy—which is this parliament—or the people who provide that support to the members of parliament and provide the peace and democracy to the people of Queensland. I am one person in this parliament who has worked through the transition to government when it was 44–all in 1986. I have seen firsthand how a democracy can give a peaceful transition in the most difficult of circumstances—no demonstrations in the street, just a peaceful reflection of the vote of the people.

This budget is about 0.2 per cent of the overall state budget and it provides for some 470 staff, particularly those electorate officers throughout the state in about 90 or more offices. Those staff do a sterling job because very often the members of parliament—be they ministers, shadow ministers or backbenchers—are away for 20 weeks or more of the year. Electorate officers have to deal with myriad inquiries that are so important to the people of the area, but they also have to deal with emotions ranging from sobbing grief to extreme anger. They have become a very important part of the community. These days, the pace of life in the community is so rapid and people often do not have the likes of a parish priest to go to talk to about their difficulties and their problems. If the member is away at parliament, it behoves the electorate officers to deal with these very important issues.

This parliament is one of the oldest and most important buildings in Queensland and it belongs to the people of Queensland not to the members of parliament. We are brief custodians as we pass through. It is being shared wonderfully with schoolchildren and through events where community groups can come here and look at the workings of democracy and examine, enjoy and love this magnificent building. But this building was built back in the 1860s. It is expensive to maintain and it must be
mean more accountability and democracy in this place. It is a bit concerning that at times the budget has to be supplemented through running a number of public functions here. This place should be available for schoolkids to be able to come to, for community groups to be able to come to, for people to be able to have forums, public meetings and all those sorts of things in. When the place has to be used for public functions to help pay the way, then we are providing for more wear and tear on the place and there is a lot of stress on the staff to maintain this place properly.

When we think about how long it has been since major money was spent on this building, when we look at the adjoining annex which was built about 32 years ago, when we see the office space getting crammed and jammed and when the tasks and the number of people needed to run the democratic services of this parliament increase, then we know that the time is fast approaching when some money may have to be spent in the near future on behalf of and for the people of Queensland. I fully support the work that the Speaker is doing to look at the future planning of this area and make sure that this building is maintained in its pristine condition for future generations.

We need to market how important this structure is to our democracy—that it does belong to each and every person in Queensland, that it is available for them to come through and enjoy and that it does ultimately provide them with the sorts of services of health, security and all the other things that go through this parliament. The people of Queensland need to appreciate its importance. For that reason, it is important that the budget of the building needs to be looked at. It is approaching the time when something will have to be spent on this building or the adjoining building.

At the same time, we cannot forget the human element of the staff who work here in the parliamentary precinct and out in the electorate offices who require continued support and professional training. Like others, I would like to emphasise the importance of security for those officers out in the electorate because they do face on a daily or weekly basis some extreme and confronting situations and they do a sterling job for the people they help and assist in those circumstances.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (3.19 pm): Like many members before me, I would like to begin by thanking my staff, because they are employees of Mr Speaker. I would like to echo the sentiments of the member for Toowoomba South and say just how much I appreciate the staff who work for me. Bronwyn Stewart and Melinda Bradford are the parliamentary staff who have been with me for over six years in politics. I hate to think of a time when I would ever be without them. They do 99 per cent of the hard lifting and the hard work, and they answer all those phone calls which are often from people in absolute crisis. Many people contact their members of parliament, but normally they are about life-and-death issues where they are not able to get operations. There are life-and-death issues that have to be dealt with. It is our very underpaid and overworked electorate office staff who have to deal with the majority of them, and I give my utter thanks to them.

Similarly, I would like to pass on my thanks to the parliamentary staff—to the attendants for the wonderful work they do; to the library staff, who produce magnificent research briefs at very short notice; to the security staff, who always have our welfare and that of our families in mind; and to the very talented Hansard crew, who make sense out of our ramblings, or my ramblings.

I would also like to mention the very welcome addition of the Indigenous Liaison Officer, Brett Nutley. Brett does so much work that goes unnoticed and is a fine addition to this parliament. I only wish that we could have another 10 of Brett. Maybe we could clone him.

The member for Toowoomba South mentioned in 1996 that he can remember when it was 44-all. I feel that we are going into a time in politics where there will be a rebalancing of members on that side of the House and on this side of the House. There will be a time in the near future when there will not be one political party which is dominant in this House, and that will be a good thing for democracy. It will mean more accountability and democracy in this place.

As it stands now, the reality is that when legislation is introduced by a minister the deals have already been done. Consultation has already taken place. Unfortunately, consultation does not occur with non-government members, and it should. Non-government members should have an ability to influence the content of legislation and the principles that the legislation addresses before it comes into the House. We can make the most magnificent of speeches. However, that speech will very rarely have an impact on the legislation. The deals are done in smoky backrooms with interest groups. Unfortunately, these days deals are being done with minority groups that do not reflect the mainstream wishes of Queensland society. Mr Speaker said in the estimates committee hearing—
I do not disagree with Mr Speaker. In fact, I would never disagree with Mr Speaker, who is in the House at the moment and whom I believe many members would recognise as one of the best Speakers this place has ever seen. However, in closing I would like to say that I stand for parliamentary reform. I believe that there should be an upper house. Failing that, the best hope that Queenslanders have in the near future of good, accountable government is for Independents and members of the Queensland Party to hold the balance of power. They can perform the function of an upper house until an upper house is established in the Queensland parliament. As part of that upper house and future parliamentary representation, I would like to see dedicated Indigenous representation. I believe that is one vital systemic change that would improve outcomes for Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people.

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (3.24 pm): It is with pleasure that I rise this afternoon as one of the members of Estimates Committee A to make a few comments on the recent estimates hearing held in the parliament. Let me start by thanking the chair, the honourable Simon Finn, the member for Yeerongpilly, for his hard work and even-handed approach to the estimates committee hearing. I also thank the parliamentary staff, particularly Hansard. The staff had to sit through almost nine hours of hearing on that day, and I do appreciate their hard work.

In a democracy such as ours, the parliament exists to represent the people, to make laws and to provide the government of the day. One of its most important functions is to grant supply—that is, to bring down the state budget in the form of appropriation bills. This parliament is tasked with scrutinising the actions of the government. This is where estimates committees play a critical role to make sure that Queenslanders know exactly where the money is being spent and that it is being spent wisely.

Estimates Committee A examined proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill for the Legislative Assembly, and it is on this area that I would like to make a few comments. During the estimates hearing I was pleased to hear that the Speaker has overseen the completion of the security upgrade for electorate offices around the state. I understand that prior to the security review being finalised the Parliamentary Service developed a training course for electorate office staff. Our electorate officers are increasingly called on to deal with challenging constituents or situations, and it is important that they are appropriately equipped to do so.

The course went for two days and it covered things like dealing with challenging situations and clients, conflict resolution, building and maintaining resilient relationships, withdrawing from aggressive client scenarios and managing emotional responses to challenging situations. Physical security was also covered, with electorate office security systems, security resources, reporting security incidents and tips on personal security delivered. I would like to thank the Speaker and the Clerk for providing such vital training to our staff in the electorate office. Thanks must also be extended to the Queensland Police Service for their role in delivering these courses. Keeping our staff safe is one of the most important priorities for members of both sides of the House.

I am also pleased to note that the Speaker recently launched a comprehensive conservation plan for Parliament House, the state’s foremost heritage building. I agree with his remarks that the decision to construct this purpose-built parliamentary precinct in the early 1860s was a remarkably ambitious one, and we can see the fantastic results around us today. As the parliament celebrates 150 years, it is appropriate to recognise that, as it is a heritage building, the ongoing maintenance of Parliament House can be a difficult and complicated process. Having a conservation plan is vital in guiding how we use the building and how we ensure it remains in good shape for many more years to come.

While the parliament is a serious place for serious business, we have also seen some fun injected, with initiatives such as Vindaloo Against Violence showing our support for Queensland’s multicultural community. Vindaloo Against Violence encouraged all Queenslanders to join in efforts to eliminate racial violence in our state. It was about enjoying Indian food and culture while at the same time reinforcing the serious message that violence of any kind, including racially motivated violence, is not acceptable in Queensland. I take this opportunity to thank the catering staff for causing there to be so many red faces on that day.

The success of the Queensland parliament open day is testament to the important role of the Speaker. More than 2,100 people attended the event and people were able to take a behind-the-scenes tour of Parliament House and enjoy free live entertainment on the Speaker’s Green throughout the day.

I often hear people criticise our democracy. While on the one hand I encourage constructive criticism and scrutiny, on the other hand I do think we have one of the best democracies in the world. Today a man came into my office in a hostile manner. He criticised our democracy and the government and proclaimed that there is no democracy and free speech in Queensland. The fact that he was able to walk into his elected representative’s office freely, say what he liked in a hostile manner and walk away without any ramification proves that democracy is alive and well in Queensland.

(Time expired)

Report adopted.

Clauses 1 to 4, as read, agreed to.
Schedule, as read, agreed to.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Powell): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee B be adopted.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (3.30 pm): It was a great pleasure and privilege to chair Estimates Committee B. At the outset, I extend my thanks to the members of that committee: the honourable member for Gladstone, Mrs Liz Cunningham; the member for Caloundra, Mr Mark McArdle; the member for Mount Ommaney, Mrs Julie Atwood; the member for Moggill, Dr Bruce Flegg; the member for Whitsunday, Ms Jan Jarratt; and the member for Springwood, Ms Barbara Stone. I particularly mention the great work done by the secretariat—the research director, Ms Erin Pasley, and the executive assistant, Ms Anne Fidler. Both were a tower of strength to the committee and helped it during its various meetings and stages. Our gratitude must be expressed accordingly.

While I am at it, could I pay tribute to the deputy chair, Mrs Liz Cunningham, who was of great strength to us in the sense of her experience being the longest serving member of the committee. That was greatly appreciated. Could I also thank Dr Bruce Flegg, because in his statement of reservation he was kind enough to refer accurately or otherwise to my chairmanship as being well done and fairly performed, which is something I appreciate.

The committee examined the portfolios of the Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training. It is hard to imagine two more important portfolios than Health and Education and Training. This is both from the point of view of the amounts of money allocated to those portfolios and their importance to the people of Queensland in terms of their health and the future of Queensland in terms of education and training, particularly of our young people.

In relation to the amount of money for the portfolios, the amount voted on for Health this year was a staggering $10,290 million. For Education and Training it was almost the same at $10,296 million. These are staggering amounts when it comes to the proportion of the total budget expenditure and reflect the importance of the matters.

I say in a semipolitical vein that the statements of reservation from the opposition members both with respect to Health and Education and Training indicate that more money should have been spent. With respect to the statement of reservation on Health under the heading ‘Specific comments on the Health portfolio’ at the first dot point, the honourable member for Caloundra stated—

The amount of hearing time allocated to a $10 billion portfolio is entirely inadequate ...

He was referring to time. Throughout the estimates committee hearing he was concerned about adequate moneys being spent in relation to various items.

Likewise, the member for Moggill at page 4 of his statement of reservation under the heading ‘Budget expenditure’ stated—

The overall funding of Education increased by as little as 3.6% in this Budget against the increase in expenditure in the Budget of over 6%.

My point is that time and time again we hear from the opposition criticism of Labor debt and Labor deficit, but when it comes to the detail with respect to individual portfolios it is not surprising to hear from the opposition that in fact we should be spending more money, not less. There is a shade of hypocrisy in relation to those matters.

The hearing covered many items of great interest to the people of Queensland and my electorate in particular. I appreciated the opportunity to chair the committee. I again thank the committee for its work.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.35 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee B. Whilst it sounds like a committee of congratulations, I would like to commend the member for Toowoomba North for his capable chairing of that committee. It was an amicable committee to be a part of. I really appreciated that. I appreciate the work of the secretariat and their very professional and timely support. Hansard sits there for quite a number of days and takes the record of the hearings. At times it is difficult. The acoustics are sometimes lacking. Certainly, some people speak more quietly than others and more quickly than others. They do a brilliant job, so thank you to Hansard.

The two portfolios that we examined are two that, from my electorate’s perspective, are critically important. Health was the first. It is the perception of the people in my electorate that our hospital is being ignored, or perhaps run down is the way to describe it when it comes to services. With a burgeoning industrial base we need to be able to attract and maintain workers. One of the things that workers and their families look at are the services that are available—health being one of the primary ones.
I was very thankful that the Minister for Health recognised the importance of the Gladstone Hospital and the representations that I have made on behalf of my community to attract better services. During the hearing I asked for the minister’s response to Gladstone Base Hospital being considered outside the hub-and-spoke model, which is the one being applied across Queensland Health facilities. The minister replied in terms of the hub-and-spoke model—

This was something that was a big discussion with the federal government on the national hospitals and health reform.

The Minister for Health then went on to speak about the implications of the hub-and-spoke model as opposed to the activity based model of funding. Subsequent to the estimates hearing Wayne Swan came to the electorate and I asked the same question of him. His reply was along the lines that he did not know what the hub-and-spoke model was. I am keen to work with the Minister for Health in relation to funding for health services based in Gladstone simply because of their importance to the industrial development of the region. Similarly, education and training have an important role in the industrial development of the region, especially with the LNG that is coming. Quite a number of LNG proponents have talked about the skills shortages that will be faced and the need for training to have already commenced given the lead times for training.

I was pleased and thankful to the Minister for Education for his announcement of the $10 million skills investment fund. Certainly, organisations in my electorate including TAFE, the Gladstone Area Group Apprentices Ltd and some private RTOs are encouraged by that announcement and by that recognition of the importance of training in the Gladstone region. Whilst you can import workers, the healthiest thing to do is to train and improve the skills and employment opportunities for people who are already there and who have already invested time, energy and their family’s time in the region. They deserve to have some priority in relation to the development that is occurring.

There was a question asked about Nagoorin State School in the Education portfolio estimates. Nagoorin is one of the schools that has been short-listed for examination for mothballing. It is a vibrant little school with a very strong enrolment future. It is one of the areas developing in the electorate simply because it is more affordable but quite an easy commute to the industry. I have a submission that I am intending to pass on to the minister this week from the Nagoorin community showing not only its vision but its energy in terms of keeping that little school open. It is a good school supported by not only energetic staff but families who have invested a lot in the Nagoorin area. I thank the Minister for Education and the Minister for Health for their informative responses and I look forward to working with them in relation to the direction that my electorate is taking.

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (3.40 pm): I was pleased to again participate in the estimates committee process on behalf of the government to examine expenditure in the portfolio areas of Health and Education. If ever there was an area of government that presents budgetary challenges, it is the Health portfolio. As outlined by Minister Lucas in his introduction, Queensland has one of the most decentralised, complex, expensive and growing health systems in the world. While life expectancy in this country is second only to Japan, demands on health services continue to grow at an alarming rate and expectations of successful medical intervention are unprecedented.

In an ageing population in which the number of people over 85 will quadruple by 2050, the demand for hospitalisation and access to procedures like renal dialysis and joint replacements will grow exponentially. Given that the state’s Health budget has nearly doubled over the past five years in order to meet increased demand, I wonder how our future governments will meet the funding burden of community expectation. But that is a challenge for the future. This year’s estimates committee had an important opportunity to question the health minister about the government’s current programs and priorities.

Like many regional members, I am grateful for the Bligh government’s commitment to capital works for facilities like new and upgraded hospitals. Our $7.3 billion Health capital works budget is the largest in the country and is underpinning much needed new infrastructure like the redevelopment of the Mackay Base Hospital. I have absolutely no doubt that this important project would not have been delivered under an LNP government. It is only Labor that is committed to maintaining an infrastructure program to deliver projects like the Mackay Hospital despite some of the most difficult economic times this state has ever seen. The $405 million redevelopment is progressing well, and $75 million is allocated this financial year for finalisation of early works packages and the commencement of block E, the main clinical building. This eagerly awaited project will provide a better work environment for Health staff and much improved capacity and treatment options for the whole Mackay-Whitsunday region. Best of all, it is but one of the many Health infrastructure projects underway across the length and breadth of Queensland.

I am just as excited about the funding that this government is injecting into the provision of dental training places in Townsville and Cairns. People in the south-east of the state may not be aware that in regional Queensland we have around half the number of practising dentists per person than our city cousins, and of course in remote areas the proportion is even worse. That is why the government’s commitment of $22 million in this year’s budget towards a 60-chair dental training facility at James Cook University in Cairns and a further commitment of $10 million in the 2011-12 budget for a facility in
Townsville is such great news for Queensland. The first 66 graduates of the university’s dental school are due to complete their training in 2013, and because they have trained in North Queensland we hope many will stay in North Queensland, or at least regional Queensland, to provide a much needed dental service in both the private and public sectors.

Another initiative of this government that is poised to make a profound difference in North Queensland is the funding allocation provided to boost cancer services in the Townsville and Mount Isa hospitals. A $373.8 million injection by federal and state governments will deliver 26 additional chemotherapy chairs, two additional linear accelerators, a PET scanner and enhanced teleoncology and chemotherapy treatment services in our North Queensland hospitals. What this means for many of my constituents is that they will be able to receive the treatment they need in Townsville instead of having to relocate to Brisbane. Being closer to home has obvious benefits for patients as well as their families. It is a great move forward, and I encourage all North Queenslanders to consider which side of federal politics they trust to continue funding our regional health facilities.

Of course, the other area in which the state and federal governments have worked in close partnership for the benefit of Queenslanders is education. Minister Wilson was able to demonstrate during the estimates hearing that he intends to continue in the role as a reformist minister by ensuring that Queensland’s education policy keeps pace with our desire to give our kids the best possible education. The evidence of reform is all around us—new kindergartens springing up across the state, the successful rollout of the biggest school infrastructure program in history and of course progress on A flying start for Queensland’s children discussion paper. Both ministers involved in Estimates Committee B demonstrated that their motivation as a minister in the Bligh government arises from a genuine commitment to advancing the wellbeing of Queenslanders. I commend both of them for their portfolio knowledge and hard work.

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—LNP) (3.45 pm): In relation to Estimate Committee B, I will confine my comments to the Health portfolio but commence by thanking all members of the committee for the way that we worked together on the day in question and those leading up to it and the help provided by the parliamentary staff on that day and earlier. I wish to focus on the question of a hydrotherapy pool, the fact that one will not be located at the Queensland Children’s Hospital and the impact that will have on the care of children needing such a service.

During estimates it was made quite clear by Dr Steer that there will be no such pool at the Queensland Children's Hospital site. Hydrotherapy or aquatic physiotherapy is a form of treatment or exercise instructed by an aquatic physiotherapist or qualified instructor conducted in a heated pool. It is used as a technique of physiotherapy for people suffering and recovering from serious injuries such as muscle wastage. Additionally, it is used for people who suffer with joint problems or those with severe physical disabilities. The hydrotherapy pool we are talking about in this case is to treat sick and injured children dealing with such problems as cerebral palsy, acquired brain injury, spinal cord injury, chronic persistent pain, juvenile respiratory conditions, oncology, postsurgical orthopaedics, neuromuscular conditions and connective tissue disorders. The Queensland Children’s Hospital has been proposed as a centre of excellence for children’s services in this state and has been referred to as the hub in a hub-and-spoke model. When asked where such a pool will be located, Dr Steer did not indicate or could not indicate where it would be. The minister in his comment in Hansard could not specify where the pool would be but said the Lota Police Citizens Youth Club in his electorate has such a hydrotherapy pool.

Let us consider the hydrotherapy pools that are located near the Queensland Children’s Hospital site. If the pool at the Royal Children’s Hospital were to be the site of choice, then as I understand it there would need to be a major upgrading of the heating, filtration and hoisting systems plus the need for appropriate and dedicated staffing, together with a proper transport system, and that pool would not be viable for patients with multiple OP appointments on the one day. Equally, the hydrotherapy pool at the PA Hospital is currently set up and constructed for adults only, has parking issues, precludes most in-patients and has limited accessibility due to times available for paediatric patients. In addition, it would require major renovations for paediatric use and would need major policy changes to accommodate children. It is important we consider what occurs when children who would benefit from hydrotherapy do not receive it. Children would have only limited early mobilisation of joints and limbs, would have limited acquisition of movement skill, the management of patients with sensory issues would be limited, movement in a sensory controlled environment would be limited, and opportunities for reintegration into community life would be reduced. In fact, it means increased time of recovery, increased length of stay and impact on quality of life.

It is important to understand that hydrotherapy pools are normally a thermoneutral pool in which the body neither gains nor loses temperature and in which the most appropriate temperature is between 33.5 and 34.5 degrees Celsius. Hydrotherapy pools are beneficial because joints feel significantly lighter with the support of water. The resistance of water against the body facilitates a strengthening of the muscles and the heat of the water soothes sore and painful joints. Hydrotherapy pools often have varying depths and require disabled access, including steps and hoists. This type of pool requires careful maintenance due to the higher temperatures, decreasing the life of the disinfectant and it provides optimal conditions for bacterial growth.
During the estimates hearing Dr Steer, in referring to the number of patients using the RCH hydrotherapy pool, made this comment—

In fact, looking at the activity to date, three patients a day was in fact the average use of the hydrotherapy pool at the RCH. It was a combination of decisions—three patients a day as of 2009.

My understanding is that in July this year there were 199 patients who used the hydrotherapy pool at the RCH and 180 patients who used it in June of this year. The minister stated that there are hydrotherapy pools throughout South-East Queensland, but in a hospital that is to be a centre of excellence one would have thought a hydrotherapy pool would be an essential item, not considered to be a luxury.

Ms STONE (Springwood—ALP) (3.50 pm): As a committee member of Estimates Committee B, I rise to speak in support of the report that has been tabled. The estimates committee process is an extremely important function of accountable and open government. The committee performs in an environment that allows access to the public and to the media. It allows an opportunity for an extremely important document, the budget, to be scrutinised along with the opportunity for the executive and departments to be held responsible and accountable. I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the chair, parliamentary staff, departmental staff and the other committee members on their professionalism and their efficient handling of the estimates process.

The Estimates Committee B report summarises the estimates referred to the committee and highlights some of the issues that the committee examined. Examined was the portfolio of the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and some of the areas raised with the Deputy Premier at the hearing included the Queensland Health employee payroll system and ministerial briefings, the cost of the implementation of the payroll stabilisation project, the implementation of the Statewide Persistent Pain Health Services Strategy, the performance of emergency departments, cancer centres in Queensland, the health service infrastructure planning process, the oral health needs of Queenslanders, the Queensland Children’s Hospital project, Hear and Say Centre funding, the Queensland Bowel Cancer Screening Program, children’s hearing services, patient waiting lists for elective surgery and the mental health stigma campaign and suicide—quite a list, and I think all Queenslanders would agree that all on that list are important to them.

The committee also examined the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training. The areas raised with the minister included Building the Education Revolution program funding and reports in relation to the funding of the projects in schools, spending for asbestos removal in Queensland schools, an independent audit of asbestos management in Queensland schools, expenditure on classroom maintenance, the Flying Start discussion paper, planning for student population increases, the implementation of the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy, responses to bullying and violence in schools, the State Schools of Tomorrow program, students with a disability and funding for special schools, school based apprentices and trainees, the proposed Queensland Skills Commission, the pre-apprenticeship skilling pathway, the Queensland training system and national changes in migration arrangements, a funding model for kindergarten services, national quality reforms for early childhood education and care, early childhood teaching scholarships and the Early Years Learning Framework. That is not even an exhaustive list of the areas that were covered by the committee on the day of the hearing. I know that all Queenslanders would say that those areas I have just read out are very important to them. I think they would be surprised that it was not a full list of issues and matters that we talked about, but it certainly demonstrates the potential there is to scrutinise the budget and to question the government when you put in the hard work.

During the hearing I raised questions about education for children with a disability. I am pleased to inform the House of the increased special education funding by $55.8 million to $511 million to ensure that all Queensland students can access a quality education. I also asked the minister what the government was doing in response to tackling bullying and cyberbullying in schools—an area about which all parents all over Queensland want to know what is being done. They want to know that all is being done to protect their children from violence and bullying in the school grounds—and not only in the school grounds but also through technology. I also took the opportunity to ask a number of important questions about health matters—those questions that are important to my electorate.

I have heard members from the other side of politics complain about the estimates process not only this year but every other year. I want to say to them that if they put in the time and effort they could ask the questions that scrutinise the expenditure which is important to their electorates. One only had to look to the member for Gladstone, who was on Estimates Committee B, who was able to ask the important questions for her constituents. She did not waste time grandstanding but instead used her time wisely and genuinely participated in the process.

We have heard the member for Beaudesert call the estimates process a circus. He owes the hardworking departmental staff a really big apology. He has insulted the hard work of the staff and he has ridiculed a very important parliamentary process. Budget estimates committees play a very significant role in the Queensland parliament, but they play a more significant role when all members participate genuinely in the process.
Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (3.55 pm): I rise to speak in relation to the report of Estimates Committee B. I first note the fact that the government saw fit to put Health and Education in the same committee—half the budget, the two largest portfolios on the same day. A cynical person could certainly be forgiven for suggesting that, because of the limited media coverage available for estimates, it suited the government to have the two biggest portfolios on the same media day.

The first question that I asked had a serious point to it. It was about the rehearsals by the department of the minister, because it was apparent in the committee hearing that the minister had rehearsed things such as attacks on the opposition and attacks on shadow ministers such as me for doing work on behalf of the schools in our own constituencies. I note also that the minister, despite being continuously under questioning in the first session of the committee hearing, was able to put out a press release with direct quotes from him about the proceedings within the committee. This raises a serious question as to whether someone else is writing comments in relation to the committee and putting them out during the proceedings of the committee.

I encourage people who are interested in accountability in this state to have a look at the Hansard and in particular at the failure to answer reasonable questions about the multibillion-dollar budget in Education—a failure that at times amounted to downright avoidance, with the minister attempting to have questions ruled out of order on obscure and technical grounds. I would also refer interested people to my statement of reservations, where I issue my thanks to the chairman, members and support staff for the committee and my suggestions for increased accountability to try to get this process right and better in the future.

In relation to the issue of early childhood, which the minister’s office sought to have one section of the committee’s time directed towards, the questions that I asked during that time never received satisfactory answers and, therefore, there remain serious shadows over community kindergartens in particular. The new funding model for kindergartens in Queensland moves from 80 per cent of the wages bill of the kindergarten being guaranteed under the current DECKAS funding, giving certainty to these community volunteer boards, to a $2,100 voucher system that cuts payments to kindergartens. That leaves kindies unpaid for any unfilled positions they have and that cuts out the ability to include three-year-old children in any of their vacancies that occur. At the same time, the government is building 240 new kindergartens in poorly researched locations on school sites, leaving all of the providers in the area chasing 3½-year-olds and trying to ditch the now enrolled three-year-olds, which is up to 40 per cent of enrolments in some of the kindergartens that have approached the government and the opposition. This is particularly hard on regional and isolated kindergartens, where numbers vary from year to year. Those kindergartens have to work with the number of 3½-year-old children in their communities.

I raised in the committee the example of the Yeppoon kindy whose members were very concerned about its viability going forward. Let us seriously have a look at the issues confronting it. There is a wonderful volunteer community board that runs the Condy Park centre on the Fraser Coast. Currently, under DECKAS funding it gets $290,000. This will drop to $252,000—a loss of $38,000—and that is assuming there is no vacancy at all, which is not a valid assumption in most cases. For each vacancy a further $2,100 comes off. They say that fees will rise dramatically and staff will be reduced.

The same applies to the Mitchelton preschool, a wonderful facility that has served that area for 60 years that is suffering a $52,000 cut to funding; the Kingaroy kindergarten that will have its funding cut by $37,661; and the Biggenden kindergarten that will see its fees double from $19 a day to $38 a day.

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.00 pm): I am pleased to address the House in relation to the Estimates Committee B hearing held on 14 July this year. Firstly, I would like to record my appreciation of the work of the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and the Minister for Education and Training and their ministerial staff and departmental officers who put so much work into the preparation of information for these hearings. All members recognise that during the months after the budget towards estimates there are many people who put a lot of time and energy into the process and this can be a particularly hectic and stressful time for all involved.

I would also like to commend the work of the highly dedicated parliamentary research staff for their assistance during the weeks preceding and on the day of the hearing. I would like to acknowledge the excellent work of the chair of Estimates Committee B, the honourable member for Toowoomba North, and the work of committee members from both sides of the House.

During the hearing a number of interesting issues were pursued by the committee and I was pleased that the Minister for Health reiterated that fixing the payroll system was the No. 1 priority. He stated that he has spoken to Queensland Health staff throughout the state to listen to their concerns in relation to the impact the system was having on them and their families. The minister again apologised for the distress that had been caused to all of the hardworking staff and promised to implement all of the Auditor-General’s recommendations.

I found the information the minister supplied in relation to future population demands on our health system quite enlightening. He said that by 2050 the number of people aged 65 to 84 years will more than double and the number of people above 85 will quadruple. This means that there will be
further need for massive budget increases in the future. The Health budget doubled from $5.1 billion in 2004-05 to $9.9 billion this year and this has meant that there have been similar increases in the medical workforce.

In regard to the Mount Ommaney electorate, I was pleased to hear of our government’s investment in the Princess Alexandra Hospital which serves many people in the western suburbs. The amount of $134 million will provide for redevelopment of the emergency department which will more than double the number of beds. It will deliver more than a doubling of its size with 25 additional treatment bays and 30 new medical assessment and planning unit beds, an additional short-stay bed, four dedicated mental health treatment rooms, additional ambulance and emergency vehicle bays and an ED floor space three times the current space. The minister’s information that of the approximate 130 patient presentations to the ED every day, 100 per cent of category 1 patients are seen within one minute was quite an achievement. He went on to say that the average wait to be seen in an ED during May 2010 was only 51 minutes, which is the envy of a GP surgery. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that puts basic health services at the forefront of our priorities to ensure that public health care is available to working families and our ageing population.

Important also are the jobs that are created with essential infrastructure programs that support the provision of health care right across Queensland. This also applies to providing education infrastructure and services to all Queensland children. As the local member for Mount Ommaney, I was pleased to be involved in the consultation process for A flying start for Queensland children, which looked at the proposal to move year 7 to secondary schools, to streamline the three statutory education authorities into one and the goals we have to review and improve teacher training and quality. In relation to the reading awareness campaign, I recall a number of seniors providing assistance to children at the Corinda State School many years ago. This worked extremely well, before some of the volunteers were no longer able to take on the task for various personal reasons. I am glad to see that this idea has been expanded upon in the discussion paper, as this early intervention will assist a child for life.

More teacher aide support has been an ongoing issue in prep and primary schools in my area and I am pleased that our government is providing 316 extra teachers and teacher aides this year. Schools in my area have benefited from the Building the Education Revolution program and this has also provided work for local business and jobs. Centenary State High School and Corinda State High School have received $200,000 for classroom refurbishments and applied studies renewal. Jindalee, Corinda Jamboree Heights, Middle Park and Oxley state schools have received $200,000 for upgrades of buildings, classrooms, outdoor seating and state-of-the-art equipment etcetera to benefit students of the school. Already this year Oxley State School’s new resource centre and multipurpose hall have been officially opened. It is $3 million very well spent. All of the other primary schools have been allocated the same amount of funding for their resource centres and multipurpose halls. Mount Ommaney Special School now has a new resource centre to the value of $850,000, as well as a further $50,000 for the installation of fibre-optic cabling and associated infrastructure in relation to school buildings. Overall, a total amount of $17,300,005 has been spent or allocated to my local schools.

Ms BATES (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (4:05 pm): I rise today to make a contribution to the debate on Estimates Committee B in relation to the health department. As the only registered nurse in this House on either side of politics, I am particularly interested in and will, as always, be a vocal representative of nursing in this place. In this past year I and every other nurse in this state have been appalled at the failure of this government and indeed the two ministers involved to take responsibility for the most basic right of nurses—the right to be paid without having to struggle through and work for no remuneration, have their loans defaulted, their tax returns in turmoil and their credit ratings destroyed by a government that just does not care.

The buck passing, the blame game and the sheer negligence on the part of this government through implementation of a system that went live with no backup is one of the most appalling situations that this government has presided over to date. All the Bligh government had to do was to check with private hospital providers, such as the Wesley that did away with the same system years ago, to avoid the meltdown of a health system that is not delivering services at the coalface and one that is frustrating nurses every which way they turn.

The Minister for Health has no idea what is really going on within his portfolio and is content to send out his director-general to answer tough questions. Hospital ramping of ambulances remains a huge concern, with this government still trying to convince the public that it has turned the corner on health. In answer to a question on notice pertaining to hospital ramp admissions the minister said—

I am advised by the relevant health service districts that patients on ambulance trolleys are not admitted to the hospital while on the ramp.

In a further article by Paul Weston in the Sunday Mail the minister stated that caring for patients and admission of patients by clerks was a separate entity. I have news for the minister: any patient who has an ID band on and an individual unit record number has been entered into a computer. These patients have their details taken by clerical staff, not nurses, and it is these same staff who enter the
people bring into question the merits of the budget estimates process and I have to say that I disagree with them. I wish to thank the committee members, the committee chair and the departmental and parliamentary staff for the hard work that they put into the effectiveness of these committees. Estimates are an important part of our democratic system and, if taken seriously by the Liberal National Party, could be used in the best interests of Queenslanders. I find it extremely disappointing to be met with a poor prepared opposition that is arrogantly hoping to fall into power, without actually earning the right.

The Bligh Labor government's solution to these problems is a quick handball to the federal government to wipe its hands of all responsibility for a failed system that has occurred on its watch. On top of that, it has agreed to forgo 43 per cent of our GST revenue to the Rudd-Gillard Labor government, so yet again Queenslanders are forced to pay more for our health system and prop up the failed health systems in other states also run by Labor governments. It is well known in maritime folklore that when a ship begins to sink it is the rats that leave first. So we have another failed Labor government, which for years has been shifting the deck chairs on the Titanic, actually now jumping ship before it sinks. Why would any informed voter believe that a Rudd-Gillard assassination team would be able to run hospitals from Canberra when every state in Australia that has a Labor government has destroyed health in every state?

Of course, Labor governments have their own propaganda departments, in the form of unions, infiltrating our hospitals. Already in this federal campaign we see the Queensland Nurses Union organisation up to its old tricks, infiltrating nurses' tearooms in every state hospital, and spreading its propaganda and fear campaigns that are designed to keep nurses in the Dark Ages. Nurses do not join a union to become fully paid-up members of the Australian Labor Party. Nurses do not pay one per cent of their wage to fund Labor advertising fear campaigns and pledge their allegiance to a Labor government. Nurses do not realise that they fund the Australian Labor Party to the tune of over $80,000 a year in donations.

Nurses are not paid under a federal award and no change of the federal government to a coalition conservative government will change their leave loading, their sick leave allowances, their penalty rates and their certificate allowances, because nurses are paid under a state award. Nurses join the union for indemnity insurance in the event of malpractice. They do not join a union for political purposes and yet the QNU organisation unashamedly hoodwinks nurses into believing it has their best interests at heart when, in fact, all it is there for is to continue to fund campaigns for arrogant, out-of-touch, on-the-nose state and federal Labor governments. Tony Abbott and the coalition have poured billions into health on a national level so that every state Labor government can waste the funds. Nurses should take a very good hard look at the QNU organisation's propaganda and make their vote count at this federal election and vote out the worst federal government in the history of this country.

(Hon. GJ Wilson)

The first question I received from the member for Moggill related to how long I had spent preparing for the estimates committee. I am pretty sure that the people of Queensland would expect a better line of questioning from an elected representative. It also amused me that questions about a plastic chair retailer can be of more importance than questions about real education and training policy. Despite being one of the best resourced oppositions in Australia, the Liberal National Party continues to be a policy-free zone. It has not offered one alternative education and training policy or position. Instead, it opts for scaremongering and cheap political shots.

Unfortunately, the real victims of the Liberal National Party's laziness are Queensland children. The only thing that the Liberal National Party has offered are cuts to services and staffing. It refuses to back away from the promise to cut 36,000 Public Service jobs, which will affect everyone from teacher aides...
and cleaners to groundsmen. The LNP stands by cutting up to $300 million from the building program that is delivering up to 240 new kindergarten services for young Queenslanders. It will cancel school based trade training centres throughout the state, leaving young Queenslanders uneducated, unskilled and unemployed. In his budget reply speech the opposition leader barely referred to education, which shows how seriously he takes education, even though it accounts for one-quarter of the Queensland budget. The Liberal National Party has left Queenslanders no clearer on its education and training policy. I doubt any parent in Queenslander could tell what the LNP stood for when it comes to education and training.

I take this opportunity to address some of the furphies presented by the member for Moggill. First, he claimed that in Queensland $2.1 billion is being spent under the BER scheme and that numerous examples of waste and inefficiency have been identified across the state. Also, the minister was caught out as the higher authority’s reports that he alluded to—that is, the PricewaterhouseCoopers reports—were not specifically directed at the issue before the committee of value for money in the BER program.

The facts are that the latest PwC report contains a detailed analysis of the costings of 25 projects. The sampling size was determined in accordance with the Australian sampling standard ASS 1199 under Sampling Procedures for Inspection by Attribute. The PwC engaged Mitchell Brandman, independent quantity surveyors and on-site construction cost managers, to assist in the examination of the BER program. PwC had open access to every document in the BER process. It did not publish the costings examined because while BER projects are still being undertaken this information has the potential to impair competitive tension; the potential to influence under and over tendering; the potential to cause financial distress to contractors if under tendering and, therefore, the potential to distort the market; and an impact on value for money for money to schools. In each of the 25 projects examined, the PwC found that value for money is being achieved overall; the department’s implementation of process management and cost controls are effective; professional fees were within prescribed caps; and DET is complying with the government’s BER guidelines.

Secondly, the member for Moggill referred to the cessation of many performance measures from publication in future budgets documents. He claimed that the minister’s decision to remove output measures from future budgets will mean that, to a significant extent, even more emphasis has to be put on NAPLAN as the measure of how education performs in Queensland. He also referred to the removal of performance measures for students with disabilities. However, the fact is that the performance measures will be published in the annual report or through school websites.

Thirdly, the member claimed that I alleged he had not asked questions and was not interested in training. The fact is that I said that rarely has the member for Moggill asked questions about training in question time. There are many other claims that I will not go into, as they are too numerous.

The Bligh government is committed to continuing to deliver universal access to early childhood services. We want more kindergartens, not less. We want more four-year-olds in kindergartens, not fewer. It would be counterproductive for any kindergarten to close. It would not make sense. It is in everyone’s interests that kindergartens continue to provide their vital and highly valued services. The Bligh government will continue to support learning, education and training throughout all dimensions of my portfolio’s responsibilities because we are putting the children and parents of Queensland first.

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (4.15 pm): I have serious concerns about the veracity of the reports regarding patient lists for elective surgery at Queensland hospitals. I have significant concerns about both the Gold Coast and Robina hospitals. I also wish to raise an issue about the response of the minister to the vexed issue of mental health and suicide. Obviously, the health payroll issue is the dominant issue and remains unexplained. I appreciate the video streaming provided to me by the parliament’s IT service during the week whilst I was severely hampered as a result of my wife’s illness.

The shadow minister has detailed our mutual concerns. It is my belief that the minister has spent far too much time personally criticising the shadow spokesperson and the LNP and far too little time on the crucial portfolio that he administers. As has been said, in this state the budget for Health is very significant. In Health, the message that is sent when one diverges into the penchant for personal criticism, particularly about senior health staff, is that you are hiding something. I know some of the senior medical people who attended with the minister, and personally I believe they have nothing to hide. This is totally unprofessional. In health we share information freely. That is how medical progress is made. The minister still has quite a bit to learn about his portfolio.

I wish to start with the minister’s response to questions about the waiting lists. The minister seems to have a standard reply to waiting list questions and his assessment of his own reporting mechanism and its timeliness. Waiting list reporting has become unintelligible to any medical or nonmedical person. On the Gold Coast the reports are generally not believed at all. That is not a random statement, but represents a general view. The former director of a senior hospital surgical department on the Gold Coast has informed me of other measures taken under the stewardship of this current Minister for Health to underreport or report falsely. There is the waiting list to get on the waiting list, which is unpublished. There is the method to routinely take all patients off the list when the surgeons
take scheduled holidays or study leave. There is the use of random telephone calls to check so-called
details of patients and if there is no response they are taken off the list. Another much-used technique is
to put the patients through all manner of check-up clinics before they are deemed acceptable to be
added to the list.

In an area like the Gold Coast, with a large aged population and a mobile and somewhat transient
population, the waiting list can look very different to the actual numbers, especially when the region
hosts 10 million tourists a year. This was highlighted in the latest release from Queensland Health South
Coast. It was dubious at best and nonsense at worst. If the minister is unable to prepare a correct report
that passes the acid test of veracity, we can provide ample examples of how best to do it.

Irrespective of any explanation given by the health minister at estimates, the impact on the Gold
Coast Hospital of the Health payroll debacle really was proportionately the worst in the state. Long after
all the crazy things—after every reason in the world was given and irrespective of what was said at the
time about earlier lists of zero payments—the pay system subsequently has paid out a staff member
$106,000 whose payroll number was 106,000, long after he told us the worst was behind us. At the Gold
Coast Hospital there is a far greater problem with the payroll than the minister is willing to concede. The
issue is not dead yet. It will go on for quite a deal of time.

In response to the minister’s comments regarding mental health and suicide, there is far too much
emphasis on questions of stigma and not enough on the serious problems of youth and adult suicide.
Similarly, questions on mental health sounded like broken record replies with the denouncement of
volunteers in this area. I urge the minister to seek advice and have another look at this area very closely.
Without volunteers we will never collectively climb the mental health mountain. John Mendoza was right
when he said that Labor has no real commitment for action and progress in mental health. He correctly
said that Labor wants to talk about it but do nothing. Mental health is hard, it is expensive and it affects
far too many in the community. I call on the minister today to join with the federal LNP’s $1.5 billion
health initiative for this very deserving group in society who include many people who are currently
excluded or are fringe dwellers.

I am not convinced that there is an ongoing process internally within Queensland Health that is
doing enough to ensure that staff clearly understand coalface medical issues. Not enough information
can be gleaned from any reports or questions raised at estimates that reflected an ongoing process of
renewal in this very, very large department. I was left wondering whether there was any real
commitment to ‘doing money’—that is, funding for patients, not capital expenditure or staff wages/salaries. I urge the minister to consider this matter, and I think he needs to report on that appropriately.
This was missing in the estimates process.

Mr EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (4.20 pm): One of the constant concerns raised with me by
parents when I see them at school functions, P&C meetings or at my regular community corners is
overcrowding at local schools. They know that the Bligh government is intent on having more dwellings
in Brisbane—156,000 more by 2031, an extra 40 per cent. They also know they are seeing more
families in their community and more young children. While they welcome those families and the
children, they worry about where those children and their own will find school places. They see the
pressures on principals and staff trying to cope with more and more children within their catchment area.

What stuns them is when I tell them of the comments by the education minister about schools in the
Indooroopilly electorate including Ironside, Indooroopilly, Fig Tree Pocket, Graceville and Sherwood.
The minister claims his department is carefully monitoring the demand for school places in the
Indooroopilly electorate. What he also claims—and this surprises many of those parents—is that
demand has been stable for many years. The minister also said that, while there has been significant
housing activity in the Indooroopilly area, the increasing number of dwellings has tended to
accommodate residents other than families with young children. This is when you see the parents shake
their heads in disbelief. They cannot believe the minister and his department are claiming that families
with young children are not moving into the Indooroopilly electorate, because those parents I speak to
know that what the minister is claiming is untrue—they see the evidence of more families and more
children as they travel through their community.

Unfortunately the minister does not see the truth. And you can understand why those parents can
have no confidence that the Bligh government will recognise the important issue, even as it tries to
squeeze more people into the Indooroopilly electorate, because the education minister does not believe
there is overcrowding. He does not even like the word. He prefers to describe it as ‘high utilisation’. But
the reality is contained in the educating department’s own figures. Last month’s figures released by the
education department showed more than 10,000 prep to year 3 students were being taught in
overcrowded state school classrooms. Those figures showed seven per cent of prep to year 3 classes,
which contained 146,000 students in February this year, are over their class target size of 25 students.

A government member: Seven per cent!
Mr EMERSON: This year about 12 per cent of prep to year 3 students are in overcrowded state school classes. We hear them say ‘seven per cent’. That is a shocking figure. Well, it is a shocking figure if your child is in one of those classes. What a shame that this government is not concerned about those children in those overcrowded schools. It thinks that it is okay if it is just seven per cent. I say that it is not okay and those parents I speak to say that it is not okay also. Despite these figures, the department of education’s deputy director-general, Alan Wagner, denies that classes are overcrowded. And the minister adds to the denial, backing away from his commitment to maximum class sizes, with the minister saying they are ‘just a guide’.

But it is just not our schools that are being put under pressure by the Bligh government and its policy of denial. The kindergarten sector is also facing uncertainty over changes to funding structures in Queensland. Operators are warning that kindergartens across Queensland will have to increase fees, making them more expensive than some private schools. Others say they will be forced to close because the government funding changes mean they will face extra costs of between $30,000 and $120,000. Just like on class sizes and catchment pressures on schools, the minister is also in denial over kindergartens. We have seen more of that denial today in his recent response. The minister claims no kindergarten will be worse off. But staff at C&K affiliated kindergartens say the new funding regime, to start next year, will force centres to raise fees, meaning a place will cost parents between $22 and $30 a day, up from $12 to $18 a day. Government funding will be based on $2,100 per child rather than the current funding of 80 per cent of teachers’ wages.

One kindergarten’s committee treasurer was reported as saying—and this is important for the minister to hear, because he denies this is the case—that he feared parents will be unable to pay the increased fees. Another committee member said committees run by parents were ‘flying in the dark’ regarding government policy and how the changes would work. A director-teacher from another C&K affiliated kindergarten—which did not wish to be named in the report because it said it had been warned it might lose its affiliation—believed it might have to be shut down because of the changes brought in by the Bligh government. ‘We’ll have about 30 pre-prep kids so that’s about $66,000 more to run the kindy’, she said. ‘I can’t make the figures work so we may have to close.’ It is a disgrace and it is of great concern to my community.

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health) (4.25 pm): Australia, and indeed Queensland, has one of the most comprehensive, expensive and thriving health systems in the world. Every day in Queensland Health $26.463 million is spent on public health services; 619 women are screened for breast cancer; 1,355 people receive residential care in 20 aged-care facilities; 118 babies are born in acute public hospitals; 29,845 non-admitted patient services, including emergency services, are provided in acute public hospitals—

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Isn’t it funny? I actually tried to ring the honourable member the other day to talk to him about a health matter in his electorate and I had to chase him and chase him and chase him just to have a telephone call with him. So interested is he in health services that I rang him and tried to get on to him and I had to chase him—unsolicited. Every day 8,268 people receive admitted care in acute public hospitals, including 1,286 people who receive same-day admitted care.

I am proud of the fact that any Australian, regardless of their socioeconomic status, can walk into a public hospital and receive free world-class health care. There are First World nations where that is not even possible. In just five years the state Health budget has nearly doubled, from $5.1 billion in 2004-05 to $9.9 billion this year. That is a 10.5 per cent increase on last year’s Health budget—well above the state’s 2.6 per cent population growth. That Health budget represents a quarter of the total state budget.

Since 2005 we have employed an extra 14,000 doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. We went to the election last year with a promise to employ an extra 3,500 clinicians over three years. In just 18 months we had already nearly met this target. Since March 2009 we have employed an extra 2,927 doctors, nurses and allied health professionals. That is why in the 2010-11 state budget we renewed our commitment and set ourselves the target of recruiting an extra 1,200 doctors, nurses and allied health staff this year. We have more than doubled the number of interns from 250 in 2005 to 556 this year to 644 next year.

We have the largest hospital building program in the nation—the largest ever undertaken. Our capital program is $7.3 billion and will secure more than 40,000 construction jobs. But it is not just about bricks and mortar. That is why we are expanding services across the state so that more Queenslanders can access more health services closer to home. As a Labor government, investment in vital services such as health and education is at the very core of our beliefs. We know what the other side of the House thinks about a public health system.

I made a point in my opening remarks of addressing the issue of the Queensland Health payroll system. I made a point of apologising to the staff who have been affected and reiterated that we are 100 per cent committed to seeing this put right. But on this issue the opposition health spokesperson had nothing new to say. He asked the same tired question over and over again. He asked about
documents I had tabled in the House myself some months earlier. He did not ask one question about how government could better assist our staff. He did not ask one question about the steps the government is taking to fix the problem. He did not ask one question about any of the 78,000 employees in Queensland Health. Not one single constituent was helped by his approach.

The shadow minister claimed secret emergency department data that was formally sent to him by my department which is used to produce reports that we put out monthly, quarterly and annually and which I had specifically referred to in a media release some weeks earlier. I tabled that release to the committee. The opposition is a sad, lazy joke when the best the shadow minister can do is rely on my media releases to know what is going on. He did not use the process to ask about budget initiatives such as Cochlear implants or the Persistent Pain Strategy that will make huge inroads into the lives of hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders. He did not use the process to ask about any of our building projects. Instead he regurgitated the same tired, old questions I had already answered in the House.

What is worse is that when the two weeks of estimates hearings were over the LNP had the hide to claim that the process was a waste of time. Committee members had three hours to ask probing, well-thought-out questions of me as health minister. That is the equivalent of three question times or an entire sitting week. Some members did ask probing, well-thought-out questions—for example, the member for Gladstone. There was one question about suicide from the member for Caloundra, but other than that the LNP did not. The LNP is the best resourced, laziest opposition this state has ever seen. You only have to see what has happened in the two sitting days this week. LNP members have had two months off, but the best they could do is what they have done in these two days. It is very, very sad that this is what the opposition has been reduced to. It is very, very sad that opposition members do not take this place seriously at all. Well, we do.

Report adopted.

Estimates Committee C

Report

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! The question is—

That the report of Estimates Committee C be adopted.

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (4.31 pm): I say every year that it really is a sublime pleasure to participate in the estimates committee process. It is an important process and a cornerstone of our democratic processes here in Queensland. We should be very proud that the Labor Party introduced this into the democratic processes of this state. I want to start today by doing what I normally finish with, but sometimes I run out of time and I forget to do this properly. I particularly want to thank Rachelle Stacey and the secretariat who provided support to Estimates Committee C this year. Rachelle is slavishly devoted to the estimates committee process, and I want to thank her for her unwavering commitment to it.

As I said, an important part of a parliamentary democracy is scrutinising the executive. That scrutiny can take place in many ways. It can take place as part of the estimates committee process, but opposition members are not limited to that process to provide the executive with some scrutiny, nor in fact are government members. They have three hours as part of the estimates process to question ministers. They can wander in here every day when parliament is sitting and put a question on notice to the minister. They can stand up at question time and put a question to the relevant minister. They can write to the minister. They can use the media. They can come and sit down next to the minister while they are here in the chamber and start asking them questions. In fact, Queensland has one of the most open democracies of anywhere not just in the Western world but in the entire world because our ministers in this government are very open, very accessible and always willing to answer questions that are put to them.

A measure of the effectiveness of the process though is what members get out of estimates. As government members, we use estimates to scrutinise the executive but obviously we want to know some of the positive things that are going on in our electorates and in Queensland. Scrutinising the executive does not necessarily have to be negative and we do not have to pointscore or carry on politically like those opposite do. That is why the process can be important for government members as well.

It was important for me during this year’s process to get some information from the Minister for Natural Resources on what he is doing with the wild river rangers program that is mostly being rolled out in my electorate but in other parts of Queensland as well. The Minister for Transport was able to provide me with some information on what she and her department are doing to assist people in the Torres Strait to lower their cost of living through public transport. It really is a good opportunity to get a whole range of information.
From the opposition's perspective, a measure of how effective they have been is whether they are able to strike a blow, whether they are able to get some newspaper column inches, whether they can get something on the television or whether they can see some cracks in the government's armour. What we saw coming out of Estimates Committee C as a measure of the opposition's effectiveness was not a single column inch of newspaper reporting on anything they put forward on that day. What we saw from the opposition's perspective is that that was the case in 2010 and it requires several weeks of briefing to get their heads around the detail in case somebody is able to ask a difficult question. Unfortunately, from the perspective of those opposite, that was not the case in 2010 but we live in hope that in the future they will be able to provide some scrutiny and some ability to bring this government to account. It seems that this year was not theirs.

Mr SEENEY (Callide—LNP) (4.36 pm): I am certainly not going to congratulate the chairman of the committee given his recollections of the day. As I have said in this House many times before, the success or otherwise of the estimates committee depends entirely on the chairman and the way that he allows the committee to operate. As we have come to expect from the member for Cook, he certainly did his best to ensure that our estimates committee could not fulfil our role to the fullest degree. When you get a dud chairman, it turns the whole committee structure into a farce. That was certainly the case here. I suggest the member for Cook take a look at the way other chairmen exercise their duties in the estimates process. He would then understand that the estimates process can be a valuable contributor to the democracy in this place, but that depends entirely on the way the process is conducted.

The estimates committee provided me with an opportunity to raise with the minister a whole series of issues relating to the resources industry in south-west Queensland in particular. I do not often do this, but I would like to commend the minister for the actions he has taken since the estimates committee to address some of the issues that were raised at the estimates committee in respect of getting more officers on the ground in those areas where unfortunately there is some community conflict arising.

As I said in the parliament this morning, the minister and the government are certainly behind the game. They are playing catch-up on these issues but it is gratifying at least to see that the minister and the department are finally moving on some of these things. They are still a long way behind the game. They still have a huge challenge to address an issue in the community that has grown a whole lot bigger than it should have simply because the government did not fulfil its role.

The government and the minister have not fulfilled their role of monitoring and supervising the resource development boom in those areas. They have taken a hands-off approach. They have left it to industry to self-regulate. While that may be an appropriate form of administration in the far-flung Cooper Basin or in the north-west minerals province, it has created a range of issues of great community concern in the more closely settled and intensively farmed areas of south-west Queensland. It is good to see that those issues are starting to be resolved. It is good to see the minister start to take some action on some of the issues that I raised at the estimates committee.

One issue that was not raised at the estimates committee—in fact, one issue that the minister did not tell us about either in the budget documents or in the estimates committee process—was a 500 per cent increase in charges within his department. That illustrates the absurdity of the whole budget estimates process when the government can present a budget in the House, go through the estimates committee process and then a couple of weeks later introduce a 500 per cent increase in charges within the department.

In common with many other members across regional Queensland, my office has been inundated in the last couple of days with outraged constituents who are receiving invoices for land rents on small parcels of land that have all been raised to a minimum of $407. Some of these are very small parcels of land. In one particular case, it is 600 square metres and the previous rent was $85 a year. They are usually small pieces of land that are on the edges of road reserves where the road has been moved or they are bore licences where the bore is on the road reserve and they have been around for a long time. The government has suddenly decided to increase the rent in this particular case from $80 to $407 because that apparently is a new minimum.

A 500 per cent increase in a tax or charge can never be justified. Even more so, it cannot be justified two weeks after the budget estimates process. It is deceitful for any government to go through that process and then bring in a 500 per cent increase in this sort of charge. It is of course another indicator of just how broke this government is and how poor its financial management has been over a
number of years. It has gone broke in a boom and now it seeks to gouge landholders for every little tax and charge that it possibly can. It seeks to increase those charges by up to 500 per cent, giving every excuse it can think of, and that is outrageous.

(Time expired)

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade) (4.41 pm): I am pleased to be able to make a short contribution, particularly in response to the very positive comments made by the chair, the member for Cook, for which I thank him, but also in terms of the interesting contribution that the member for Callide just made. If members had actually listened to him, they would believe that we have just put in place, out of the blue, out of nowhere, a series of charges to which he referred with a great degree of faux outrage.

It never ceases to amaze me that, when we are dealing with the best resourced opposition in the country, when it has had double the number of staff, its members still cannot follow basic processes of government. These charges to which they have referred have actually been put out in the public arena for consultation for the last two years.

Mr Seeney: Where? Where have they been?

Mr ROBERTSON: Had the member been paying attention, he would have read advertisements—

Mr Seeney: In the Government Gazette?

Mr ROBERTSON: No.

Mr Seeney: Where?

Mr ROBERTSON: In local newspapers.

Mr Seeney: Which ones?

Mr ROBERTSON: I know the member for Callide has problems with the basics of reading and arithmetic, but surely even his staff can follow the newspapers and pick up when consultation is being undertaken on a raft of areas particularly relevant to his portfolio. I am, frankly, shocked that a process has gone on for two years about which he has no knowledge—

Mr Seeney: That's how good the process was! That's how good the consultation process was!

Mr ROBERTSON: —and he claims, as he has just done, that somehow publication not just in newspapers but in the Government Gazette represents some secret consultation process. I would have thought that the one thing a shadow minister would do in this parliament in undertaking his or her responsibilities would be to read the Government Gazette. Clearly, that is beyond the member for Callide. Clearly, that workload is just impossible for him to undertake even though his is the most well resourced opposition in any parliament in Australia.

I move on. The other interesting performance that occurred during the estimates committee was, of course, a complete lack of understanding by the member for Callide as to what the machinery-of-government changes actually meant in terms of knowing which minister was responsible for which particular area. As a result, the estimates committee’s time was wasted by questions asked of me as Minister for Natural Resources about arrangements in the Office of Climate Change. Again, I would have thought that any opposition spokesperson, any shadow minister, at the time of formation of a new government would have actually followed the Government Gazette, which actually sets out which acts and what responsibilities each minister has. Had he done so, he would have realised that the Office of Climate Change was, in fact, the responsibility of the Minister for Climate Change, not the Minister for Natural Resources. Clearly, that confusion also goes for the shadow minister for climate change because when it came to his time to ask questions of the then Acting Minister for Climate Change, he asked no questions about the Office of Climate Change whatsoever. That just proves yet again how lazy this opposition is. Its members do not even know—

Mr Seeney: Tell us about the 500 per cent increase. Why is there a 500 per cent increase?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! Member for Callide, you have had your say.

Mr ROBERTSON: —which minister is responsible for which areas of government. They cannot even be bothered to pick up a Government Gazette and keep track of the consultation processes in which they have responsibility to participate as the alternative ministers and the alternative government of this state.

Then, of course, there was even further embarrassment when the opposition spokesperson starting asking my director-general of the Department of Environment and Resource Management questions about the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, further confirming that he has no idea whatsoever about the new machinery-of-government changes in this state and the matters that are of direct relevance to his portfolio. It was an absolute embarrassment. When I read the dissenting reports about how time was wasted in these estimates committees, I can
only think that the main culprit of time wasting in that process was the opposition spokesperson himself, who failed on the fundamentals time and time again. He had no idea what the minister’s responsibilities are, no idea what the director-general’s responsibilities are and cannot even pick up a copy of the Government Gazette to find out what is going on. He is an absolute disgrace yet again, because this happens year in, year out with the member for Callide. He holds on to this portfolio—

(Time expired)

Mr Seeney interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Callide will cease interjecting. The minister will take his seat.

Mr Seeney: Good to see you took the advice.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Callide, I will not have you continue to disrupt this parliament.

Ms SIMPSON (Maroochydore—LNP) (4.46 pm): There has been something of a ‘rail to Damascus’ experience for Labor with regard to Redcliffe rail. I am actually quite delighted that there seems to be agreement from all sides of politics that this is a project which must be brought forward. The state LNP strongly championed this project at the last state election, committing to bringing it forward in our first term if federal funding was found and, if not, to ensure that it came forward in SEQIPP in the second term before the opportunities around the corridor were compromised by development which missed the mark for transit-oriented development. Most importantly, we also recognised the need for other network upgrades such as the Pine River bridge, the Citytrain network and the north coast line for a whole-of-network approach, which also integrated with buses.

While the time lines for these are not as clear in Labor’s plan, I would urge the government to fulfil the recommendations of the cross-city rail pre-feasibility with regard to works required before the cross-city rail is delivered in 2016 to increase capacity, otherwise there is a real danger that efficiency will be lost and there will be gridlock in the network by 2016, and this is a high risk. I have had briefings with the department and asked for this detailed plan of works to be undertaken to increase capacity prior to 2016 and there has been no detailed response. This is unsatisfactory. We want more than just a ‘trust us’ promise from the government and we will continue to pursue this. If passengers and freight are to continue to increase across the network, this certainty needs to be based on more than just vague assurances from government. We need to see the evidence of the work and how the capacity will be guaranteed.

With regard to the important Redcliffe rail project, the opportunity is there to ensure that the development around it supports the objectives of mass transit and is truly integrated. We were attacked for saying that this project needed to come forward from the Neverland of SEQIPP in the out years. Labor bagged us and said Redcliffe rail was not the highest priority. However, as I said, I am pleased to see a change of heart. In fact, the member for Redcliffe, Lillian van Litsenburg, is quoted in the Redcliffe and Bayside Herald of 25 March last year as saying there are ‘bigger issues to consider’.

Pine Rivers MP Carolyn Male, in the Pine Rivers Press of 25 March last year, said that voters had told her that upgrading the Caboolture line was a priority over building the Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail link and that, ‘It will be built, but it is 12 to 14 years away.’ One thing I will agree on with the member for Pine Rivers is that the upgrade of the north coast line is vital to network functionality and that is why we committed to it. I call on the minister to give us a strong commitment as to when this work will be completed.

Something else that is critical is master planning around this corridor. We need to ensure that transit oriented development underpins its viability. There is also considerable state owned land, which we have identified, in addition to the corridor which needs to be preserved. It needs to used for proper economic development in this area. There is an opportunity to get this right with jobs nodes and transit oriented density around the corridor. It is not just about commuters going into the city; it is about bringing economic development to these communities.

Given that the announcement of the government’s commitment of $300 million towards this project came two weeks after the budget estimates process, will the minister now advise the House how much money is being assigned to that project in this budget? I support the Redcliffe rail but I want to see transparency and accountability from this government. If this project is to be properly and efficiently delivered we need to know the amount in this budget that has been committed to the project. It was only two weeks after the estimates process that $300 million in funding for this project was announced by the state government. The federal funding is not due to kick in until 2014-15. I also call on the minister to advise when the north coast line upgrades will take place which are critical to ensuring continued functionality. The system really needs to be about the whole network.

This brings me to my next point. Where is the integrated network plan, the transport plan for South-East Queensland—in fact, for all of Queensland? The Auditor-General criticised this government and said it was years out of date. It has been proven that SEQIPP has no relevance to proper integrated
transport planning, particularly when we see rail paralleling busways. There must be a proper integrated transport plan to get the best bang for the buck, to ensure the sequencing occurs and to ensure that bottlenecks are avoided.

I ask the minister: where is the integrated network plan? Why has it not been released or is the government hiding it prior to the federal election because it does not want people knowing—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order! The member’s time has expired.

Ms Simpson: It is important for many other reasons—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Redcliffe.

Ms Simpson:—multimodal corridor as the cost levels discussed—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order!

Ms van LITSENBURG (Redcliffe—ALP) (4.51 pm): I rise to support—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Redcliffe, just hold on a moment. Member for Maroochydore, I had called that your time had expired. I would request when that is done that you take your seat. The member for Redcliffe has the call.

Ms van LITSENBURG: I rise to support the report of Estimates Committee C in its investigation into the expenditures pertaining to the portfolios of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade and the Minister for Transport. Minister Robertson has managed his portfolio budget to ensure the Queensland economy is stronger and has a better outlook into the future.

Natural resources are an important asset for Queensland, particularly since tourism is a large part of our income. It is imperative that the minister has moved to protect our natural areas such as high-value native regrowth vegetation and expanded our protection of wild rivers.

He has also continued to effectively manage water and energy issues across the state. This has included investing $115 million over five years in a range of solar energy initiatives. Many of my constituents have been able to install a solar hot-water system which they would not have been able to afford without the state government rebate. The minister has worked towards developing better relationships in the mining industry by investing $12.5 million to streamline government regulatory processes and mining and petroleum tenure approval, $10.7 million over three years to develop a fully integrated electronic tenure management system and $18 million over four years for the Greenfields 2020 program to target under-explored geological terrains.

To support our economy in this difficult post global financial crisis climate, the minister has worked hard to maintain and increase our trade in our traditional markets and has developed new trade relationships with a variety of new countries such as in the African and Asian continents, including China, and Eastern Europe and the United Arab Emirates. He has also established a new in-market trade representative in Chile.

Similarly, the Minister for Transport has forged ahead to deliver a world-class public transport system for South-East Queensland. She is systematically implementing the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program with $197 million for the Northern Busway between Enoggera Creek and Kedron, which my constituents are excited about. When this busway is completed they look forward to using it as the fastest route from Redcliffe to Brisbane. Another $219 million has been allocated for the construction of the Eastern Busway connection between the South East Busway and Main Avenue. There is $192 million for the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project which will deliver the first stage of light rail from Parkwood to Broadbeach.

The lifestyle infrastructure includes $20.3 million to continue construction of cycle paths and $7.1 million to construct boat ramps and other recreational boating facilities. Redcliffe’s cycle paths and boat ramps are at the heart of our bayside lifestyle and we enjoy these facilities. It is good to see them being extended around the state.

The icing on the cake for me, of course, is rail to Redcliffe which is being delivered through the three levels of government, with a $300 million contribution from the Queensland government. The member for Maroochydore has quoted me out of context. Redcliffe rail is part of an integrated public transport system for Redcliffe and it is one that I have always supported.

Rail will give Redcliffe people an integrated public transport system that will allow them to connect with all parts of South-East Queensland and open up employment opportunities and increase business opportunities on the peninsula. With the Ted Smout Bridge and the upgrade of the Peninsula Fair bus interchange together with the Northern Busway and rail, Redcliffe has truly come of age. We will be able to reach our potential as a vibrant community offering a great bayside lifestyle, great family holidays in our natural environment as well as great shopping, cafes, arts and entertainment.
I would like to thank both ministers for their commitment to transparent policy and acquittal of their budgets and for using their resources to build a better Queensland for all of us. I would like to thank the committee chair, Jason O’Brien, for his leadership and management of our estimates process and I thank my fellow committee members.

(Time expired)

Mrs PRATT (Nanango—Ind) (4.57 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee C which dealt with the portfolios of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Trade and Transport. It was quite an extensive estimates process. I think the parliament can see by the argy-bargy that has been going on today that Estimates Committee C was quite stimulating, to say the least. We had the old bull and the young bull—as in the members for Callide and Cook—fronting each other on various occasions. Any issues I had I raised in the committee itself. It definitely has not been a dull committee.

The estimates committee process is not only to question the actual money contained in the budget but also to ensure that the moneys go where they are needed. It is a chance to find out what parts of the portfolio need addressing more than others. I know that people say it is a waste of time, but for me this year the estimates were definitely not a waste of time.

When I asked a question about UCG monitoring it was revealed that there had been issues at the plant in my local area. I have to give credit where it is due. The minister acted very quickly when these issues were raised and the plant was shut down within hours. What it did reveal is the huge gap in the knowledge about UCG, where it should be located and the possibility of incidents occurring. In Queensland and Australia it is a relatively new industry. As we know, there are three pilot programs being undertaken in Queensland.

I do not know how many members saw the rally today, but it was very interesting to hear some of the things that came out. Unfortunately, I could not stay for the whole time, but a report was mentioned that was compiled by CWIMI in 2008. It was compiled for DEEDI. Its very first recommendation recommended that the government fill the knowledge gap. That report was compiled in 2008. We are now in 2010 and it has been revealed that that gap still exists. All I can say is that it was revealed at the estimates hearing that the monitoring process is nowhere near good enough and that the onus should not be put on the companies to self-monitor—because we all know that that just simply does not work, particularly in an industry that is described as relatively new in Queensland although we understand that it is not new around the world. I have asked for examples of successful UCG operations around the world but still to this day I have not yet found one that has not had any problems.

So what happens now? I know both the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability and the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy are working on this, but what will come out in the future will be a measure of the seriousness that the government takes of its responsibility to work in the interests of people, their lifestyles and their areas and to put them before the interests of industry. I would like to pick up on one point that Minister Robertson stated with regard to the crossing over of the responsibilities of the Sustainability and Natural Resources and Mines and Energy portfolios. It is difficult to discern who to direct questions to. I know I have often had to ask questions here in the parliament and I have had to seek advice on which minister to ask. During the estimates hearing the minister himself admitted that it was a confusing area. He was lenient, and I grant him that. He took questions that may not necessarily have related to his portfolio.

So we can see that the committee hearing was very interesting. I would like to thank the committee secretariat. They had a bit of a challenge with the committee and the argy-bargy that went on at times. I would also like to thank the other members of the committee who, I believe, did their jobs admirably. I think possibly everyone who is on an estimates committee learns something new every year. It is a challenge. Whether or not we think it is boring and whether we think it comes to nothing, it is an obligation and I believe that we owe it to the people of Queensland to attend the committees and to work hard on them.

Ms FARMER (Bulimba—ALP) (5.02 pm): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee C, which dealt with the expenditure within the responsibility of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade and the Minister for Transport. At the outset I would like to acknowledge the efforts of everyone involved in the preparation for this committee hearing. The estimates committee process, put in place by a Labor government, is a precious part of our democracy in Queensland, ensuring that there are checks and balances in place at the highest level around the expenditure of taxpayers’ money. Queenslanders are entitled to know that their money is well spent and that the onus should be put on the companies to self-monitor—because we all know that that just simply does not work, particularly in an industry that is described as relatively new in Queensland although we understand that it is not new around the world.

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It was a shame that greater advantage was not taken by the LNP of this excellent opportunity to raise any issues that might be of interest or concern to Queenslanders. I note the criticism that members opposite have generally been labelling at the estimates process. However, when I discuss with local residents what the estimates process is about and then tell them how the LNP uses it, either with limited interest in more than one or two topics or with little analysis or prioritising, it is the LNP of whom they are critical and not the process itself.

I would like to direct most of my comments to the matters relating to expenditure within the responsibility of the Minister for Transport relating to passenger transport, railways, busways, maritime services and air services. Of particular interest to the Bulimba electorate in terms of major budget highlights was the $150 million funding of the Eastern Busway connection between the South East Busway and Main Avenue in Coorparoo. This is the first part of a significant commitment from the Bligh Labor government—$833 million for the first two stages alone—to address traffic congestion and carbon pollution on my side of town. The initial budget commitment is a down payment on a project that will result in vastly reduced travel times for local commuters.

Another budget highlight of local interest was the $20.3 million to fund the continued construction of cycling links. The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2007-2026 allocated $556 million to be distributed over 20 years to develop a regional cycle network in South-East Queensland, with the main objective to develop facilities that will encourage more sustainable transport modes, such as cycling, walking and the use of public transport. These outcomes are being achieved in my local area. Kilometre by kilometre, local cycle paths are being constructed and kilometre by kilometre are they are being linked up.

The minister also answered a number of questions relating to public transport in Queensland, particularly in South-East Queensland. This is a subject that is of particular interest to residents in an inner-city electorate such as Bulimba. The Bligh Labor government has invested heavily to improve public transport and fight traffic congestion in South-East Queensland and the recent budget allocated $7 billion just for that purpose. That sort of commitment has paid for funding of 100 per cent of all rail services in South-East Queensland, funding of 60 per cent of all Brisbane City Council buses, funding of 100 per cent of all new buses in South-East Queensland, a $50 million boost for bus services throughout South-East Queensland, and $174 million to continue building 64 three-carriage passenger trains to improve the frequency and amenity of passenger rail services.

The implementation of the go card has been a significant mark of success for the Bligh Labor government, and in that regard the minister was able to inform the committee of a number of achievements. At the time of the estimates committee hearing, over 100 million go card trips had been taken by commuters and I see that this week the Tourism and Transport Forum, the nation’s peak transport forum, has referred to our integrated ticketing system as the benchmark for Australia and stated—

Other jurisdictions can learn from the successful implementation of smartcard ticketing across southeast Queensland’s rail, bus and ferry networks.

There are many other excellent initiatives being developed in the portfolio, including integrated transport planning, reforms to the taxi industry and the management of Queensland’s railway facilities. I thank both the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade and the Minister for Transport and their staff for their hard work in their portfolios over the last year to develop the best possible outcomes for Queenslanders.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (5.07 pm): I rise to join in the debate on the Appropriation Bill and the report of Estimates Committee C following scrutiny of the appropriation for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Trade—

Mr O’Brien interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: I can see that the chair of this committee was quite disappointed not to have my company there.

Mr O’Brien interjected.

Mrs STUCKEY: As I and my colleagues have mentioned in earlier speeches to estimates committee reports, the current estimates process in Queensland is wanting—as is the member for Cook—in a number of areas. Besides the obvious time-wasting techniques that this Labor government has perfected, numerous respected individuals, as well as media commentators, scoff as they advocate for drastic reform of the estimates process. Included among these respected individuals is the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Neil Laurie, who described the Premier’s changes to the committee system as ‘no doubt well intentioned and in the main positive’ but with ‘serious flaws’. In particular, he says—

The system is still defective in terms of its ability to scrutinise government.

It therefore fascinates me to hear government member after member lavish praise upon and wax lyrical about the current estimates process. My contribution to this debate will focus on aspects of the budget for the portfolio, as I said, of Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Trade that relate directly to the Tugun desalination plant in the Currumbin electorate.
In the 2009-10 budget, under the heading of 2008-09 achievements, the Bligh Labor government stated that it had completed construction and commissioning of South-East Queensland water grid projects, including the Western Corridor Recycled Water Project and the Gold Coast desalination plant. During this year’s committee hearing it was noted that an additional $90.7 million was included in the 2010-11 budget to be spent by the Queensland Manufactured Water Authority, known as WaterSecure.

WaterSecure’s CEO initially denied that there was any more money to be spent on the desalination plant. However, he later corrected his comments, confirming that the budget was to be split between the government’s two manufactured water facilities mentioned above. It transpired that $30.8 million has been allocated to the desalination plant in this year’s budget, bringing it perfectly in line with the government’s total expenditure to date being $911.2 million out of the total estimated cost of $942 million. In his retraction, the CEO reiterated that these works are not additional funding as they were already in the budget to complete both projects. All very muddling indeed, especially when the government last year was boasting that this project was a fait accompli.

The Tugun project has suffered a litany of mistakes and setbacks since commencement. This gentleman’s confusion is typical of the poor governance exhibited by this Labor government. The list of defects and flaws that have required repair in the short time this plant has been operating is phenomenal: sludge and potential cracks in the inlet pipe, corrosion of supposedly non-corrodible stainless steel parts, replacement of inferior quality pipes and so on. Barely a month goes by without another dilemma. Then there is the human factor. It is very disheartening and even depressing for many local residents who have been treated so shabbily by this incompetent Labor government. It is supposedly all within budget, as we continue to hear. Yet despite repeated requests from myself and local media, no breakdown of costings has been made available, highlighting again this government’s lack of accountability.

When will Queenslanders finally get to learn the truth about this major infrastructure headache? Countless people, including those with technical experience, have expressed their concerns to me over the last two years as the problems with the plant escalate. Instead of lasting the 50-year time frames that were guaranteed, pipes and holding tanks constructed barely one year ago are already needing to be replaced due to corrosion. Local residents are simply fed up with this plant. Delays, damage to homes, disruption and excuses are all taking a toll on people’s lives.

I find it gallling for this government and the ministers involved to have claimed that this is an achievement and a completed project in the 2009-10 budget papers. This was an untrue and misleading statement designed to deceive Queenslanders. I am appalled that Labor members here in this House hail this experiment a success. How many other projects of this magnitude and billion dollar price tag has it stated that it has completed and commissioned but will not claim ownership and ongoing maintenance because they have ongoing serious defects? I wonder what happened to the Public Works Committee inquiry into the Tugun desalination plant commenced in 2008? I understand it was mothballed. It is time that it came out of those mothballs to let people have a decent look at what this government has managed to completely mess up.

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (5.12 pm): I rise to support the report to the Legislative Assembly of Estimates Committee C for 2010. At the outset, I would like to thank the chair, the member for Cook, for his very able management of the committee process. I would also like to thank parliamentary staff, Rachelle Stacey, Alistair Maciennan and Carolyn Heffernan, whose support made the committee’s deliberations possible.

The committee considered the budget allocations for the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade as well as the Minister for Transport. In the portfolio of the Minister for Natural Resources, Mines and Energy and Minister for Trade, I was very pleased to see the allocation of $115 million for solar and renewable energy initiatives. These initiatives are an important way for the state government to assist Queensland households to reduce their energy costs while at the same time reducing their carbon emissions. This really is a win-win and something that we should continue to promote. This way we are better prepared for the reality of a carbon constrained future which is coming upon us quickly.

I was concerned by the somewhat unhealthy obsession of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition with Peter Beattie in his role as trade commissioner. Of the four questions he had for the Minister for Trade, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked all but one of his questions about the resignation of Peter Beattie as a trade commissioner. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition first criticised Mr Beattie’s appointment and now wants to attack his resignation 11 months early. Mr Beattie has left public life and I thought that was something the Deputy Leader of the Opposition might be rejoicing over, given that Mr Beattie beat him at two of his three election losses.

The budget estimates process for the portfolio of the Minister for Transport also brought good news for Queenslanders. The committee heard of a budget of more than $7 billion for providing transport in Queensland, an increase of 11 per cent from last year. The challenge of transport in South-East Queensland is to manage the pressures of a growing community. The budget estimates for the
2010-2011 year really do focus on sustainable urban growth, including $1.3 billion in infrastructure in this budget. In South-East Queensland, this means funding for the Gold Coast Rapid Transit project, the Eastern Busway, the Northern Busway as well as rail projects to Ferny Grove and Springfield.

I wanted to deal with two issues that are really important to my electorate in this estimates committee report. Despite the baseless criticism from the LNP, the go card continues to grow in popularity and usage in my electorate. In response to my question, the minister informed the committee that the go card is performing well, with over 113 million trips taken on go cards since its inception in 2008. More than one million cards have been issued to the public and more than 63 per cent of trips on the TransLink system are being taken by go card users every day. While the LNP continue to undermine the go card, the people of my electorate are voting with their feet and their wallet to make the switch to go card.

Beef processing is one of the largest employers in my electorate, with Teys Bros and their Beenleigh abattoir based in Beenleigh. Transport by rail makes up about 20 per cent of the cattle transport to the abattoir. Traditionally, livestock transport has been supported by a loss being made by QR’s livestock transport operations. This has often seen the contracts that are negotiated on a yearly basis involve a great deal of resort to political resolution. This government has made a commitment to livestock transport. The Labor government has, for the first time in our state’s history, made an explicit commitment to subsidising livestock transport in our state. But there is still more to do. The beef industry and QR National must now roll up their sleeves and look at the success of recent grain transport negotiations and see whether a similar outcome is available. A clear and explicit subsidy, such as the one provided in this budget, removes the politics from livestock transport arrangements and puts the responsibility back on processors, producers and QR National to negotiate livestock transport arrangements that suit the industry and the efficient delivery of livestock to beef processing.

I read with disappointment the statement of reservation made by the member for Maroochydore to the committee’s report. Unlike the statement made by the member for Callide, the statement of reservation from the member for Maroochydore bears no resemblance to the questioning, let alone the answers provided at the hearing. While I understand that a statement of reservation may consider anything relevant to the appropriations, I would think that if someone were to read the member for Maroochydore’s statement of reservation and then read the transcript of the hearing or the questions on notice, they might wonder whether the member for Maroochydore was actually at the same hearing.

Finally, I want to take up the issue of criticism of the estimates process. I do think the estimates committee process needs another look. That is why we have the Committee System Review Committee in place. However, I think some of the criticisms made by the opposition are unfair, with opposition questioning often trying to make a political point rather than trying to—

(Time expired)

Mr POWELL (Glass House—LNP) (5.17 pm): I have noted with interest the budget debates and the report of Estimates Committee C as it pertains to public transport. I have previously made my views on public transport very clear. In short, I am a huge fan. I am a fan for a number of reasons. Firstly, as Malcolm Turnbull recently identified in his speech to the National Population Summit, public transport infrastructure is actually a key ingredient in the population debate. There cannot be sustainable population growth without significant, staged, structured investment in public transport infrastructure. But as Mr Turnbull continues, there are other benefits to public transport—

Good public transport has an important social benefit. I am a passionate believer in mass transit and public transport because the reality is that cities, dare I add regions, that are wholly dependent on motor cars discriminate against the old, the poor and the young.

Mr Turnbull goes on to say—

Furthermore while technology can enable us to enjoy virtual proximity to each other, it is physical proximity, the ability to move around to meet each other, to go to places of public recreation, culture and commerce, that is essential to a city and above all to its social equity.

I agree entirely with Mr Turnbull. This is why I monitor the budget papers and debates with increasing interest when it comes to public transport investment—and, to be honest, with increasing alarm. I say ‘alarm’ because some key elements of a significant, staged and structured investment program for public transport have clearly gone missing. Yes, the Bligh Labor government is investing, some would say significantly, in public transport. But the Bligh Labor government can no longer claim to have a staged and structured approach. Let me give members an example. I have studied at length the budget papers; there is no mention of Redcliffe rail. In the Hansard of Estimates Committee C there is no mention of Redcliffe rail, yet even the member for Redcliffe herself was a member of that committee.

In the Bligh government’s recently released glossy, the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2010-31, there is one vague reference to the benefits of the project. There are no dollars and no time frames for it in the government’s latest plan for infrastructure development in South-East Queensland. Before those opposite howl with derision that I am opposed to the Redcliffe rail project, let me be clear: I am not. I am in full support of it. In fact, as a former high school student from
the peninsula, I would have loved to have seen it in place sooner. What I am alarmed at is the almost magical way the funding for the project can be plucked from thin air. There is no mention of it in the budget or at estimates, but perhaps most tellingly there is only one vague mention of it in the latest edition of SEQIPP.

In my electorate of Glass House the question being asked is: while funding can be found for the Redcliffe rail project, why are the Bligh government’s own published, staged and structured plans for the Caboolture to Nambour rail duplication being delayed and delayed again? This is not about funding; this is about planning. This is about sequencing and it is about staying true to publicly released budget and planning papers. Every year that the Nambour rail duplication project is delayed, railway towns up and down the electorate of Glass House grow more and more frustrated. For instance, while we wait for the rail upgrade we cannot address traffic issues through the Palmwoods town centre. We cannot develop and deliver improved commercial opportunities for businesses and locals. Council cannot, with confidence, sign off on residential developments. In short, the town is held hostage, awaiting release that will only come when the upgrade is complete. Some will say that the technical aspects of the rail project are finalised and this should give certainty to council and the community regarding their plans. I respond by saying that we can have all the maps and technical drawings we like, but until the existing rail line is physically removed, shifted or replaced we can deliver none of the solutions I mentioned previously. It is simply not good enough. I know that there is little if any money left in the bank—the Bligh government has made sure of that—but what money is left should be directed to the projects that have been identified and publicly circulated. If not, it makes a mockery of this government’s planning attempts.

In the time remaining I will touch on one other transport issue of concern to residents in the electorate of Glass House and, specifically, residents of Elimbah. Unfortunately, once again the Bligh Labor government has abdicated its responsibilities and the Moreton Bay Regional Council, through Councillor Adrian Raedel, has had to step up to the plate and fund the bill for urgent improvements to the Beerburrum road pedestrian crossing outside Elimbah State School. Thanks to Councillor Raedel, the students will get a safer crossing, but thanks to the Bligh Labor government those same students will be relying on volunteer crossing supervisors because this government cannot find $15,000 to fund this much needed position. The Department of Transport and Main Roads has identified it as a priority and the council has done its part. I call on the minister to delay no longer in allocating $15,000 for the sake of the lives of Elimbah’s students.

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (5.22 pm): In rising I would like to challenge something that the member for Waterford said earlier. He indicated that when Peter Beattie was appointed as trade commissioner to North America, I attacked his appointment. I did not. I was one of the few people who supported his appointment. I said that I could not think of a better person to represent us in Hollywood, because they would be able to see what a real actor is all about. There is no doubt that he has all the capability to sell ice to the Eskimos, although I suppose when you open a package it is always a little bit different. That was not the reason that we challenged his appointment or raised concerns about it, even though we said he was eminently qualified. It was his own flipping and flopping on the issue that we had concerns with.

Let us look at what the Premier of the day said. Peter Beattie was asked quite specifically whether he wanted a job in government and whether he wanted to be considered for a trade commissioner’s job. I remember the great big headlines in the *Sunday Mail*: ‘I’m not interested’, said Pete. ‘I’m going to get out of public life.’ Yet a month or so later he was appointed as trade commissioner to North America based in Hollywood, and what better place for him. Firstly, he did not want it and then he did want it, and now he wants out 10 months early. One cannot blame the opposition for raising some questions about Mr Beattie’s state of mind when he knocked back the position and then he took it. Perhaps that happened because the government actually wanted him out of the way and out of the media? We know that has always been a difficult challenge when it comes to the former Premier of Queensland.

Let us look at the budget estimates for last year. Looking at the dollars spent, the least amount was returned from the North American office. Those are the sorts of questions that we asked. Because of our scrutiny on the North America trade commissioner, now departed, we saw much more activity from him in the last year. We welcome the announcement of the expansion of an office in South America, but we still have some concerns about the closure of the office in Los Angeles, because North America is very important as well. What really concerned us was the minister’s lack of capacity to answer this question: if this person is going to leave a three-year contract 10 months early—he said he did not want the job and then he did want the job and now he wants to leave early—what will that cost? A new commissioner needs to be found. The minister could not answer that question.

On 28 March we were all treated to the spectacle of former Premier Beattie, along with Heather, calling a press conference to say that he was going to fade into obscurity. He told us he was going to fade from the limelight, but he has not shut up since. Every single day he has commented in the media. He has been talking about Julia Gillard. He was the first to predict her ascendance to the prime
ministerial throne the day she became Prime Minister, commenting from horseback in Montana. The guy has not shut up since that time. We really need to look at where he is heading now. That is a matter of public interest.

I asked the minister if he could outline what was happening with the kangaroo meat industry in Russia. I asked him how we have recovered from the embarrassment of the Premier, after announcing in the House that she liked a kanga banger and that she was going to save the roo meat industry, going to Russia and meeting with the wrong minister. How embarrassing was that? Again, the minister could not give a clear indication of the situation.

I turn to an issue raised by the member for Callide regarding minimum land rentals in Queensland. I have here a notice from somebody in my electorate. The land valuation is $910 and they are paying $407 in rent, that is, almost 50 per cent. There has been no consultation. The minister said there has been consultation, but who was that consultation with? AgForce has not been consulted. If it has, it does not support it because it has not been told the amounts. What modelling was done? Who did they consult with and how did the government arrive at the cost? There was a promise to send out notifications to minimum land rental holders in March of this year, indicating the quantum. That has not been done. They did not send that out. It is up to the minister to stand in this place and tell us when he announced minimum rent of $407.

(Time expired)

Hon. RG NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (Minister for Transport) (5.27 pm): In responding to the estimates committee hearing held a number of weeks ago and to this evening’s debate, I want to refer particularly to the comments just made by the member for Glass House in relation to the Redcliffe rail project. Since the Moreton Bay rail link was announced just over a week ago, the LNP has tried to make two arguments about it. First, it has tried to argue that, in committing to this project, we are somehow just following LNP policy. Secondly, it has put the proposition, which was put by the member for Glass House just now, that because this item was not in the budget papers brought down in June it somehow undermines the government’s whole planning and budgetary process. Let me respond on both counts.

Yes, it is the case that in recent weeks the Commonwealth has stepped up and announced more than $700 million for the construction of the Moreton Bay rail link by 2016. Yes, it is the case that, in response to the Commonwealth putting such a significant body of money on the table, the state government has agreed to a $300 million contribution and the Moreton Bay Regional Council has put $105 million into the tin.

So how then did we get to this point? While the LNP wants to say that this had always been its policy, let us just examine the detail of this. Sure, the LNP did go to the last state election saying that it would build the Redcliffe rail link and it did it in a press release from the member for Maroochydore which said in small print ‘subject to GFC and financial considerations’. What happened was that the member for Maroochydore went rogue in the election campaign, went up there with the local candidates, completely unbeknown to the then leader of the LNP, and announced that this project would happen. And then when the community got to look at the fine print, it turned out that the commitment was subject to the GFC.

So it is completely dishonest to say that the government is following in the LNP’s footsteps because, unlike the LNP that had a fake commitment—a commitment with an asterisk ‘subject to GFC’—this is a funded commitment that has come about because the Commonwealth has put $700 million on the table. How did that happen? Well, this government for some time has had this GFC’—this is a funded commitment that has come about because the Commonwealth has put such a significant body of money on the table, the state government has agreed to commit to it too.

But if we follow the member for Glass House’s logic, it would have been the case that, because that was not in the budget papers, when the Commonwealth came to us and said, ‘We will provide a $1.1 billion project to benefit tens of thousands of people who live in that area and to provide an asset for public transport for the state for the future,’ we should have said, ‘Sorry, it is not in our budget and therefore we can’t manage it at this point in time.’ If we followed the member for Glass House’s logic, that is what the state would have been obliged to do. What utter rot! The member for Maroochydore makes a similar claim in her dissenting report. She talks about the fact that this was not in the original budget papers.

This is a great offer. This is federal Labor putting huge money on the table for public transport at exactly the same time as the federal Leader of the Opposition, Mr Abbott, is saying to his constituents, ‘Transport infrastructure is a state responsibility. The Commonwealth government should no more have to fund a Warringah tunnel’—in this case a project in his electorate—‘than the state government should have to buy new tanks for the Army.’

Report adopted.

Debate, on motion of Mr Schwarten, adjourned.
MOTION

Sale of Public Assets

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (5.33 pm): I move—

That this House calls on the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal opposition to represent the 85 per cent of Queenslanders opposed to the sale of Queensland state assets and intervene to prevent the proposed sale.

At the outset I have been challenged about the 85 per cent cited in my motion and the origins of that figure. I have no wish to mislead this House: 85 per cent of Queenslanders opposed to the sale was a figure used at a number of public rallies in my electorate and elsewhere by union representatives and others in the media which I believe is accurate. Indeed, if I were to use figures from my own electorate based on feedback to my office, the media and me, the figure would be closer to 95 per cent to 98 per cent. I take no joy in moving a motion directly inviting the federal jurisdiction to become involved—to interfere, if you like—in this state’s initiatives. However, this state government refuses to listen to the wishes of the overwhelming majority of Queenslanders.

Initially the defence of the sale was the critical financial position the state faced as a result of not only the global financial crisis but also the decisions made in Queensland prior to that time. Since then a more positive financial situation is reflected and many in the community question the fundamental need to dispose of the assets, and the more so given their opposition to the sale of these public assets built and invested in over many decades by current residents and by their forebears. On 28 July 2010 in the Australian Sean Parnell wrote—

The model being used by the Bligh government to sell off its coal rail business is anti-competitive. It disadvantages mining companies and is likely to slash the state’s long-term royalty take, according to a Commonwealth appraisal of the plan.

Mr Albanese’s briefing notes warn that the vertically integrated model would:

- Introduce a private sector monopoly and remove competition for above-rail services;
- Allow cost-shifting between rail operations, and internal competition for investment that could cause distortions;
- Result in higher costs for the resources sector and less revenue for government.

‘While the basis for the sale of an integrated entity would potentially provide the highest upfront payment for a seller and facilitate a quick sale, it would be at the expense of a sound public policy outcome for competition and efficiency of the coal network in Queensland and is likely to reduce Queensland government income from the resources sector over time ...

Further, on 23 March 2010 in the Courier-Mail an article states—

Federal Treasurer Wayne Swan may be forced to resolve competition issues surrounding the Bligh Government’s planned $7 billion sell-off of Queensland Rail.

He waded into the debate yesterday as Nick Greiner, the unofficial head of the powerful Queensland coal companies, along with the company chiefs met Premier Anna Bligh at the Executive Building in Brisbane last night.

Mr Swan said the planned sell-off could raise competition issues he might have to resolve.

‘Well, there are issues here of competition policy and access regimes,’ he said in Canberra.

‘Depending on what occurs in Queensland, it may well be that I will become the final arbiter of the competition arrangements put in place.’

Mr Swan is the third senior minister to raise issues over the QR sell-off, in a sign the Rudd Government—

it was at the time—

might be trying to distance itself from the unpopular assets sales.

Residents in my electorate are vehemently opposed to the proposed sale. People in the state are overwhelmingly opposed to privatisation of state assets. While federal intervention is not ideal, this motion is driven by the fact that the Premier and Treasurer will not acknowledge, nor act on, the community of Queensland’s clear message, whereas there is at least a hope that the Prime Minister and federal opposition leader during the election period will understand and take heed of the messages from residents in Queensland throughout the state on both sides of politics who are saying, ‘Don’t sell our Queensland assets.’ They have been built up over a long period of time by the hard work and the foresight of many in our community, and the disposal of those assets at this time is not in the long-term interests of the state or of future generations. We call for federal intervention only because our requests to the state decision makers have fallen on deaf ears, and we hope that the Prime Minister and federal opposition leader at this time will listen and act to get the best result for the people of Queensland.

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—Ind) (5.37 pm): What a magnificent motion that we have before the House tonight. It is my absolute pleasure to second it. I congratulate my fellow Independent members of parliament, especially the member for Gladstone, for putting this motion before the people’s House. The Independent members of this place have listened to their constituents and put forward a timely, important and relevant motion, unlike the 80 per cent of drivel which comes out of the mouths of the mess which is supposed to be the LNP official opposition.
It is a very proud moment to stand in this place to speak to an issue which 85 per cent of Queenslanders, at least, feel passionate about. It is a very proud moment to stand before this parliament and talk to an issue which helped me become an Independent. I am not going to sit back and watch my state destroyed on the one hand by entrenched waste and corruption and on the other hand by complacency, incompetence and lack of courage. If it were left up to the official opposition, if it were left up to this government, this issue—this sensible solution to a huge problem before our state right now—would not be before this place.

It is only the Independents of this place who have the guts to do the job we were elected to do and initiate this debate. Both major political parties have failed the people of Queensland and there is no hope of stopping the much hated and despised asset sales. There will be hope if the majority of members of this House vote to support this motion because it will mean that we are fair dinkum about finding a political and financial solution to the mess that we are in. If the federal government can cooperate with this state government to build a more than billion dollar railway in Brisbane’s north, if the federal government can pluck $700 million-plus out of the state’s coffers and if the state can line up and pluck another $300 million-plus, then both Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott can surely spend some time to sit down with Anna Bligh and work out a plan to stop the sale of our state’s assets—which will see a net gain of, at best, a couple of billion dollars.

Big business buddies of the LNP are rubbing their hands with glee in anticipation of getting a slice of the bargains in the fire sale of our state assets. LNP members are making all the right noises about stopping the sale of assets and they are taking out ads, but do you know what? In their heart, it is just rhetoric. They would sell the assets just as quickly as Labor would.

The federal election is a great opportunity for Queenslanders to force both sides of federal politics to come up with policies to stop the sale of state assets. Julia Gillard can prove that, unlike state Labor, her federal brand of Labor can be trusted. Tony Abbott can prove that, unlike his state colleagues, he is fair dinkum when it comes to keeping profitable assets in the hands of the people—the people who bought the assets, the people who paid for the assets. Both Abbott and Gillard will have the power to undo the damage that this government has caused and will cause. Whichever federal party comes up with a solution to stop the Queensland sale of state assets will win the hearts, minds and votes of Queenslanders.

In closing, I make this point: if LNP members vote with the Independents on this motion, then the Leader of the Opposition must write to Tony Abbott and Julia Gillard asking them to intervene and help stop the sale of state assets. If he does not, then it is proof that LNP members are not fair dinkum and they may as well vote against this motion with Labor.

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (5.43 pm): The federal government will not be supporting this motion. It reeks of hypocrisy, and I will go to that question a little later in my contribution. In September 2008, the global economy went into free fall. Over the following year, Queensland like jurisdictions and countries all around the world experienced the toughest economic conditions in 75 years, and we were not alone. In the lead-up to the March election, what did we do? We threw open the budget books for all to see. No other state in Australia did that. We released an economic and fiscal update in February which showed the full effects of the global financial crisis on our economy and on our budget. No other state did that.

What that update made abundantly clear, openly and transparently, was that we had to make some very difficult choices. In fact, it was the reason I went to the election because it was clear that whoever was going to govern Queensland in the wake of the global financial crisis would have tough fiscal choices to make. I went to the election telling people that we would have to make some tough decisions and they would not be easy. Every time I was asked what some of those choices might be, I honestly answered that everything was on the table and I could not rule anything in or out.

We did have options. We could have cut jobs, we could have cut services and we could have raised taxes. We did not. We promised to put jobs first above all else, and that is what we have delivered and jobs are growing as a result. We promised to keep our building program, and we have done just that. We promised to deliver skilling programs, and we have done just that. We promised to maintain services, and we have done just that. We put the interests of Queenslanders and their jobs as our No. 1 priority.
What is clear is that our strategy is working. Because we took the tough decision that allowed us the financial ability to keep our building program going, we are now starting to see the benefits and the beginnings of an economic recovery—a budget this year that delivers higher growth, lower deficits, lower debt and more jobs sooner. Our economic strategy is the most fundamental restructure of Queensland’s fiscal position in decades. It will put Queensland on a more equal footing with other states—states whose budgets are not constrained by the need to invest in commercial activities at the expense of the social responsibilities of government.

What we have before us tonight is a motion moved by the member for Gladstone seeking to appeal to Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott on the issue that is before the House. What is the member for Gladstone’s record on this issue? There might be people in this House who have forgotten but I have not. Suncorp Metway was sold by the Borbidge government. How did that happen? Because the member for Gladstone gave them her vote. It was the vote of the member for Gladstone that sold Suncorp Metway. Without it, it could not have happened. It was the vote of the member for Gladstone. Why? Because it was a Liberal National Party doing it.

When Labor under Peter Beattie came to the question of the TAB, was that supported by the member for Gladstone? No. When Tony Abbott decided to sell the Australian National Rail, where was the member for Gladstone? Silent. When Tony Abbott decided to sell Broadcast Australia, where was the member for Gladstone? Silent. When he sold the National Rail Corporation and FreightCorp, where was the member for Gladstone? Silent. So when the Liberal Party or National Party make these decisions, whose backing do they have? The member for Gladstone. But when Labor has to face some tough economic decisions, it becomes, ‘Oh, it’s terrible.’ She could never support it; she does not know how an asset could come to this. I have heard the member for Gladstone talk pompously about dishonesty in the last state election. There was a dishonesty perpetrated. It was the inclusion of the word ‘Independent’ on her how-to-vote card.

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Information and Communication Technology) (5.47 pm): I rise to take a similar line to the honourable the Premier, but I would just point out to any of those thinking of supporting this motion that they could add on the bottom of it, ‘If the feds give us $9 billion to run our health system in Queensland, then we’ll allow the coal companies to put their borrowings on our debt,’ because that is effectively what they are asking us to do. It is great to be an Independent because they have all care and no responsibility—in some cases, no care either. The reality is that we have to make some tough decisions and we have said that all along. Does the honourable member want us to put up fees and charges? No. Does the honourable member want us to introduce new taxes? No. Do we want to increase the GST in this country?

Mrs Cunningham: No.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The honourable member says no. The list goes on. What if we were to sack some public servants, like those opposite said they would do. Would the honourable member support that? No, of course she would not. Would she want to give them a wage cut? Would she want to give the police a wage cut? No, of course she would not. If the honourable member for Gladstone ran her household like this and she ran into tough times, what would she do? I know what she would do. If she had an asset put away for a rainy day, she would sell it. That is what she would do, like any responsible person would do.

Let us talk about this asset that we are proposing to privatise. It is QR coal. What is the service that it provides to the people of Queensland? Nothing—nothing whatsoever. When is the last time that anybody in this room got on a coal truck and used it for a service? Never, ever.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It does not do that at all, you lunatic.

Mr SPEAKER: You will have to withdraw that.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I will withdraw it. Mr Speaker, he would drive you to despair with his madcap chattering up there and his irrelevance. The reality is that the honourable member is supporting the subsidisation by Queensland taxpayers of the coal industry of Queensland. But at what expense? At the expense of building workers! He should go on to any of the building sites in Queensland, as I have done, and say that we should not be borrowing money. The member for Gladstone can do the same thing. They can go and look those blokes in the eye and say, ‘We’re going to stop the Capital Works Program and put you out of a job.’ What do we say to the coal workers? ‘We will give you job security that those in the building industry do not have.’ The last time I looked, the coal industry in Queensland had a very bright future in terms of employing people. In the building industry there are 700 blokes down on the Gold Coast queuing up with their hammer and nail bag looking for a job because they do not have any work. What does the member want us to do? He wants us to keep on subsidising multinational coal companies so that we do not build hospitals for sick people who cannot afford to pay their way out of the pot.
That is what the member for Burnett stands for; that is what the member for Gladstone stands for—not to borrow money, not to build infrastructure, but to keep structures that were set up in the 1960s to subsidise the coal industry to come to Queensland. We do not need to subsidise the coal industry in Queensland anymore. It can stand on its own two feet. The multinational companies that are making a fortune out of it should be standing on their own two feet. They can afford to employ people and give them secure jobs. Yes, they are my constituents. Those people would be amongst the best paid of my constituents ever. However, I have to look after all sections of my community. The people in the building industry are very dear to my heart. They are the people who are looking down the barrel of unemployment. If it were not for this government taking the tough decision to borrow, to go into deficit, to keep the building industry going, a lot of those people, including the constituents of the member for Gladstone, would be unemployed and out on the dole queue.

Mr Messenger: Not even willing to talk to Julia.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I know you do not care about people who are unemployed but you should be unemployed.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! The minister should direct his comments through the chair.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The member continues to shout inanities at me from the back, squawking his irrelevance. He should be outside the parliament and in a place that is run by the Minister for Health. The bottom line is that this is specious nonsense that we are hearing tonight from these people. They want their cake and to eat it, too. They are irresponsible.

Mr Messenger: What about the union members put up on the outskirts of Rockhampton?

Mr SCHWARTEN: The member got chucked out of the National Party for his antics. He will get chucked out of parliament at the next election—he should be. He stood as a fraud at the last election, standing under the banner of the National Party and then he ran and hid up the back after he scabbed on them. So he should not talk to me about workers. The fact is that we are not in the business of subsidising multinational companies the way—

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: That gentleman up there needs some assistance. We are in the business of providing jobs.

(Time expired)

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (5.52 pm): I rise to bring the debate back to the motion before the House. I repeat for the benefit of members and Queenslanders who may be listening that the motion reads—

That this House calls on the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal opposition to represent the 85 per cent of Queenslanders opposed to the sale of Queensland’s state assets and intervene to prevent the proposed sale wherever possible.

Whether we like it or not, in my view, Queenslanders overwhelmingly do not believe that the election held last year was an election on asset sales. I do not believe—and I maintain this passionately—that the majority of Queenslanders went to the last election thinking they were voting on the issue of asset sales in Queensland. The government may think it has a mandate but I do not believe that Queenslanders overwhelmingly voted for this government on that basis. I say here quite clearly tonight that I echo the mood of the motion and the sentiments of the member for Gladstone that overwhelmingly the majority of people in our respective electorates around Queensland do not support the proposed asset sales.

My electorate has many people from many backgrounds and they are very adamant that they do not support the asset sales. Today at midday I attended a rally in front of Parliament House. People from Queensland came here sharing their concerns with the government—their concerns about proposed coal seam gas mining in Queensland. They were calling for a moratorium. During those discussions I spoke with many parents and we spoke about other issues such as the asset sales. They said to me, ‘Peter, we only ever sell our cattle when our backs are to the wall or the bank is saying, “Sell something or we will sell you up.”’ We have never heard the Treasurer or this government say that that was the state of the finances in Queensland, where the banks are saying, ‘If you don’t sell, we will sell you up and we will take that action.’

Our farmers and other Queenslanders have to manage their finances. We are calling on our federal Prime Minister and the alternative Prime Minister of Australia to use whatever influence they have to try to get this government to reconsider the decision. It is not too late for the Premier to reconsider her continued strategy for the asset sale. We have time on our side. The former Premier, Peter Beattie, was prepared to say, ‘Let’s have another look at a range of issues.’ He made a range of decisions on which he changed his mind and the government’s mind. He was not criticised; he was not crucified. Queenslanders rallied to him and said, ‘Yes, at least the Premier had a chance to reconsider the decision.’
So I use this opportunity to call on this government to please reconsider its decision to proceed with this asset sale. I use the opportunity to ask members of the Liberal National Party to use whatever influence they have with their federal leader of the Liberal National Party—and they are in Queensland today. The Prime Minister and the leader of the federal Liberal National Party are in Queensland today trying to engage with Queenslanders. We have no better issue than what we are talking about now: the issue of asset sales in Queensland.

As the member for Gladstone indicated, a number of ministers of the federal parliament have spoken about this very issue of asset sales. We have had the federal Treasurer, Mr Wayne Swan; the federal finance minister, Mr Lindsay Tanner; the federal minister for infrastructure, Mr Anthony Albanese; and we have also had the federal minister for resources, Martin Ferguson—all having something to say about this very important issue to all Queenslanders. So we use this opportunity as Independents, who are not bound by any vested interest, who do not have silent people funding our campaigns. We have no other interest than to protect and do the best we can for Queenslanders, no matter where they live in Queensland. We are saying: will the Prime Minister and the leader of the federal Liberal National Party continue to pursue this issue, as we have asked them to do? We ask the Liberal Nationals in Queensland in our state parliament to also follow our lead and to take the matter up with their respective party.

The state government will listen to the federal government. Look at what the federal minister for the environment did. He stopped the Traveston Dam. The state government listened. Look at the leader of the Greens, Bob Brown. He is out there in Queensland. The state government is listening. We also have the federal minister for the environment calling in and asking for more information about the proposed coal seam gas mines. On that issue, I table a letter that was tabled at this rally this morning for all members of parliament. It is an open letter to our political leaders. I table that for the benefit of all members to consider—other issues that Queenslanders are passionately concerned about.

I simply say to the government: all is not lost. You have time to reconsider. Please reconsider this issue and hopefully the Liberal National Party in state parliament will support us on this issue.

Tabled paper: Copy of an open letter, dated 5 August 2010, to the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition titled ‘Our Land, Our Water and Our Future are Under Threat’ [2689].

(Time expired)

Mr FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (5.57 pm): What a PR nightmare the government is faced with at the moment when 85 per cent of the kids on the block want to play rugby league, 14 per cent want to play AFL and one per cent want to play ice hockey, except that global warming has melted the ice. You know that you have a PR nightmare on your hands when you have a conga line in your office of unionists, LNP voters and everybody else except the brown dog. In all the years I have been in this parliament, I have never seen any issue that has so incensed the people of Queensland. It is right across the board; it does not matter their political persuasion. Many times unionists have stopped me in the street and said, ‘What the hell is this government doing selling off the family farm? We are so passionately against it, yet we are just not being listened to.’

When this House ignores the wishes of the people, it brings democracy into a somewhat parlous state. Politically, I believe that it does so at its own peril. Selling off publicly owned assets is Liberal Party policy, not Labor Party policy. Let me say it again: selling off publicly owned assets against the wishes of 85 per cent of Queenslanders is Liberal Party policy, not Labor Party policy. Frankly, I am very surprised and disappointed that this is a move that the Labor Party has taken, much to the chagrin of its rank-and-file members.

The key to this is that selling off publicly owned assets—assets that are owned by the people of Queensland for the people of Queensland, assets that generate income and will generate income for a long time to come—is a very short-term decision. If we sell off the very thing we have that will generate income, then we will not be able to earn income from those publicly owned assets in an ongoing sense. The last thing in the world farmers want to do is sell off a tractor, machinery or anything else because they know that they need them to actually generate income. If we have a state that becomes utterly privatised—and I say again that it is Liberal Party policy, not Labor Party policy—then we will end up owning nothing and renting everything and we will have very unhappy campers. We need to stop the waste rather than going out and selling off assets.

I have a story from a principal from one of the very small schools in my electorate, and I will not mention the name of the school. I went out there to hand out some leadership badges. I had a fantastic time at the school. As I was leaving I said to the principal, ‘As the principal of a small country school, what is your greatest challenge?’ He looked at me and said, ‘How to spend about $900,000—nearly a million dollars. We have to spend it on assets that you can hang a plaque on when what we really need is teachers.’ He basically said straight out that they do not need the money but obviously they are going to take it. I do not blame schools at all for doing that. I have been to a number of schools in my electorate. I went out to the school at Howard with Senator John Hogg. I am there with the schools. I am very happy that they have those good facilities. But when they have facilities that are being delivered at ridiculous prices, then that is a waste of taxpayers’ money.
On TV today we find that specialists are threatening to walk out of Queensland Health facilities over not being paid. What we have is nurses, doctors and allied health staff not being paid properly by Queensland Health. We have had money wasted on the insulation debacle and a number of other initiatives of the government.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr Foley: Absolutely, but it is the same taxpayer dollars whether we are talking about federal or state initiatives. I do not think we can sit back and say, ‘That is federal so it does not count.’ In summary, this is a profoundly unpopular move which is not supported by the electorate that, at the end of the day, owns the assets of Queensland.

Hon. CR Dick (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (6.02 pm): I oppose the motion before the House. By calling on the members of the Commonwealth parliament to intervene in the sovereign affairs of Queensland, this motion, if passed, would necessarily diminish all of us and the Queenslanders who put us here in the first place. It draws the necessary inference that those proposing this motion have no faith in this parliament and no relevance in its proceedings.

It is for Queenslanders to make decisions about Queensland. If members of this place genuinely believe in a federation, and the authority and integrity of this state parliament, then this is the democratic chamber, this is the democratic body, that we should all respect as having the power to make democratic decisions for Queenslanders—whether as individual members of parliament we ultimately agree with those collective decisions or not. It was a decision of this parliament, by passing authorising legislation, that authorised the government’s actions.

The framers of our Constitution, including very distinguished Queenslanders, settled upon a federal model of governance for our nation for very good and sound reasons—as sound and as valid today as they were more than a century ago when our federal Constitution was given life by our nation, including Queenslanders. We would do a great disservice to ourselves and irrevocably diminish ourselves as state MPs, our state’s democratic institutions and our state as a whole—as well as those Queenslanders who believe in a federal system of government—if we were to support this motion.

Others who have spoken in this debate tonight have spoken in detail about the tough decisions made by the Bligh government to renew Queensland—decisions the government needed to take in the best interests of all Queenslanders, decisions which were made in this chamber by Queenslanders, for Queenslanders. Labor believes in the dignity of work, and laws made in this place continue to support working Queenslanders and working families across the state.

The way Labor governments have delivered dignity at work is through fair workplace laws and arrangements. That is why we will provide award based workers employed with Forestry Plantations Queensland with three years of employment security as part of the conditions of sale. We are also negotiating similar protections for employees in the Port of Queensland, Queensland Motorways Ltd and QRNational. These are protections made by and for Queenslanders. But, above all, it is through fair and just workplace laws that Queenslanders—Australians—are provided with fairness and dignity at work.

If motions like this are moved in this place then members like the member for Gladstone and those who might support her should be calling on this parliament to stop the return of Work Choices, because it will be workers in places like Gladstone and other places throughout Queensland who will be forever harmed and damaged by Work Choices. Let us look at what Tony Abbott—the person called on to do something and intervene in Queensland affairs—said about Work Choices. On 19 March 2008 he stated—

The Howard Government’s industrial legislation, it was good for wages, it was good for jobs, and it was good for workers. And let’s never forget that.

In the House of Representatives on 13 August 2009 he stated—

Let me begin my contribution to this debate by reminding members that workplace reform was one of the greatest achievements of the Howard government.

On 12 February 2010 in a speech to the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry—just this year; just a few months ago—he stated—

You know, at four elections running we had a mandate to take the unfair dismissal monkey off the back of small business and we will once more seek that mandate. At four elections running we had a mandate to introduce statutory non-union contracts and we will seek to renew that mandate.

That is what he said a few months ago—we will seek to renew that mandate. The grand-daddy of them all is what he wrote in Battlelines. On page 87 he stated—

WorkChoices was a political mistake, but it may not have been an economic one.

We know it is true. We know it is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the gospel truth according to Tony Abbott because he wrote it down. He said publicly, ‘You can’t believe what I say but if I read something out it is true.’ He wrote that a year ago. He wrote it when he never thought he would be the leader of the federal Liberal Party, when he never thought he would be the alternative Prime Minister. He wrote it down so we know it is true.
In conclusion, if members of this House call on Tony Abbott to intervene on this issue, they had better be ready for him to intervene on all sorts of matters affecting our state, including workplace laws, in future, that will damage and harm Queensland families. If members of this Queensland parliament support motions like this, they will forever condemn themselves to impotence and irrelevance as members of the state legislature.

Labor opposes Work Choices. We always have. We always will. We do not have to put a three-year time limit on it. Three, 13, 33 years—we will always oppose Work Choices. We stand for dignity at work because dignity at work means dignity in life. Dignity at work is the bedrock of happy families and productive communities. Dignity at work is what Labor has always stood for and what we will always stand for in the future. This motion is wrong, it is wrongheaded and it must be opposed.

Mr McLINDON (Beaudesert—Ind) (6.07 pm): I will return to the motion. My grandfather Bernard spent 21 years in railway construction in Newport, Victoria. I proudly marched on Labour Day in his great honour and for the work he had done to help every single one of us in this chamber. For 150 years Queensland has survived and built this infrastructure. What has this government done? It has blatantly turned a blind eye to the wishes of the majority of Queenslanders. It has taken less than 18 months for this Premier to put at risk 150 years of blood, sweat and toil to get this great state on track.

What did we hear from the member for Rockhampton? He had the absolute audacity to attack the Independents who have the guts to come in here and step away from the wolves and have the backbone to stand up for that 85 per cent of Queenslanders. No major party in this great state is willing to make the tough decisions. When it comes to health matters the government picks up the phone and calls Kev and says, ‘Oh, Kev, we need the money.’ When it comes to other state issues where it suits the government, it picks up the phone. It is rejecting a very simple motion. If those 85 per cent of Queenslanders were watching this right now, they would see the absolute insanity of this government.

I look forward, when a division is called on this motion, to seeing every single member of the LNP sitting proudly in their seats and sending a letter to Tony Abbott tomorrow, because in 17 days Queenslanders will have a choice. We all know that Queensland is the battlefield when it comes to the federal election. I understand that this motion is going to hurt both sides of the parliament. This is exactly why a new party is needed in Queensland. The Queensland Party will lobby the federal government to have it enshrined in legislation, because the cost of living will continue to go up.

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I challenge the member for Rockhampton to have a debate with me in Rockhampton city and then see what his community thinks. I challenge any member on any side to debate this motion in their communities in public. They know that they will not be able to defend it. We know where the LNP stands on it and we know where the ALP stands on it. There are 30 federal seats in Queensland and 16 of them are held below a margin of five per cent. Either Gillard or Abbott have a clear-cut decision to make.

What services are they going to cut for the $300 million that the Premier plucked out of her hat a couple of days ago? The members opposite know that, with every single asset that is sold one by one, the cost of living goes up. That is the blind reality. The other reality is that it is going to set a very dangerous precedent in this state. The other $260 billion worth of Queensland’s assets are vulnerable. As they are sold one by one, not only is Queensland getting privatised but also this very chamber is getting privatised by big business on both the ALP side and the LNP side. Not only do they have hidden agendas but also they weave their own web. They can no longer speak up for Queenslanders.

This is why we need an upper house. This is why we need a third major party. The members who proudly sit on the left and the right of me now are the only ones who have the guts in this chamber to, without fear or favour, represent each and every single Queenslanders in this great state. We have buried ourselves in debt. We are making short-sighted decisions.

Only a few weeks ago in answer to a question without notice the Premier said that of course Queensland Rail revenue will go up, because we are getting a 60 per cent return for a 40 per cent expenditure. We need to look at the books and stop making short-sighted decisions. Why would you sell the house to pay off the credit cards? What is the problem with this government? What is the problem with the LNP? We have complacency on one side and we have incompetence on the other.

In 17 days Queenslanders will have a choice and, for whoever moves first out of Abbott and Gillard, the race is on for those vulnerable seats that are held under a margin of five per cent. Who is going to stick up for the 85 per cent of Queenslanders? I look forward to a letter being sent from the LNP tomorrow to Tony Abbott saying, ‘Yes, these asset sales need federal intervention, like every other state issue.’ Pick and choose. This is the most important issue facing Queenslanders. The cost of living is going up. It is hurting Queensland. This is what will justify an upper house. It would never have got in otherwise.

I believe now that we have a very clear choice when it comes to the division tonight. I will be telling every single Queenslanders between now and the state election exactly how every member voted.
Hon. RG Nolan (Ipswich—ALP) (Minister for Transport) (6.12 pm): I oppose the motion moved by the member for Gladstone—a member who can come in here and tell us all that she is diligently representing the voice of her constituents but a member who, by very definition as an Independent, is all care and no responsibility in this place. I am the member for Ipswich, the birthplace of Queensland Rail. Whether we accept the 85 per cent result in a union funded poll or not, I know that these asset sales, for which I carry a high degree of ministerial responsibility, are not that popular. I also know that they are 100 per cent right.

In the main game of politics, where we either shoulder the responsibility of government or we seek to, we have some serious obligations to the people of Queensland. In the main game, we have an obligation to meet the challenge of sustainability, we have an obligation to provide social services, we have an obligation to provide the infrastructure that makes our regional economies viable and the infrastructure that makes our cities liveable and we have an obligation on behalf of the people to manage the state’s finances well. They are the obligations that this program of asset sales meets. With this asset sales program, we are selling commercial enterprises—100 per cent profit-making businesses that in any mature economy throughout the world would be run by the private sector—and the funds are going into infrastructure to support the state’s future: into schools, into hospitals and into public transport.

I do not support the member for Gladstone’s motion, but I have no problem at all with her seeking to make some of these things national issues. Why is it that this state has to have this debate? Queensland is Australia’s growth state and, largely through natural population growth—through people having babies—and through interstate migration there are more people living here each year. As is very well known, the state government has a massive infrastructure program to support that growth. In 12 years in power the former Liberal government did nothing to assist us to build that infrastructure to meet that growth. In 12 years, while the former Liberal government collected $16 billion a year in fuel excise, that federal Liberal government put nothing into public transport at all.

In 2½ years federal Labor has funded the Gold Coast Rapid Transit, it is the major funder of the Cross River Rail study and now it has committed $700 million to Redcliffe rail. But where do the federal Liberals stand on those matters of critical public transport infrastructure that this state needs? As we well know, Tony Abbott says in writing—so it must be the gospel truth and we should believe him—that transport is a state responsibility and the federal government should no more have to fund it than the states should have to buy tanks for the Army. So we know that the federal Liberal Party does not believe that it should fund the public transport infrastructure that we need. This government is doing it and it will be doing it in part with the proceeds of these sales.

I well understand that there is concern around asset sales, but I also understand that they are necessary to fund infrastructure for sustainable growth—for the state’s future, for schools, for hospitals, for public transport. If the member for Gladstone wants to make a useful contribution for the people of Queensland in this federal campaign, she would be well served to ask the federal LNP why it is that it continues to believe that it should collect $16 billion a year in fuel excise at a federal level and give nothing to the states for public transport.

Mrs Pratt (Nanango—Ind) (6.17 pm): At the outset, I have to say that I agree with the Attorney-General on one point that he made in his speech. He said that this is about Queenslanders making a decision for Queensland. The fact is that their decision has been made. Eighty-five per cent of Queenslanders do not want the asset sales to proceed. I have seen quite a disgraceful attack on individuals in this chamber tonight. I was always taught that when people resort to personal attacks it shows that they have no real argument to put forward. That has been shown pretty well here today. The government knows that there is an issue out there. People are very upset about the asset sales.

I can also agree with the Premier when she said that the financial position in 2008 was indeed a fairly dire one. But we have economists and many others who are well aware of the financial position of Queensland who have stated quite openly that the need for the sale of assets is no longer there. The situation that existed in 2008 has changed and the need to sell the assets in 2010 no longer exists.

One only has to look at the people who are opposed to the asset sales. It is not just people from country electorates, it is not just people who support Independents; it is people who support the LNP and Labor. At the recent 2010 Labour Day march there were unionists who showed quite strongly their opposition to asset sales. In an article in response to the comment ‘if you don’t support the sale then don’t support Labor’, the Queensland Council of Unions Assistant Secretary Amanda Richards said that unions would always support the ALP despite the dispute. However, the unions directly affected by the asset sales have suspended their donations to the ALP until after the next election. They are doing it with their dollars. They are very unhappy about it. They state in the article—

We have made no donations to the ALP since the asset sell off was announced. We will not support ALP members at the next election who support the asset sales.
We will see what happens in the future. I expect that many Labor members are quite concerned. Do not think that it is not a real situation. It is very, very real. The union members chanted in the Labour Day march, ‘Queensland’s not for sale! Queensland’s not for sale!’ One can go to any website and look at the comments following any article in any media—and there are hundreds and hundreds of them; I have a lot here if anyone wants them—and not find a positive one amongst them. It was reported on 7 July 2010 in the Courier-Mail—

A Galaxy Poll conducted exclusively for the Courier-Mail has revealed Queenslanders are seething about the Premier’s performance and overwhelmingly opposed to the asset sales.

It goes on to say—

But Premier Bligh shrugged off the poll results this morning.

That shows how little she cares for what the people of Queensland think. At least Beattie had the intestinal fortitude to recognise when the government had made an error of judgement and the intestinal fortitude to take an alternative position. I never thought that I would say that I missed him, but I do.

The LNP has to state here and now where it stands on this issue. Recent legislation was put forward in this House to facilitate the sale of assets, to divide those parts off that were to be sold. Almost all LNP members stated openly in this chamber that they were supportive of the bill. Some even said they commended the bill to the House. But when the Independents called a division they back-pedalled and voted with the Independents. Tonight they have to decide where they want to stand. Will they say to Queenslanders that they support the government in this particular sale? Will they stand up for Queenslanders who believe that you do not sell the cow; you sell the milk? I find it absolutely astonishing that people sit on the fence. Tonight is not the time. Take your sides, boys, because the election is coming.

Hon. AP FRASER (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Treasurer and Minister for Employment and Economic Development) (6.22 pm): I rise to oppose the motion put forward by the member for Gladstone in this House tonight. How typically benign of the Independents in this place—that those who have put themselves forward as defenders of democracy, as crusaders for the community, should come in here on a Wednesday with the opportunity they have to prosecute an argument and seek to subjugate this parliament and this state for a brief moment of media play. The defenders of democracy and crusaders of the community should stand up for the rights of Queenslanders and the right to self-determination, not seek for political purposes to subjugate this parliament to the federal parliament because of their own particular whims.

The reality, of course, as the Premier so deliberately noted, is that this parliament has a motion before it being promoted in one of the more stunning acts of hypocrisy that this parliament has ever seen. The promoter of this motion is the only Independent in this parliament who on one occasion had the vote that could have made the difference between an asset being sold or not. On that occasion, when the 45th vote was required, where was the 45th vote coming from? It was from the author of this motion here tonight. What did the member for Gladstone do then? And what did she say tonight? The track record is clear.

The member for Gladstone quoted extensively from a briefing note from a federal bureaucrat. Just because it is written in a federal briefing note by a bureaucrat does not make it right. When they wrote all those briefing notes in support of Work Choices and attacking working class people, that did not make it right. The member for Gladstone might not agree with that because when it was the Liberal and National parties attacking workers’ rights in this parliament of course the 45th vote was required and where did it come from? From exactly the same chair in this parliament. Look not only at what the person says but the way in which they vote. She voted against the rights of working people. She has a track record.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr Fraser: The last person who can talk about electoral mandates is the person sitting up the back interjecting at the moment. He should actually hold his tongue until the next election. The reality is that what we have here is a play for an intervention by Tony Abbott. Is Tony Abbott—putative prime minister Tony Abbott—about to ride into town? No, he is not. Why? Because we already know where he stands. Last month on ABC Radio he was asked by the compere—

The big issue here in Queensland on a state level is the privatisation of state assets—do you support that?

Answer by T Abbott on 8 July—it is written down here so it has probably got a fair chance of being true—is—

In principle, yes.

If members ever had a doubt about him believing this, wind back a couple of years because he is quoted on 3 April 2006 talking about Medibank Private, which he now proposes to sell. Look at not what he has done but at what he proposes to do should he be Prime Minister, and that is to continue the privatisation program. Why do we know that he is going to privatise Medibank Private? Not because he said that he would this time but way back in 2006 he said—

The government, obviously, is instinctively in favour of privatisation.

We think that in the end, it’s competition which creates better services, not government ownership.
So at the passing of this motion, on the Independent's whim they will send a letter off to Tony Abbott but do not waste your time because you know where he stands. He stands four square corners in favour of privatisation because he instinctively believes in it. He was at the cabinet table when he voted for the sale of rail assets and when he voted for the sale of airports. He is taking a privatisation agenda to the federal election in looking to sell Medibank Private. We know that the Liberal National Party instinctively believes in privatisation because it always has. Tony Abbott describes himself as a John Howard acolyte. We know that John Howard turned up here and told them all to stand up for the privatisation that they truly believe in. We know that Mal Brough has said that they truly believe in privatisation. We know that they are on the record supporting privatisation in this parliament. We know that they are just pretending not to have a privatisation agenda. We know that Joe Hockey, Tony Abbott and all the Liberal National Party members support privatisation.

The Independents only ever have all care and no responsibility. Those of us who have to do the right thing and make the decisions know that we are doing the right thing in the long-term interests of Queensland. I oppose the motion.

Division: Question put—That the motion be agreed to.


Resolved in the negative.

Sitting suspended from 6.41 pm to 7.41 pm.

CRIMINAL CODE (SERIOUS ASSAULTS ON POLICE AND PARTICULAR OTHER PERSONS) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resolved from 24 February (see p. 457), on motion of Mr Springborg—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (7.41 pm): I rise in the House tonight to oppose the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill 2010, introduced by the member for Southern Downs as a private member’s bill on 24 February 2010. I advise the House from the outset that the government will oppose this bill.

The bill proposes amendments to section 340 of the Criminal Code, which contains the existing offence of serious assault. The bill aims to introduce mandatory minimum sentences of three months imprisonment for people convicted of seriously assaulting police or certain public officers where the offence involves actual bodily harm or biting, spitting, or throwing bodily fluids or faeces. The mandatory minimum penalty will only apply when the assault is committed against a police officer, or an ambulance, fire and rescue or rural fire officer. The explanatory notes do not explain why assaults on these officers and not other front-line public officers—for example, corrective service officers, state emergency workers, transport inspectors, nurses in our state’s hospitals, teachers in state schools or child safety officers—have been captured.

This is an artificial and false distinction and is insulting to those other officers who may be in jeopardy in their work each and every day. It shows just how politically motivated this bill is. I would like to see how the member for Southern Downs explains why this particular legislative measure should not cover the 1,200 new clinical health staff provided for in this year’s budget or the 316 new teachers and teacher aides who this government has provided this year or the 35 new child safety officers. It is an artificial and false distinction that does not seek to properly protect public sector workers as does the current section in the Criminal Code, which has been strengthened by the Labor government.

The bill specifically provides that the three-month minimum term cannot be suspended in whole or in part. At first blush it appears that offenders will be required to serve at least three months in actual custody. However, it should be noted that this will not be achieved because the provisions do not preclude the court from making an intensive corrections order which requires the offender to serve their term of imprisonment within the community, or from fixing an immediate parole release date. Again, another example of the best funded opposition in the history of Queensland delivering yet another lazy drafting effort that does not even achieve the purposes of the bill.
The government takes assaults on police and public officers seriously. I want to make that very clear. Under section 340 of the Criminal Code, behaviour which would otherwise constitute a common assault is deemed to be a serious assault in certain circumstances. For example, a person who assaults, resists or wilfully obstructs a police officer while acting in the execution of the officer’s duty is guilty of the offence. In 2006 the code was amended by Labor to include situations where the person bites, spits or throws bodily fluid or faeces at a police officer.

Further, in 2008, the Bligh government introduced the Criminal Code and Other Acts Amendment Act, which amended the offence to confirm that assaults on public officers constitute a serious assault punishable by seven years imprisonment. Also, the Queensland Court of Appeal decision in R v King demonstrates the court’s serious approach to assaults on police, particularly those involving spitting. In the decision of the court, the Chief Justice, with whom Justice Keane agreed, stated that those people who spit on police officers should ordinarily expect to be imprisoned, meaning actual imprisonment.

This week I have introduced into the parliament the Penalties and Sentences (Sentencing Advisory Council) Amendment Bill 2010. The bill establishes Queensland’s Sentencing Advisory Council. The creation of this council is intended to promote consistency in sentencing and stimulate balanced public debate on sentencing issues.

The government opposes this private member’s bill. This is because, in addition to the bill’s other shortcomings which are manifest, the government does not support mandatory minimum sentences. Firstly, the inclusion of mandatory minimum sentences violates fundamental principles of sentencing including that punishment should be appropriate to the circumstances and to the nature of the crime. Judicial discretion is an important part of the judicial system. For example, a young offender may commit an offence at the low end of the range, is genuinely remorseful, may plead guilty at the earliest opportunity, may be a first-time offender and may be an ideal candidate for a community based order. A repeat offender who commits a serious assault may refuse to cooperate with authorities and insist on a trial. Whilst under the present system the court would acknowledge these differences when considering the appropriate sentence, the proposed bill would require both offenders to serve at least three months in custody. How can that be just?

Secondly, research, as well as the experience of other jurisdictions, indicates that mandatory minimum sentences—and this is critical—offers little in the way of deterrence. Even a cursory examination of evidence and research in this area would have demonstrated that to members of the LNP, but they do not want to be dissuaded from the base political motives underlying this bill. I will go to more of that hypocrisy shortly.

A report by the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council observes that sentencing schemes based on concepts of deterrence presuppose that would-be offenders weigh up the costs and benefits of criminal conduct before acting. However, serious assaults on Queensland police and other front-line officers, by their very nature, would generally occur impulsively, in the heat of the moment—in some cases as a result of alcohol or drug consumption—and would not be premeditated. The findings of the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council are worth repeating. Noting that the aim of mandatory sentencing regimes are deterrence and a reduced crime rate, the council concludes—

Ultimately, current research in this area indicates that there is a very low likelihood that a mandatory sentencing regime will deliver on its aims.

Thirdly, the implementation of mandatory minimum sentencing can interfere with the existing hierarchy of sanctions. For example, this bill will increase the severity of sanctions for certain serious assaults on police and prescribed public officers while not adopting the same approach to offences involving other abhorrent conduct. In addition, mandatory sentencing schemes disregard the important role of the court. Such schemes can lead to a ‘redistribution of power’ from the open and transparent decisions of the judiciary to pre-trial decisions of prosecuting authorities.

This is demonstrated by one case in Western Australia where there is mandatory minimumsentencing for certain serious assaults. One of the first people charged under the new laws was a 22-year-old woman with mental health issues. The charge was downgraded on the basis that punishment should be appropriate to the circumstances and to the nature of the crime. Judicial discretion is an important part of the judicial system. For example, a young offender may commit an offence at the low end of the range, is genuinely remorseful, may plead guilty at the earliest opportunity, may be a first-time offender and may be an ideal candidate for a community based order. A repeat offender who commits a serious assault may refuse to cooperate with authorities and insist on a trial. Whilst under the present system the court would acknowledge these differences when considering the appropriate sentence, the proposed bill would require both offenders to serve at least three months in custody. How can that be just?

There is ... ample evidence that suggests that mandatory sentencing can and will be circumvented by lawyers, judges and juries both by accepted mechanisms (such as plea bargaining) and by less visible means.

I note that during the recent parliamentary debate, very interestingly, on the Criminal Code (Abusive Domestic Relationship Defence and Another Matter) Amendment Bill 2009, members of parliament—including opposition members such as the member for Southern Downs, the member for Currumbin, and the member for Glass House—acknowledged that mandatory sentences can have a
disproportionate impact. Surely, if they have some semblance of credibility and consistency and integrity in what they believe when they come into this House, the same reasoning should apply to any mandatory sentencing regime, as there will always be cases where the impact of the sentence will be disproportionate and unjust.

This bill is a cynical attempt to exploit community concerns in an effort to convince the electorate that crime is out of control and harsher measures are warranted to stop criminal behaviour, yet the facts do not back this up. I do not have psychic powers, but I know what I will hear in this debate—the same consistent sloganeering we hear from the LNP every time we discuss a matter relevant to the criminal justice system. It will be the same sloganeering that substitutes for sound public policy. We know there is no evidence base for this bill, but we will hear the same slogans time and time again. What will they be? Labor is soft on crime. Labor sentencing laws are weak. We will hear all of those things. But what does the evidence tell us about that? Let us look at police resources first of all. When the National Party was last in power, what was the police to population ratio? One police officer for every 507 people. What is it now under Labor? One police officer for every 427 Queenslanders. Over a 12-year period, when the population of Queensland has led the nation in its growth, we have gone ahead of the nation. We have continued to increase police numbers. When the Nationals were last in power, we had 6,833 police officers. What is the number in 2010? We have 10,400 police officers and rising. That is almost 4,000 more police officers under Labor.

What is the core basis of any criminal justice policy? It is to protect the Queensland community and to make it safer. What does the evidence show? During the history of this Labor government, crime rates have fallen in Queensland. During the period of power of the Labor government, crime has reduced by 21.5 per cent, notwithstanding the fact that our population has grown above the national average and has grown significantly in that period. The crime rate has dropped by over 20 per cent since Labor came to power. Property offences are down, offences against the person are down, clearance rates are up. More people are being caught because of the funding and the support that the Labor government gives to our Police Service. We have more funding, better services and a safer community.

What do we hear from LNP members? They talk about Labor being soft on crime. What happened when it came to organised criminal activity in this state? What did we hear from the LNP members then? They were cowards when it came to attacking the most serious, hardened group of criminals in the state. These are silent, closed criminal organisations that perpetrate very serious criminal offences against the community. What did we hear from LNP members? Nothing. In fact, we heard again complete hypocrisy. We had members who spoke in favour of their own legislative measures to crack down on organised crime on one occasion and then they came back here last year and spoke and voted against those measures. You could hang your coat on the hypocrisy in the air when it comes to the LNP and law enforcement, and the community knows it. We now have Malcolm Cole—a candidate in the federal election endorsed by the LNP who was supporting the organised motorcycle gangs, who was their mouthpiece in the community, who was acting as their PR representative. That is the sort of hypocrisy we get day in, day out from the LNP on crime and law and order. No-one believes them.

What about sentencing trends? What about what courts do in the Queensland criminal justice system? We have the third highest imprisonment rate in the nation for serious offending—that is, offending in the District and Supreme courts. Only New South Wales and the Northern Territory have a higher imprisonment rate per head of population than Queensland. One statistic we will not hear from those opposite is that there are about a million more people living in Victoria than in Queensland but there are about a thousand more people in Queensland jails. Queensland courts send criminals to jail but they send them to jail in a fair and just system, not one where the politicians make decisions about what a criminal sentence should be. That is what we are hearing from the LNP—that it is politicians who should set the tariff, it is politicians who should set the penalty.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr DICK: The ignorance of the member for Southern Downs knows no depth, it knows no bound. It is extraordinary that someone who holds himself out to be the alternative Attorney-General of Queensland demonstrates such arrogant ignorance and nonsense every time he opens his mouth about the criminal justice system. You would think he would take some advice, you would think he would do some research, you would think he would take some steps to improve his own knowledge and understanding of such matters that are of such critical importance to our state. Why? Because it is about keeping Queensland safe. We hear nothing from the shadow minister on that. It is all about the headline, it is all about the news grab, it is all about transitory political advantage and nothing about substance and commitment.

We do not deny there are issues facing our community, nor does this government deny that criminal activity continues to present a challenge, but we are simply misinforming the public if we bark and bemoan the illusion that criminal activity is on the rise. It is not; it is down and it will continue to stay down under Labor governments. The other thing about mandatory sentencing is that it has a
disproportionate effect on first-time offenders and young people in the criminal justice system. If there is anything that our criminal justice system should do, it should keep people out of the system if at all possible. We do not want young people who come in contact with the criminal justice system to ever come back to our courts, nor do we want first-time offenders to ever come back to our courts.

Mandatory sentencing can have a devastating effect on people and their families. That is why the inconsistencies in the arguments of members opposite in the debate we had some weeks ago on the new spousal defence in the Criminal Code in relation to unlawful killing and also yesterday in the debate on the Civil and Criminal Jurisdiction Reform and Modernisation Amendment Bill 2010 are so marked. A strong, safe and fair justice system is one of the hallmarks of our modern democracy, but the concerns raised by members opposite yesterday illustrate why mandatory sentencing as a policy is flawed. Members opposite cannot hold a position for 24 hours. In relation to the need for adequate legal aid funding, the member for Southern Downs said—

That can actually have the effect of forcing people to plead guilty to something when they arguably might not be guilty of that particular offence.

Yet under his proposal such a person would face a mandatory jail term of three months.

The government does not believe in mandatory sentencing. In fact, we believe judicial officers should retain discretion to impose an appropriate sentence based on all the facts. This does not mean, however, that we will not pursue with vigour those people who break the law and those people who should be punished in the Queensland community.

Together with the Premier earlier this week, I announced proposed changes to the Penalties and Sentences Act which will enshrine in legislation the sentencing principles enunciated not by parliaments and not by politicians seeking momentary political advantage—which the member for Southern Downs always seeks to do on every issue—but by the Court of Appeal. We seek to enshrine them in legislation. The Court of Appeal has said for 14 years that people who indecently deal with children or otherwise sexually offend against children should spend actual time in prison. Unlike the LNP, we have thought long and hard about this. We have drafted a bill that reflects our intention, unlike the members opposite who fail to even capture what they are seeking to do in their own legislation. They have failed and drafted poor legislation.

The provision before the parliament in our bill says that, unless exceptional circumstances exist, a person who commits an offence against a child should serve an actual period of imprisonment. What do we hear from the member for Southern Downs who introduced this bill? That exceptional circumstances are a ‘get out of jail card’. What does he have in his own bill? Exceptional circumstances for young people. What a hypocrite. It is the most arrant form of nonsense one has ever heard.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ryan): Order! That is unparliamentary.

Mr DICK: I withdraw my comment, but the comments of the member for Southern Downs speak for themselves. He is still out there tawling for the leadership. He was out there tawling for two weeks when his leader was missing in action overseas. Quite rightly, no-one actually missed his leader, no-one even knew that he was out of the jurisdiction, no-one even knew that he had left the state. The member for Southern Downs is out there slavering to obtain the leadership so he can have his chance again. He will do anything to get that, including perverting and distorting our criminal justice system for his own ends.

In a very fundamental way, this bill fails to deliver its policy objectives because it is poorly and incorrectly drafted. It purports to impose mandatory minimum sentences, but this will not be the effect of the bill as drafted. The LNP has not excluded intensive corrections orders and the LNP has not excluded people being released on parole. The LNP has failed in the very most fundamental way to even deliver on what it said publicly it would do through this sentencing.

In relation to Labor’s tough on crime approach, we have some of the strongest penalties and protections in the nation in our Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003. These are some of the toughest laws in the country that this government will make tougher. Why? To protect the community in a way that is constitutionally valid and that has been upheld by our courts in this state and upheld by the High Court. Labor will not stop in our task to ensure the Queensland community remains protected and safe.

This bill undermines the fundamental tenets of our state’s criminal justice system, including the independence of the judiciary, but why would that ever bother the LNP or the shadow Attorney-General? The greatest condemnation of this flawed legislative proposal is that it will not make Queensland safer, nor will it result in any greater protection for our hardworking Queensland police officers or those other very limited classes of public officers named in the bill. Labor has enormous respect for the incredibly hard work that Queensland police officers do each and every day, putting themselves in the line of fire. We will continue to support them, but this bill does not even achieve its own objective of providing greater protection for police officers.
This bill reveals the modus operandi of the LNP. It has been introduced into this House for nothing more than political purposes. It is politically motivated. All the shadow Attorney-General is seeking to do is to obtain momentary political advantage, to grab a headline and to get a news grab. That is the only thing that motivates him. It is simply dishonest and illusory for the LNP to pretend that this measure will make Queensland safer or protect Queensland police officers or the other very limited band of public officers it seeks to name in the bill. The bill should be opposed.

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—LNP) (8.00 pm): I rise to speak to the shadow Attorney's Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill 2010. I find it very interesting to hear from the Attorney-General that this bill is all about the opposition destroying the criminal justice system in Queensland. I have great respect for the Attorney but at the same time I do not think that the government has respect for police officers in this state if it thinks that, in bringing forward this legislation, we are against putting in place protection for police officers. No, what it is saying is that it is about putting in place protection for the criminal element that wants to abuse our police officers.

In 2007 some 429 offenders were convicted of serious assaults against police officers in Queensland, and this bill seeks to introduce a minimum sentencing range for assaults against police and other public officers, including ambulance officers. These crimes include spitting, biting, kicking and all those violent, abusive things that do happen to police in the execution of their duties, and this cannot be condoned. Anybody on the government side who says that it can is not fair dinkum to the cause of being a law-abiding citizen of this state. I am pleased to see the honourable police minister in the House tonight. We have 10,000 police officers in Queensland and they are absolutely fantastic police officers doing a great job. Under this government's jurisdiction, we are against the odds. The Attorney said here tonight that we are hypocritical in introducing this piece of legislation. Now that the shadow Attorney has introduced this bill, how long will it be before we see the government introduce its own parallel legislation to what the shadow Attorney is trying to achieve here tonight?

I turn now to assaults on ambulance officers. There were 38 assaults on ambulance officers recorded in 2007-08, soaring to 107 in 2008-09, with a further 21 assaults reported in the first six weeks of 2009-10. The trend is worsening. That is deplorable in a Western society, a free democratic society, where we are taught to do the right thing and be law-abiding citizens. But what are we doing? We are condoning this element who want to go and abuse the police, ambulance officers, fire officers or other public officers of this state. That is why this legislation must be supported. That qualifies why it should be supported.

The Attorney said that his government has in place tough rules that will send these people to jail for seven years. I am yet to see one of them go to jail for seven years. I am yet to see one of them go to jail at all. That is why the new Western Australian conservative government introduced similar legislation in its parliament in September 2009, and look at the resounding results from that legislation in WA.

Mr Kilburn: What is it?

Mr JOHNSON: I will tell you what it is. I will tell you what it is, 'Mr Smarty'. There were 703 assaults—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Gregory, I would ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr JOHNSON: I am, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am not going to cop that negative comment.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I would ask you to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr JOHNSON: I will, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: If you are directing your comments through the chair, the use of the words 'Mr Smarty' would not seriously refer to the deputy speaker, I am afraid.

Mr JOHNSON: I will withdraw that. That was not a reflection on the chair. I do apologise if you were offended.

There were 703 assaults against police officers in Western Australia in the period from October 2009 to May 2010. That was a 25.1 per cent, or 235 offence, decrease compared with the period from October 2008 to May 2009 of 938 offences. The member opposite might put that in his little book. The first five months—January to May—of the 2010 calendar year have resulted in 403 offences being reported, a decrease of 32.4 per cent or 193 offences, compared with the 596 reported offences during the same period in 2009. It is also lower than the corresponding period in previous years. The annualised trend in assault offences against police indicates a decreasing trend in offences from 1,426 in the 12 months ending April 2009 to 1,064 in the 12 months ending May 2010. That is because of this mandatory legislation that the Western Australian government has introduced and has now put in place. This represents a decrease of 25.4 per cent or 362 offences against police. The number of offences for the 12-month period ending May 2010 is also the lowest since the 12 months ending June 2006.
I spoke with the Western Australian Police Union this afternoon and it told me that since this legislation was put in place only two people have been sent to prison as a result. However, there are huge decreases in the number of attacks on police as they go about carrying out their duties and doing the right thing by the people of Western Australia. But, no, here in Queensland we are going to continue to see and condone criminals abusing, bashing, kicking and doing all things horrible to our police as they try to do their job. No wonder they are leaving the force in droves!

Do honourable members remember that little policewoman in Townsville who was bashed by that thug a couple of years ago? They still have not caught him. I actually hope they do not catch him because I would hate to think what might happen to him. At the end of the day, prison is too good for those sorts of people when we have police officers being hurt while trying to do the right thing. The right thing is to protect the community of Queensland, as they are doing in Western Australia—protecting the community of Western Australia. In the last two weeks another two of these people in WA were to go before the courts and will probably suffer the same fate as the others who were sent to jail.

Prior to the introduction of this legislation in Western Australia, assaults on public officers had increased by 10 per cent in recent years, and 80 per cent of the assaults were against police officers. We do hear a lot about mental health issues related to crimes. However, there are considerations relating to mental health. We know full well that mental health is an issue. We also know that our police officers know the issues. It is absolutely paramount that those issues be covered, analysed and evaluated before a person is sent to prison. In WA the senior officers undertake that evaluation before the matter enters the court system.

Talk is cheap when it comes to the government saying that the opposition has got it wrong. What does it think: that we have got it wrong all the time? I wonder how long it will be before we see the shadow Attorney’s bill lob onto that side of the House and become law in this state. I hope it will not be too long, because the facts and figures from Western Australia substantiate the argument that the WA law is working. I have spoken with the union this afternoon. It is happy with it. The police are happy with it. The Western Australian government is happy with it. It is only the do-gooders on the Labor side who are not happy with it.

Mr Wettenhall interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Barron River!

Mr JOHNSTON: I think he has had one too many.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Gregory, I do not need assistance—

Mr WETTENHALL: I rise to a point of order. I find that offensive and I ask for it to be withdrawn.

Mr JOHNSTON: Whatever he finds offensive, I do—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: No, no.

Mr JOHNSTON: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Gregory. If all members would let the member for Gregory continue with his speech we would not have the same sort of antics.

Mr JOHNSTON: To assist with local issues relating to the mentally ill, local incident management units in WA liaise with mental health care providers when required and district liaison inspectors have been appointed to liaise with designated mental health facilities and providers at a local level.

We all know there is an issue out there when it comes to mental health. We all know that there is blatant abuse of police officers, ambulance officers and fire officers who go about doing their duties in a very admirable and professional way. The one thing that cannot be condoned is the actions of that element of society who want to blatantly abuse the professionalism of those people. That is why the shadow Attorney-General has put this legislation before the House. He is hoping that the government will support this legislation which has purpose, will bear fruit for the good citizens of Queensland and will provide for a safer environment in which our police officers, ambulance officers and fireies can work.

The real fact of the matter is that if this is working in one jurisdiction in Australia why will it not work in another jurisdiction in Australia that has similar qualities and similar issues to the state of Western Australia? I say to the Attorney and police minister tonight that the most important thing we can do in this state and in this nation is make certain that the personnel who provide that mantle of safety for our communities right across the length and breadth of Queensland are safe themselves. In many cases we have single-officer stations. They work in some tough areas. It is paramount that they know that they will be able to work in an environment that is safe and where they want to go to work and the community wants to support them in protecting the communities of Queensland. I support the legislation introduced by the shadow Attorney.

Mr MALONE (Miri—LNP) (8.11 pm): It is a real pleasure to support the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police & Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill. I commend the shadow Attorney-General on his second reading speech. I also congratulate the shadow minister for police on his speech. He identified many of the issues that need to be talked about tonight.
It is really interesting to look at our communities nowadays. We have alcohol fuelled violence on our streets in nightclub precincts and the police and ambulance officers have to work in those circumstances. There are cowardly attacks on police and ambulance officers who are trying to do their jobs in those environments.

We have a highly resourced government. Each one of the ministers has more staff than any one of our shadow ministers or the opposition office and they have the gall to come in here tonight and talk derisively about this bill. There is a community expectation right across Queensland that it is not right for people to engage in cowardly attacks on our police officers or our ambos when they are trying to treat somebody or our fire officers or volunteers in the rural fire brigades when they are back-burning and so on. It is not a community expectation that these people—the police, fireys and ambos—who are doing their jobs bravely and doing the hard yards for the community will be attacked in such a cowardly way. With equal opportunity we have females in our services now, and that is great. To have thugs attack our female officers and get away with it is not right. It is unbelievable that the government is speaking against this bill.

The shadow minister for police indicated that legislation in this area introduced in Western Australia recently is working. I think we should take comfort from that. Too often we read in the papers about police being attacked. More particularly, I am concerned about the females in the force. These thugs have no compunction and no understanding of what they are doing. Quite often they are out off their brains with alcohol or drugs. They have no idea what they are doing. When they go before the courts they have no recollection of what they did the night before.

From what I could understand of the Attorney-General’s speech—he spoke away from the microphone and quite quickly—he actually advocated that it was quite okay for people with mental illness to attack others and under special circumstances not be subject to disciplinary action. He also indicated that it would be very devastating for the families of people who were put away under mandatory sentencing.

I have to say that it is pretty ordinary for the families of police officers, ambulance officers or any other public servant who is attacked, spat on, punched or has faeces thrown at them.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Mirani, perhaps you could confine what you say to the persons set out in the bill. You mention other public servants when the bill is very specific.

Mr MALONE: By public servants I mean volunteer rural fire officers. I am sorry about that. It is very specific. I understand your ruling.

As I said earlier, there is an expectation that people who put their lives at risk every time they go out should be protected by the laws of Queensland. Quite frankly, it is beyond comprehension that those in this government can stand up and reject outright the proposition put forward by the opposition tonight.

There are concerns for those officers who are attacked. They have to wait for test results. There are HIV tests and other tests that have to take place. Those people go through hell for a period of time. Whatever we can do to alleviate that or stop it happening we should do.

As the shadow minister for police said, it is working in Western Australia. It is fairly easy for the government to pick up the phone and find out what is happening over there. Maybe those opposite might have changed their minds before they walked in here tonight if they had done that. Are those on the government back bench quite happy for police officers to be attacked or ambos who are working on a victim in the street—

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mirani, if you direct your comments through the chair we will have less interference in your speech.

Mr MALONE: I am satisfied that the members of the government at the back of the chamber would not be happy to see ambulance officers working on victims in the street attacked by drunken louts. I implore them to cross the floor and support this legislation.

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (8.17 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill 2010 introduced into the House by the shadow Attorney-General and member for Southern Downs on 24 February 2010. In doing so, I wish to convey my strong support for the provisions contained within this bill and place on record the LNP’s commitment to support our police and emergency workers who have once again been hung out to dry by this Labor government.

Listening to the Attorney tonight I learned that his first reason for opposing this bill was that it did not encompass a wide range of workers. Well, it is a darn good start. It is very interesting also that the industry supports it. I was shocked when the Attorney then downplayed the serious assaults on front-line workers. Labor is not only soft on crime; it is limp-wristed when it comes to standing up for front-line
workers. Graphic news footage of drunken youths and adults resisting arrest and lashing out at police really does highlight the extreme danger that officers place themselves in each time they go out on patrol, with night shifts in entertainment precincts more perilous than other areas.

The urgency of this bill is demonstrated by the rise in the number of assaults on police and frontline emergency workers in recent years as they do their best to protect the Queensland public. The clear aim of the bill is to implement a minimum sentence standard for certain types of serious assaults on police and specified public officers in an effort to deter offenders which would, in turn, reduce the rate of assaults on our emergency service workers. Covered by provisions in this bill are police, ambulance, fire and rescue and rural fire officers.

The bill seeks to amend the Criminal Code to insert a new subsection 2(C) in section 340, titled ‘Serious Assaults’, to impose imprisonment of at least three months in circumstances of serious assaults specifically causing bodily harm to a prescribed person, or biting, spitting on or throwing bodily fluid or faeces at a prescribed person. This bill also proposes that the sentence not be suspended in whole or in part for the first three months. If the convicted person is a child, under the Juvenile Justice Act 1992 new subsection 2(C) will not apply if the court is satisfied that exceptional circumstances exist.

I must say that I have an uneasy feeling of déjà vu as I make my contribution today. Two and a half years ago—on Wednesday, 27 February 2008—I delivered a speech on a similar private member’s bill that would have amended the Criminal Code to extend greater protection to our emergency service officers. The LNP’s bill was voted down by this Labor government, as were a number of other pieces of legislation that would have assisted our police in their fight against crime.

But why be surprised? Labor members take these dedicated front-line workers for granted, just as they do nurses, doctors and health workers, whom they rob of their pay. Assaults against police have been in excess of 2,700 a year for the past two years. Labor has been in power for all of that time. Total assaults have steadily increased over the past decade. Labor has been in power for all of that time. Without doubt, the culture of violence against our emergency service officers is increasing and this arrogant government has sat there watching it unfold. These skilled workers face deadly scenarios on an increasingly frequent basis and this Labor government turns a blind eye.

Equally sickening, as is the graphic footage that we see on our television screens, are the unprovoked attacks on ambulance officers who are trying to administer aid. Reports in the Gold Coast Bulletin in May this year revealed that paramedics have been punched, kicked, spat at and even sexually assaulted by revellers when attending to incidents in the nightspots of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach on the Gold Coast. It is shameful to admit that it has reached the point at which police protection is needed before paramedics can administer help to injured persons. The Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union released figures indicating that 94 per cent of ambulance officers have been the victim of assault while performing their duties and that 87 per cent fear for their safety when attending jobs. How can this government sit by idly while our front-line emergency services cop these attacks? The amendments contained within this bill have the full support of the industry itself, with the Queensland Police Union calling for mandatory jail sentences to reflect the seriousness of these crimes.

The Gold Coast is facing an unwelcome surge in violent attacks—the worst across the state—and my electorate of Currumbin has not been spared. In December 2009, whilst breaking up a fight outside a popular Coolangatta nightspot, Senior Sergeant Steve Quinn was hit from behind, causing potentially fatal injuries to his jaw and head. Only three months earlier Senior Sergeant Quinn was the first officer on the scene after one punch killed young Andrew Houlahan in the same area in September 2009. Amazingly, this dedicated officer was back to work within days of his attack.

I would like to praise the efforts of my local police: the Gold Coast Police Superintendent Jim Keogh, Inspector Des Lacy, Senior Sergeant Chris Ahearn from the Palm Beach station and the head of Coolangatta police, Senior Sergeant Mark Johnston. A concerted team approach by these gentlemen has seen the overall number of assaults drop in theCurrumbin electorate. However, Gold Coast police are facing demands at rates never previously experienced. Cross-border pressures are experienced by Coolangatta based police and I notice that the minister has listened to my request to help streamline the process of special constables so that we are able to better police our borders. But battle weary officers who continue to be rostered on weekend shifts will burn out as a result of this government’s inability to see the physical impacts that these extra demands are having. Police are crying out for reinforcement—more officers to control the thousands of drunks on the streets every Friday and Saturday night—but the Bligh government expects them to work even more weekends in order to get a pay rise.

This private member’s bill from the LNP before us tonight shows our front-line officers—our police, ambulance, fire and rescue officers and rural fire officers—that we value their efforts, unlike Labor, which takes them for granted. Judging by the lack of government speakers to this bill—there are only five on my list—it is easy to see that the Labor government does not care for the wellbeing of these dedicated and important workers in our great state.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Before calling the member for Mudgeeraba, I bring to the attention of the House that the division that was called for the motion prior to the dinner adjournment was given the numbers ayes 34, noes 50. In actual fact, there was an error in counting for the ayes. The correct numbers were ayes 35, noes 50.

Ms BATES (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (8.25 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill 2009, introduced by my colleague the shadow Attorney-General and member for Southern Downs, Lawrence Springborg. The objective of the bill is to introduce a minimum sentence of three months imprisonment when a serious offence that involves biting, spitting, or the throwing of bodily fluids or faeces is committed against police, ambulance officers, fire and rescue officers and rural fire officers and results in bodily harm. This minimum sentencing is achieved by amending the Criminal Code to send a strong message that under no circumstances will serious assaults against our extremely hardworking emergency service personnel be tolerated in Queensland.

In early 2008 a similar amendment bill was introduced to the House. The amendment sought to adjust the Criminal Code to introduce mandatory sentencing for serious assaults on our emergency service personnel. The coalition of the Liberal and National parties were committed to not only protecting our emergency service workers in our communities but also sending a strong message to Queenslanders that the coalition was tough on crime, placing the coalition worlds apart from the Labor government’s soft-on-crime approach. The amendment bill was debated in early 2008 and, once again, Labor, with its soft approach on crime, voted down the legislation 52 noes to 26 ayes, including the former member for Mudgeeraba, who voted against this legislation.

Since that time, violent assaults have continued on our emergency and Corrective Services personnel while the Bligh Labor government sits on its hands and does nothing, proving yet again to the people that the bleeding heart Left on the other side of the House continues to support criminals and not those who serve to bring them to justice or who have to deal with them in other emergency contexts.

In an answer to question on notice No. 459 in 2009, the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services advised the parliament of some alarming figures. From 17 December 2008 to 4 June 2009 there were 155 WorkCover claims resulting from assaults on police in the line of duty. What is even more alarming was that of those 155 claims, 72 were the result of blood/body fluid—of BBF—exposures. That is a totally unacceptable level of assaults on our police officers. Those alarming figures have been ignored by those opposite and it is left up to those on this side of the House, under the united banner of the LNP, to reintroduce another amendment to the Criminal Code in order to protect our emergency service personnel and send a strong message to the public that attacks on them will not be tolerated. Those in our community who prefer to prey on the elderly and the disabled, or our police, ambulance and fire officers trying to complete their duties under this legislation, would be sentenced to a minimum three months in jail. There would be no get-out-of-jail-free cards.

In recent years, there have been a number of sickening attacks on police officers on the Gold Coast, which have been mentioned already by the member for Currumbin. Ironically, one of the most horrific attacks occurred to an off-duty police officer and his girlfriend during the months the previous amendments were before this House. In November 2007, a group of 20 youths, in an unprovoked attack, set upon the pair at 12.50 am on a Saturday night as they walked down the street. They were knocked to the ground, violently kicked and had their hair pulled out in what can only be described as a sickening attack. The off-duty police officer required 20 stitches to his head after his head was stomped on while he lay on the ground helpless and then the perpetrators even stole his wallet. Worse though, the mother of one of the attackers was arrested when she arrived at the Southport watch-house to pick up her son from detention. The women was so drunk that the police had no choice but to arrest her.

She was incarcerated in a padded cell as she was aggressive, violent and abusive towards police. This is as reported by Melanie Pilling from the Gold Coast Bulletin. As two witnesses reported to the Southport Court, they watched the woman scoop up liquid from the floor and throw it at them. The article then quotes Sergeant Shaun Groufsky—

This kind of behaviour in anyone’s terms is intolerable. Even after this incident the court handed out only a minor sentence of 100 hours of community service and a 12-month probation period. To add insult to injury, the woman was fined a mere $733 for damage caused to the cell in which she was incarcerated. Incidents of such disgusting behaviour should attract a minimum of three months jail time.

Recently a number of unions have called for mandatory sentencing for offenders. In an article in the Courier-Mail in September last year under the heading ‘Union calls for harsher penalties on police attackers’, Mr Ian Leavers, General President of the Queensland Police Union of Employees, is quoted as saying—

The Parliament should follow the West Australian lead and intervene to mandate terms of imprisonment for those who seriously assault police.
The people of Queensland do not need more evidence that this Bligh Labor government is ignoring them. Now we see that the government even ignores pleas for mandatory sentencing from its own union buddies. If that is not bad enough, other unions responsible for our ambulance employees are also joining their voices to protest against the leniency of the fines and sentences for offences committed against their own. In March 2009 the *Courier-Mail* reported on paramedics calling for police escorts after figures showed that since 2005 attacks against them had almost doubled. Acknowledging that this request was a tall order, a representative stated—

We need a comprehensive course with practical elements because these paramedics are being bitten, spat on and hit and it’s increasing exponentially.

Evidence of the increasing number of attacks on our Queensland ambulance officers is contained in answer to question on notice No. 903. In 2007-08 there were 38 recorded assaults and in 2008-09 the figure more than doubled to 107. That is an astonishing figure given the fact that these paramedics are trying to save Queenslanders’ lives. From 1 July 2009 to 19 August 2009 there have been 21 recorded assaults of which five, or close to 24 per cent, have been reported to police by ambulance officers. In response to these figures, Jason Dutton from the Miscellaneous Workers Union in an *ABC* article in September 2009 was quoted as saying—

So obviously we are calling upon the Government and the judiciary to apply heavier penalties, which may also be the introduction of mandatory sentencing.

This is again a plea to this Labor government by a union, yet it is ignoring pleas from its own. No member on this side of the House believes that the introduction of mandatory sentencing for crimes and attacks on emergency service personnel will stop serious attacks in their entirety. Everyone, no matter what their profession, deserves the right to feel safe at work as they go about their day-to-day lives. We need harsher penalties on the people who do commit these offences in order to deter offenders from committing an offence of this nature in the first place. If this legislation stops one person from committing a serious offence against any of our emergency workers with the knowledge that without fail they will spend a minimum three months in jail with no bail, then it has done its job in protecting and providing Queensland workers with a safer place to work. I and my fellow colleagues wait in anticipation to see if this Bligh Labor government has the safety and interests of our emergency services personnel at heart and subsequently votes for this amendment to the Criminal Code.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! There was a comment made by the member for Currumbin in relation to the number of people speaking. There are a variety of reasons why people choose not to speak on a bill and it is quite improper to suggest a reason. I would remind all persons speaking on the bill to be mindful of the Speaker’s ruling.

Hon. NS ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services) (8.33 pm): No-one in this chamber, and I would say on both sides of the House, is saying that any assault on a police officer, an ambulance officer, a fire and rescue officer or indeed any public officer who is undertaking their duties is an acceptable thing. To suggest anything otherwise is absolutely inappropriate and is not a fair reflection of the genuine belief on both sides of the House that these police officers, ambos and firies go out there with all good intent to act in the public interest. For anyone to assault them in any way during the course of their duties is absolutely unacceptable.

As the person who has the privilege of being the Minister for Police and also the Minister for Emergency Services, I have the opportunity of meeting and speaking with front-line officers from the Police Service and Emergency Services on a regular basis. I see the results of some of these assaults. I see the black eyes, cuts, bruises and the trauma that these assaults cause not only to the individual officers but also to their families. That is why the government took tough action recently to increase penalties for people who assault officers. The specific action that was taken was the opportunity for the courts to treat any assault against a police officer, an ambulance officer or a fire and rescue officer as a serious assault with a maximum penalty of up to seven years.

The LNP regularly calls for mandatory sentencing. It is almost like a broken record. When the court sentences an offender, no matter what the offence is, it is required to take into account all of the circumstances of the particular case. If it is a serious assault that causes serious injury to an individual, whether it be a police officer or another Emergency Services worker, in most of those cases a jail sentence will be imposed. It is not true to suggest that the courts are not imposing prison sentences for assaults. I will come to that issue a bit later.

The rationale given for mandatory sentencing is that it will somehow be a deterrent to people committing these sorts of abhorrent crimes against police and other Emergency Services personnel. The fact is that people who are going to assault somebody will not be thinking, ‘If I assault this individual—this police officer, this ambo—I will end up in jail.’ The reality is that the majority of these offences are committed in the heat of the moment, they are opportunistic and people are often under the influence of drugs or alcohol. They do not think about the consequences of their actions when they throw the punch or tackle someone to the ground. To suggest that having a mandatory sentence will be a deterrent I do not believe can be justified by any accredited research. In fact, the accredited research both in Australia and internationally shows that mandatory sentencing is not a deterrent. There is no
evidence that suggests that mandatory sentencing is a deterrent, particularly in crimes that are opportunistic. In all of the discussions that I have had with the Police Service—and this would apply with the Ambulance Service and others—the overwhelming majority of these assaults are opportunistic or drug or alcohol related offences.

In Queensland the courts have indicated that a term of imprisonment is, in fact, an appropriate sentence in many of these cases. Chief Justice Paul de Jersey in a Court of Appeal case, when talking about this disgraceful behaviour of spitting on and biting police officers, said—

An appropriate level of deterrence will in such cases usually be secured only through actual imprisonment of the offender.

If one looks at many of the cases where these types of offences are taking place, that is in many instances the outcome for the offender. If there are particular circumstances the court may impose a different sentence. We live in a country where our justice system relies upon courts to make decisions based on the merits of the case and all of the facts and evidence before it. Whether it be a police officer or an ambulance officer who is before the court for assault themselves, or indeed someone who has assaulted a police officer, I think we would all expect that the courts would take into account all of the facts and circumstances before a sentence is imposed.

In terms of the sentences that have been imposed, statistics from last year given to me through the Police Service show that of all the convictions for serious assaults against police more than 50 per cent actually received a jail sentence. If one includes suspended sentences, around 65 per cent of people convicted of serious assaults against police received a custodial sentence. It is simply not true to say that the courts are not willing to impose these sentences.

Whereas each of us may have particular personal views about cases which we might hear of and what we might like to see happen to that particular offender, the facts are that the courts are demonstrating, through the evidence, that they are putting people behind bars for many of these offences. In those cases where they do not, they are basing those decisions on all the circumstances of the case. That is the foundation principle of the justice system that we live and work under here in Queensland and, indeed, Australia.

As high as the rate of assaults on police is—no-one can deny that it is a terrible rate of assault—and despite the claims of many on the other side that there is a skyrocketing growth in assaults against police, the figures actually show there has been a slight decline in the rate of assaults. The information provided to me by the Police Service is that in 2008 the rate of reported assaults on police was 286 per 1,000 police officers and in 2009 it had reduced to 260 per 1,000 police officers. No-one denies or is arguing against the fact that that is an absolutely unacceptable number. However, over those two years the actual rate of assaults against police officers did decline by around nine per cent, which is a different story to that being put to us by members of the opposition.

What is the LNP’s record on law and order? I have been in this parliament for a long time and I remember when the member for Southern Downs and the member for Gregory sat at the cabinet table and they talked tough about their approach to law and order. They beat their chests and talked about throwing away the keys and bringing back the guillotine. You name it, they were going to bring it all back and get tough on criminals. Let us look at the record of the LNP, because it is all talk and no action when it comes to law and order. When dealing with law and order issues, the LNP had an opportunity to have a go at organised criminal gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs. What did they do with the Criminal Organisation Bill? They voted against it. When the member for Southern Downs and the member for Gregory sat at the cabinet table, what did they do with sex offenders? At the end of their sentences, sex offenders walked free. There was no supervision and no monitoring. They could join whatever clubs they liked and associate with any children they liked, with absolutely no controls at all. That is the record of the member for Southern Downs and the member for Gregory. They talked tough about crime, but what is their record?

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Wendt): Order!

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Southern Downs, you will have your say. I see your name on the speaking list.

Mr ROBERTS: If we look at their record on dealing with things like sex offenders, they sat at the cabinet table, they sat on their hands and they did nothing.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr Dick interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Toowoomba South, if you wish to interject you will return to your seat. Attorney-General, I will ask you to cease interjecting.
Mr ROBERTS: Let us look at the record of the National Party. The Attorney-General talked about the police to population ratio. According to the Fitzgerald report, when the Nationals were last in power and the member for Southern Downs sat at the cabinet table, some of the fundamental flaws in the police service were that it was under resourced and police numbers were low. What was the result? High crime rates. As the Attorney-General has pointed out, under the Nationals there was one police officer for every 507 people. Under Labor, that figure dropped to one police officer for every 430 people. Since Labor has been in power, the crime rate has dropped by over 20 per cent. Since Labor has been in power the clearance rate has increased. The Liberal National Party is all talk and no action when it comes to law and order issues. With respect to this bill, there is no credible evidence that mandatory sentencing will reduce the incidence of the types of crime that we are talking about, which are opportunistic crimes. On that basis I oppose their bill.

Mr SHINE (Toowoomba North—ALP) (8.43 pm): I rise to condemn the amendments introduced by the honourable member for Southern Downs in this bill. These amendments are a return to the bad old days of pre-Fitzgerald Liberal and National Party politics when the rule of law, transparency and an open, accessible and understandable justice system took a back seat to cheap political opportunism and ideological sectarianism. The Australian Federation and Queensland’s place in that constitutional fabric is underpinned by a strong adherence to the rule of law. While parliament makes the law and the executive administers the law, it is up to the courts and an independent judiciary to interpret and apply the law in accordance with parliament’s intention. This constitutional duty on the part of the judiciary must necessarily bind the exercise of executive administration, particularly where parliament provides for a punishable offence against an individual.

This bill dangerously allows for the executive to mandate the sentence the courts may hand down to an offender. Where the bill mandates that a person who does bodily harm or bites, spits or throws bodily fluid or faeces at a person, whether police, ambulance or fire and safety officer, should serve a minimum term of imprisonment of three months, it is undermining the independence of the judiciary and curtailing the rule of law. It is the basis of all good decision making to consider all of the circumstances and evidence before taking action.

It may be argued that the introduction of a minimum sentence level some how impinges on the discretion of the judiciary; however minimum sentences have been introduced and are being used across many jurisdictions including Queensland.

One such jurisdiction is Western Australia which, in September last year, introduced mandatory sentencing legislation providing for an automatic six month sentence for offenders who attack police, ambulance and public transport officers. Sound familiar? The honourable member cannot even cook up an original policy, no matter how extreme and ill-conceived. Last year at its general meeting, which was held on the Gold Coast, the Australian Lawyers Alliance labelled Western Australia’s mandatory sentencing regime backward and reprehensible. Speaking at the Australian Lawyers Alliance AGM, the Queensland Chief Justice, the honourable Paul de Jersey, condemned mandatory sentencing as ‘a dreadful thing’. The alliance’s national president, Mr Mark Blumer, said that the alliance believed the retention of judicial discretionary sentencing of offenders was a cardinal principle of any democratic society. He said that without such discretion lives would not only be ruined but society would suffer as well. He stated—

It is the basis of all good decision making to consider all of the circumstances and evidence before taking action.

Mr Blumer said—

This is even more imperative when you are determining justice and individuals’ fates, as well as the future fabric of society.

I am not sure which Queensland legislation the honourable member is targeting when he refers to mandatory sentencing in Queensland. Certainly there is a mandatory term of imprisonment for the crime of murder. Perhaps he equates the infliction of bodily harm with the intentional taking of another human life. Perhaps he is targeting the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act, which provides, in circumstances and subject to certain procedures, for the continuing, preventive detention of serious sexual offenders who have served their terms of imprisonment and who are shown to constitute a serious danger to the community. As the honourable member knows, the High Court of Australia has already found that this legislation does not impact on the Supreme Court of Queensland’s ability to fulfil its independent judicial role under Chapter III of the Constitution. This legislation does not constitute mandatory sentencing.

What is more, the dangerous prisoners legislation deals with certified serious sexual offenders who have been convicted of a crime and are still considered dangerous. On the contrary, those most at risk from the Liberal National Party’s mandatory sentencing regime are misguided young people or people with a mental health problem who, through inexperience or human infirmity, make a one-off mistake. Let us take the example of Queensland’s Indigenous population. If the LNP’s policy of mandatory sentencing were to be introduced, the progress made in working with Indigenous Queenslanders to find appropriate sentencing practices and positive diversionary processes would be wound back by decades.
This is a bad bill and it is a bad law. Well documented research shows that a policy such as mandatory sentencing distorts the criminal justice system, does not result in a reduction of recidivism rates, has a disproportionate effect on juvenile and first-time offenders, particularly those first-time offenders with a disability or impairment, and will have the potential to result in increased incarceration rates for Indigenous Queenslanders. In our democratic society, based on its evolution over 1,000 years, the separation of powers is essential, particularly where the criminal law is concerned. Sentencing is the task of judges, not politicians. In February 2002, the Law Society’s *Proctor* magazine quoted the then shadow—

**Mr Rickuss:** You get it sent to your office, too. If you read it, you might know something about the law.

**Mr SHINE:** The member should listen—the then shadow Attorney-General, Mr McArdle, the member for Caloundra. He said—

Primarily a trial judge is best placed to make decisions on sentencing.

I agree with him. He then tried to explain that the major problem is that the courts are not getting out to the public the explanations as to why they have arrived at the sentences that they have made. He says that we need to address how sentences and sentencing can be better explained to the public. That shadow Attorney-General had some sense at least on that occasion.


In 1995, Dearden—

who was the president of that association—

responded to a survey that almost 70% of Australians believed judges were too lenient on sentencing. In press statements, he said that this was typical of people’s perceptions of the criminal justice system, and that those who had direct contact with criminal proceedings usually did not consider judges lenient. He pointed out that there was no evidence that harsher sentences reduced crime rates. He reiterated that politicians, for their own purposes, traded on the public’s perceptions about crime.

That was in 1995. Nothing has changed. It goes on—

When the National/Liberal Coalition Party took over government early in 1996, it continued using sentencing as a political football. The new Attorney-General, Denver Beanland, moved to introduce legislation which would require offenders who served 10 years or more for violent offences to serve 80% of their sentence ...

He writes—

... that this had superficial political appeal, but would involve extra costs to the taxpayer, and would make no difference to the crime rate. When the Coalition Party went into Opposition in mid 1998 before it could carry out this legislation, it retained this policy of mandatory sentencing as the basis of proposed legislation that it would enact when it regained power. It claimed that the prison system was a revolving door for prisoners ...

The honourable member for Southern Downs conveniently quotes Mr Terry O’Gorman when it suits him. Only yesterday he was quoting him favourably. I also now quote Mr O’Gorman. Mr O’Gorman stated, referring to page 180 of this article—

... to lawyers who regularly practised in the criminal courts, the statistics put forward by the Opposition simply did not reflect the reality. He pointed out that the attorney-general had wide powers to go to the Court of Appeal and seek to have perceived lenient sentences increased, and that the attorney-general regularly used this power.

That is in relation to the District and Supreme Court, but who has those powers in the Magistrates Court? Those powers are in the hands of the prosecuting police themselves. The police have the power to appeal if the sentence is too lenient. It is up to the police to do so, and I suggest that the honourable gentleman opposite should acquaint himself with what really does happen in a court. Perhaps he should sit down the back of a court once or twice in the forthcoming months to see what really does go on and get a real appreciation of how justice is administered in this state.

**Mr EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (8.52 pm):** Some call it the line of duty but it is becoming more like the line of fire, with repeated reports of violence against police and emergency service officers. The Queensland public expects its police, ambulance, fire and rescue officers to be able to carry out their duties without suffering serious assault. Let us be very clear here. We are not talking about those simply resisting arrest. We are talking about police being hit with iron bars, police being punched in the face, police being kicked in the groin and spat on while working. They are all examples from recent months of attacks on police and emergency services workers.

An assault on a police or emergency services officer in the course of doing their duty is totally unacceptable. It is not acceptable that when you start work there is a risk you will be physically assaulted as part of your duties. But, as the police admit, the number of serious assaults on officers has been rising and the brutality of assaults has also been rising. But they also believe that penalties handed to offenders by the courts rarely meet community expectations. All police and emergency workers deserve much better protection.
This LNP bill introduces a mandatory minimum three-month imprisonment for serious assaults that involve bodily harm or biting or spitting on police, ambulance, fire and rescue and rural fire officers. Those serious assaults on police include assaults involving biting, spitting or throwing bodily fluids or faeces. The LNP believes that assaults against our police and emergency services personnel are a serious crime against the community, and the sentence should reflect the gravity of that crime.

The most recent assault figures should be of concern to every member of parliament. Fifty police a week are being spat on, punched, kicked and assaulted in an escalation of violence more likely to come from women and young people. Police figures show that more than 2,700 officers were assaulted across Queensland last year. Of the 2,700 police assaulted, 593 were female officers. The most recent figures—for the last six months of last year—showed police were seriously hurt more than 370 times. One officer was seriously wounded, while there were four cases of grievous bodily harm.

Most disturbing is that violence has become a routine part of weekend night shifts. As regional duty officer Inspector Mark Jackson said, 'There appears to be a change in society that made people think it is okay to attack a cop.' He said that a growing number of middle-aged and young women were attacking police. 'There seems to be a trend these days for people taking police on—pushing the officer, spitting on the officer, punching the officer,' Inspector Jackson said.

Let us consider those assault figures again. Of the 2,743 police assaulted, 593 were female officers. About 40 per cent of police are females these days. These cowards who attack cops have never had the odds so much in their favour. As one report said, the odds always were in favour of anyone with a king hit. Imagine the chances of a female police officer against premeditated assault from a brute twice her size. As I said, the most recent assault figures should be of concern to every member of parliament.

Now, police minister Neil Roberts argues that since 2006-07 the rate of assaults on police as a whole had dropped by 4.32 per cent, from 278 assaults per 1,000 police officers to 266. But let us have a closer look at the latest figures, those figures released by the police minister himself. In the category of assaults on police occasioning bodily harm, in 2008-09 there were 47 assaults. In the first six months of 2009-10, there were 35. If it continues at that rate, it would equate to a 48 per cent increase over the previous year—almost a 50 per cent increase. In the category of serious assaults not covered under other categories, in 2008-09 there were 662 assaults. In the first six months of 2009-10, there were 367 assaults. That equates to more than a 10 per cent increase. The Bligh government argues that things are improving—the reality proves otherwise.

The LNP’s bill does not just deal with attacks involving iron bars or punching. Spitting or spraying blood on police has become an all too common offence. This bill seeks to introduce a minimum sentencing range for serious assaults on police where the assault involves biting, spitting or throwing bodily fluid or faeces. Between December 2008 and June 2009 police officers made 155 WorkCover claims for assaults against them and in almost half of those cases the officer was exposed to blood or bodily fluid.

In a case late last year, District Court Judge Tony Rafter SC highlighted the problems police could face after being assaulted on the job. Judge Rafter awarded compensation to a female police constable who was bitten and spat on by a drunken woman who had refused to get out of a taxi in Brisbane’s Fortitude Valley. A male constable was awarded $8,500 after he was bitten by a woman. In both cases Judge Rafter highlighted the mental and nervous shock for the officers, who had a long wait to find out if they had contracted hepatitis C or HIV. He also noted that in both cases the officers’ relationships had broken down. The Police Union said the breakdown of relationships was one of the major problems for police who were victims of serious assault charges involving spitting and biting. It means they can have little contact with their children or partners. He said it puts a major strain on their relationships.

It is not just police that are under attack. Thirty-eight assaults on ambulance officers were recorded in 2007-08, soaring to 107 in 2008-09. A further 21 assaults were reported in the first six weeks of 2009-10. They included officers being spat on, threatened, punched, kicked or bitten. The Emergency Medical Service Protection Association, which represents 800 paramedics and ambulance workers in Queensland, said assaults were becoming more frequent and more severe. But in Queensland chances are the offender will receive a fine unless they have a criminal record. The 37-year-old female who recently pleaded guilty to kicking a North Queensland policewoman in the face received 18 months probation. A report in the Sunshine Coast Daily of 24 May headed ‘Punched, bitten, spit on, kicked—justice comes cheap’ states—

A Sunshine Coast police officer will receive just $10 a week in compensation for a savage attack that has left her career in tatters.

It goes on to say—

When her attacker appeared in Maroochydore Magistrates Court, she pleaded guilty to serious assault of a police officer and received nine months probation.
As the article says, this female officer was punched, bitten, spat on and kicked. While I am extremely cautious about the use of mandatory sentencing, the disturbing increase in the number of serious assaults on police and of assailants going relatively unpunished—as my examples indicate—has persuaded me that this is the right course of action.

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (8.59 pm): I am very happy to rise this evening and add my support to the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill before the House on behalf of the Kawana electorate. May I premise my remarks by answering one of the issues raised by the honourable the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General raised the issue of how can it be just to give young people, first-time offenders and second-time offenders a mandatory three-month jail sentence? I throw that back to the Attorney on behalf of all the police officers, fireys and ambulance officers. How can it be just that they get spat on every night? How can it be just to be assaulted like that?

The Attorney can only think of the poor person who has perpetrated that violence against the officer. That is what is at the forefront of the Attorney’s mind—not the victim but the perpetrator. He thinks, ‘Because they are a first-time offender, let us encourage them, let us cuddle them, let us put them back in society so they can go to the CBD next Friday night and do it all over again.’ That is why this bill should be supported. I look forward to the member for Chatsworth crossing the floor tonight because he is an ex-firey and he will understand firsthand why this bill needs to pass this place tonight.

The Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill was introduced by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. From the outset, I would like to place on the record my support for the shadow Attorney-General’s bill which provides further protection to the good men and women working for our state police, ambulance, fire and rural fire offices. I am confident that the introduction of a minimum sentence range for serious assaults that involve bodily harm, biting or spitting on emergency services personnel will act as a stronger deterrent to those in our community who have little respect for our emergency services personnel and the invaluable service they provide to our communities.

Unfortunately, there is an increasing societal trend where people think it is okay to assault emergency services personnel, and the numbers speak for themselves. In 2007, there were 429 offenders who were convicted of serious assaults against police officers. The bill before the House seeks a minimum sentencing range of three months imprisonment for all serious assaults on police where the assault involves biting, spitting or throwing bodily fluid or faeces. Between December 2008 and June 2009, police officers made 155 WorkCover claims for assaults against them, and in 72 of those cases the officer was exposed to blood or bodily fluid. In 2007-08, 38 assaults were made against ambulance officers and this jumped to 107 in 2008-09. In 2009-10, the number is continuing to escalate and evidently is spiralling out of control. Honourable members, this is not good enough. Our emergency services personnel deserve to have the right to personal safety and protection in the workplace.

It is the height of hypocrisy for Labor Party members to oppose this measure, given that they regard themselves as the workers’ party—except when it comes to police, who were recently insulted with the pay rise offer that was put forward by this Labor government; or our doctors and nurses who cannot even be paid correctly, if at all; or our miners, who were sold out to Rudd and ‘Fake Gillard’ at the time with the introduction of the great big new tax on mining; or our teachers last year who had to strike twice before they could get a decent pay rise offered. Then there is the WorkCover scheme which is in place to compensate workers who are injured in the workplace which this government managed to bankrupt before it was resurrected earlier this year.

It seems to me that the longer the Bligh Labor government is in office the more and more it marginalises the hundreds of thousands of workers from the many industries all over this great state which it claims to represent. While Labor members continue to state that they are for jobs and jobs growth in Queensland, they are all talk and no action. What the people of Queensland are crying out for is real action.

It is no surprise that it requires the LNP opposition to stand up for our emergency services personnel and restore some order in our system, because the Bligh Labor government has adopted the softly, softly approach and it is quite clear that this approach has not worked. It was the same in Western Australia, where the Liberal government had to restore order on the streets. Stronger measures need to be implemented in Queensland as a measure of protection for our police, ambulance, fire and rural fire officers.

Only last weekend, a police officer was assaulted while pulling a motorist over for a random breath test on the Sunshine Motorway, which is on the border of my electorate. Details of the incident were reported in the Sunshine Coast Daily on 1 August 2010 and the article read as follows:

A DRUNK driver struck a police officer in the face after driving on the Sunshine Motorway while more than four times the legal blood alcohol limit, police said.

The 36-year-old Mountain Creek man was pulled over by a patrol unit at Mooloolaba about 4.20am yesterday. The man allegedly gave a positive blood alcohol roadside test before returning a 0.219% BAC at Maroochydore Police Station.
A year after being savagely king-hit from behind while trying to break up a brawl involving about 80 people at the nightclub strip, the 27-year-old still bears the scars.

But the vicious thug behind the cowardly July 4 attack is still walking the streets.

It took surgery and a love of her job to get her back to general duty work.

'I couldn’t wait to get back because I love my job. I was a bit nervous about going down Flinders St for the first time though.

When I heard a job come over the radio involving a brawl I felt my heart start pounding.’

Constable Luscombe spent three days in hospital following surgery to reconstruct part of her face.

'I had a fractured eye socket, fractured cheek bone and my jaw was fractured near my ear,’ she said.

During surgery they put in six titanium plates behind and around my eye.

'I have scars at the bottom of my ear and all the way over the top of my head ...
This is just one of the hundreds of incidents that occur every year as a result of assaults on police officers, ambulance officers and, likewise, our local fireies. The real issue here is getting the clear message out that if any thug, crim or big-noter seriously assaults police officers, ambos or fireies they will be punished and do time in jail.

The core issue here is the protection of our emergency service workers and having laws that deter this degeneration of our police officers and emergency services officers. The Queensland Police Union has strongly backed the introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing for those who choose to show the ultimate disregard for the authority of police officers. If members of the public know that the serious assault on police officers, fireies or ambulance officers will result in jail time, they will be less likely to resort to this behaviour. The proposed amendments also send a clear message to our emergency services. Our emergency services have been gutted by the inadequacies of our courts when it comes to sentencing the perpetrators of violence against police officers, fireies and ambulance officers. These men and women do an incredible job of protecting the public or assisting police. However, they are increasingly finding themselves on the receiving end of assaults.

It is a poor reflection on this government to underpay our emergency services personnel. The government is in breach of its duty of care if it fails to ensure that the law effectively protects those whose job it is to enforce it. The most effective way to do this is to make sure that the penalties for assaults on our police officers are enough to deter perpetrators from physically attacking officers by spitting on them or other monstrous behaviours that expose police officers and emergency personnel to blood and faeces. These low acts need to be dealt with decisively and effectively.

**Mrs CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—Ind) (9.13 pm): I rise to speak to the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill 2010. I place on record my absolute respect for all of our police officers, our fire officers, our ambulance officers and, even though they are not mentioned in the bill, officers such as those who work in the SES and St John’s—those who volunteer in areas of service where they do come across people who are perhaps stressed at the time of an incident and who may act out in a way that given more normal circumstances they would not. I certainly do not support in any way, shape or form vicious attacks on these officers. In fact, I do not support vicious attacks on anybody, whether it is a person in the street, a person of a sexual orientation or perhaps a volunteer in an organisation, particularly where that organisation might meet the needs of people who are marginalised. All of those groups can at times act in a way that is unacceptable in the normal course of events. But let us be honest: many of these people—police, fire officers, ambulance officers, nurses, doctors—work in an environment that could be described as not the normal course of events.

I want to place on the record my great respect for all people in the emergency services and, indeed, in all of these other voluntary roles. I am very concerned, however, about the notion of mandatory sentencing. I have to say—and I have been accused of hypocrisy here tonight—that if we were debating a bill about mandatory sentencing for sexual perverts, for people who abuse children, I would probably hold a different view because I am not very tolerant at all of people who hurt our children. However, I do believe that there are circumstances that mitigate these events. It does not happen often—certainly not always—but there are circumstances that should be taken into account.

Let me use the debate we had earlier tonight to demonstrate my level of concern. In that earlier debate I was accused of being a hypocrite. I was accused of voting in a contrary manner in the mid-1990s in relation to the sale of a bank. Did I vote in favour of the sale of the bank? Yes, those facts are correct. With regard to any of the people who accused me of hypocrisy—the Premier and the Minister for Public Works did and I am not sure if the Attorney-General did but the Minister for Transport and the Treasurer certainly did—did any of them in their contributions to the debate wrap the circumstances of my vote into the debate tonight? Not at all. Did they know the circumstances surrounding the final decision on my part to vote the way that I did? No, because they were not in attendance at the discussions, if indeed you could call them discussions. However, the circumstances surrounding the event mitigate against what happened as a result. Again, I am not justifying violence against our emergency services officers. Alcohol fuelled violence does not justify the offence of violence, but it speaks to whether there was premeditation. Indeed, it speaks to whether there is any memory of the event afterwards.

The bill put forward by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition intends to establish mandatory sentencing for a range of offenders found guilty of seriously assaulting police, ambulance and fire officers where the assault involves biting, spitting or throwing bodily fluids—and I assume that is predominantly blood or faeces—at an officer in the course of their duties. Biting and spitting are completely unacceptable, but they can be incredibly spontaneous reactions to a circumstance. I have some difficulty in standing here and supporting legislation that would attach a mandatory three-month prison sentence to somebody who, because they felt aggrieved or threatened, bit or spat at a police officer, and in some circumstances that officer may be in plain clothes. Throwing bodily fluid, that is blood, as opposed to blood from an injury attaching to an officer or throwing faeces at an officer could indicate some premeditation. I would hope that, in the hearing of that event, the courts would take into account the opportunity for the offender to prepare to commit the offence or whether it was an offence of spontaneity.
I reiterate that I do not support violence against any of our emergency services officers. Indeed I do not support violence against any volunteer in any area of service to our community. But I do have real problems with mandatory sentencing. In this instance, whilst I respect the role of police officers, ambulance officers and fire officers, I cannot support this bill which effectively intends to introduce mandatory sentencing into our legal system.

It is important in two ways. It is important that offenders understand the seriousness of the offence and that if there are grounds for a custodial sentence that that is given. It is important for the judiciary to understand that, whilst this parliament may not support or pass mandatory sentencing laws, we do expect that appropriate sentences will be attached to offences that reflect the gravity of the offence, the circumstances of the offence and the history of the offender. On those bases, I will not be supporting the legislation.

Mr KILBURN (Chatsworth—ALP) (9.20 pm): I hate to disappoint the member for Kawana, but I rise to oppose the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill. Firstly, let me make it abundantly clear that no-one in Queensland should ever have to put up with being assaulted in the course of their duties or, in fact, at any other time. In my 15 years as a fire officer I witnessed firsthand and was involved in many occasions where the type of behaviour being identified in this bill was on show. I think it is a shame that—

Mr Dempsey interjected.

Mr KILBURN: You will get your turn. I think it is a shame that on a matter of this much importance those in the LNP will do as they usually do and play politics with the issue. They will play politics with this issue because they know that they can get a free headline in the paper tomorrow for pretending to be the friend of emergency service workers whom they want to wrap their arms around when it suits them.

The member for Kawana talked as though crime is out of control in the streets. I am a bit afraid to walk down to the car park after listening to his speech. He says that there is that much crime and everything is out of control. That is utter garbage. We all know that it is utter garbage. Those opposite are aiming for a headline. They will get it. They are safe in the knowledge that they will get a headline because we will do the right thing; we will do the hard thing and vote against mandatory sentencing.

There is no evidence anywhere and no-one on the other side has presented evidence that mandatory sentencing reduces crime. The member for Southern Downs loves to quote law societies when it suits him. In fact, there is evidence that shows the exact opposite. The National Children’s and Youth Law Centre has done a survey that shows that mandatory sentencing may be perceived as solid law and order; however, there is significant research which indicates that rather than acting as a deterrent a sentencing system which accelerates contact with the prison system will in fact lead to higher and more serious reoffending.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms O’Neill): Order! Just a moment, member for Chatsworth. Could you stop conversing across the chamber please, gentlemen. The member for Chatsworth has the call.

Mr KILBURN: I will say that again. The research has shown that any law that accelerates contact with the prison system will in fact lead to higher and more serious reoffending, higher rates of recidivism and ultimately higher crime rates. That is the exact opposite to what those opposite purport to be trying to achieve. We know it is a stunt. It nearly always is a stunt.

The member for Kawana made the statement that the LNP is the party that is strong on law and order and its history shows that. When? What history is that? When those opposite were in power between 1996 and 1998 is that their history? Or is it the history before that when they were in power? We all know what their law and order standards were when last in government before the Borbidge government. I do not think that that is what they want to allude to. Let us not kid ourselves that they are the champions of law and order. They are hypocrites and always have been. And this is their best one since I have been in this House.

Those opposite want to quote those in the legal system. Let us look at what some in the legal system have said. In March 2000 the New South Wales Court of Appeal—Justices Fitzgerald, Stein, Beazley and Wood—said that it is unjust to imprison offenders without regard for their personal circumstances, life experience, prospects of rehabilitation or other more suitable sentences. There are a number of those quotes. I could go on and on.

I know those opposite want to make a big deal about talking about emergency service workers because it is an easy score. I was an emergency service worker, but do those opposite know what I also am? I am also a parent of a 17-year-old who may, on their first trip out to the Valley, or when they go to their school formal or have their first experience in the big wide world, get caught up in something untoward or a bit out of the ordinary and ends up being charged. Under this legislation, they would spend three months in jail with no chance of appeal and no bail. It would destroy the rest of their life.
So you can stand up here and tell us all your hard luck stories and how terrible things are, but after a couple of years under your law we would be hearing how young people’s lives were being destroyed by the unfair and ridiculous law that you are seeking to pass through this House.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Chatsworth, address your comments through the chair.

Mr KILBURN: You should be ashamed of it. Mandatory sentencing does not work. It has not worked anywhere. You should try and use a bit more common sense.

This bill purports to introduce a mandatory term of imprisonment for people charged with serious assault against police, ambulance, fire and rescue and rural fire officers. I say again that I do not believe that anyone should ever be assaulted in their workplace. I support strong action being taken but I will not support, in this instance, mandatory sentencing.

This bill is designed to undermine the criminal justice system by taking away the discretion of sentencing judges to impose the appropriate sentence in certain circumstances. In doing so, it signals to the wider community that we do not trust magistrates and judges to do their jobs. We know that that is the case for the LNP. This is in keeping with the attitude of the LNP, particularly towards magistrates. I refer to the media release put out by the member for Southern Downs after last night’s debate where he described the bill, which transferred significant jurisdiction down from the District Court to the Magistrates Court, as a dumbing down of the courts.

The Minister for Police said previously that the coalition had done everything including bringing back the guillotine. I know that was said in jest. I did notice that the member for Gregory laughed. However, I also heard him say that jail is not good enough for them. We know that the policy of those opposite is somewhere between jail and the guillotine. It will be interesting to see what their opinion is when it comes to a legitimate penal system. Is it stoning? What are they going to bring back—crucifixion? Let us put it on the table and see what they think it should be.

It also plays well to the opposition’s usual scream that crime is out of control in Queensland and the courts do not impose appropriate sentences. Those opposite may think it is funny to come in here and make out that crime is out of control, we cannot walk down the street, everything is spiralling out of control—we heard that many times tonight. They might think it is funny playing politics and that it is a great gig. Do members know what I do not find funny? I do not find it funny that people like the members opposite want to make a big deal and pretend that crime is out of control.

My grandmother is too scared to walk out of her door because she thinks that crime is out of control in this state. All the evidence—and anyone who wants to take the time to look will see—shows that that is utter garbage. It is a fear campaign. It strikes fear in the hearts of people in this state. Members opposite should be absolutely ashamed of the way they do that. It is not good for our society. They should think hard before they go about making out that crime is out of control. It is ridiculous.

I challenge members of the opposition in this House to take the step that their colleagues in New South Wales have done and not encourage a law and order auction. But those opposite will. They should carefully consider options that are in the best interests of the criminal justice system. The opposition legal affairs spokesman in New South Wales, Greg Smith, has said that the New South Wales Liberals have decided to ditch the usual law and order auction because history has shown that such policies did not work. ‘I don’t think it has improved the community, I don’t think it has helped cut down crime,’ he said. I have Liberal Party support for this view that the law and order auction should not be continued.

However, he was realistic about the fact that such an attitude still exists. ‘I know there are still rednecks out there who want mandatory sentencing and that sort of thing,’ he said. Do we know why that came from a Liberal member of New South Wales parliament and not a National Party member? Up here there are no Liberals; there are just Nats. They have taken over. The Liberals have been neutered and the half decent Liberals who stand up for rights in the community have been crippled by the old rednecks in the National Party. This is a perfect example of it. I find it hard to actually know what the member for Southern Downs really thinks about mandatory sentencing. Recently on Mackay radio he said—

Well, there is no doubt we should all believe in judicial discretion. And you know, the Parliament shouldn’t be sitting in the Court actually telling a judge what to do.

That is what the member for Southern Downs said in Mackay, and here he is today bringing in a bill to tell judges what to do—no discretion, no ability to use common sense, no ability to take into account people's circumstances; lock them up. It is the usual National Party redneck way of lock them up and throw away the key—‘we’ll get a bit of a headline’—and do not think about the consequences down the line. The evidence shows that it is going to increase crime, lock up people who should not be in jail and get them in there learning how to be proper criminals.
I could go on all night talking about the hypocrisy of the Liberal National Party—or the National Party. But I say again: no-one in this House—and I believe that sincerely on both sides of this House—thinks that police or any other person who works in Queensland should be assaulted. It is a disgrace. As a member of the Law, Justice and Safety Committee, I can say that all members of that committee participated in trips to the Valley and to Townsville with the police. I know that they have a very difficult job and I will support anything that reasonably allows us to make sure that the punishment fits the crime. But mandatory sentencing will not solve the problem. It is a stunt. Those opposite know it and they should be ashamed of themselves.

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—LNP) (9.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill. The last member to speak mentioned hypocrisy. It gets me how Labor members in their speeches say that these offences should not be condoned but, at the end of the day, they are not going to do anything about it. The last Labor member who spoke said, ‘Don’t send anyone to jail because that will affect them even more and they will offend even more.’ He also said that, basically, anyone over the age of 17 should not take responsibility for their actions. I am a great believer in rights, but I believe also in responsibilities and community expectations.

Assaults on police, ambulance officers and firefighters are appalling acts that threaten the people who protect our community. As a parliament, we need to act to ensure that the people who protect us are not abused for doing their job—a job that is to serve the people of Queensland, a job that has different expectations. These people are not volunteers; they are people who go with the set task to turn up and take away people’s liberties and rights when they have committed an offence. They know the seriousness of it. They know the judicial system. Their job is to get out there and do the hard task of putting people before the courts. Then the courts make the decisions and then the sentencing will come down to the mandatory sentencing. For example, if you have a young person before the court, they first have to be found guilty by their peers before a sentence is handed down. So the government’s argument is blown out of the water there. The law needs to not only be an adequate deterrent; it needs to be uncompromising in handing down penalties on thugs who assault paramedics, firefighters and police.

In my previous occupation in the Police Service, as I mentioned before, in our induction we were always told to serve without favour, affection, malice or ill will but also we were told the importance of taking away a person’s rights and obstructing their liberties and, most importantly, the need to meet community expectations. When police turn up to a task, they cannot simply walk away. They are the front line for the community. When they turn up to a bar fight or a domestic, they cannot think, ‘Look, I’m going to get assaulted here. I’ve got to walk back out.’ They have to take those risks and action into line. They have to be the front line for the community. They have to meet the community’s expectations and serve the community.

This government also has a duty of care for its police and emergency service workers and it should not take their commitment and dedication for wanting to serve the people in their communities for granted. The minister says that the penalty is seven years. I would like to know how many people who have committed a serious assault have actually received seven years. Before the latest change in the law—going back to when I served in the Police Service—the criminals knew that they could belt a police officer and get 50 bucks. But if they belted someone else in the community, they got a higher sentence plus a higher degree of compensation. The criminals knew that.

A government member: What’s your evidence of that?

Mr DEMPSEY: It is from practical experience. You should go and talk to the 10,000-odd police officers. So what we have to do here is stop—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Bundaberg, I would remind members that the member for Bundaberg has the floor, including members in his own ranks. Please continue.

Mr DEMPSEY: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As I have said previously, criminals have to receive the proper sentences that reflect the community’s expectations. The community does not deserve to be taken for granted. These criminals should know that they will go before the courts, before their peers, and will receive these penalties. The people on the Labor side are saying, ‘They will try to blame these assaults on drugs and alcohol. These people are unable to think properly.’ It is about time people started taking responsibility before they took drugs and alcohol. They should be thinking about their actions. Before they go out and seriously—

A government member interjected.

Mr DEMPSEY: No, I am not talking about a punch; I am talking about seriously assaulting police, ambulance officers or fire officers.

Mr Roberts interjected.
We have heard, this legislation is all about trying to protect our law enforcement officers, our fire and rescue officers, our ambulance officers and our rural fire brigade officers—those people who are at the front line every day. They have no choice. It is hard work.

I have talked to many police officers, fires and ambos. Plenty of them declined to comment when asked the question about mandatory sentencing, but I did not get one that said it was a bad idea. Everyone whom I spoke to who was prepared to answer said this is a good bit of legislation, it is long overdue and it is the sort of protection that they need. They will be so disappointed when they hear the comments of the Attorney-General tonight and those opposite if they do not support this legislation. This is the protection that they need and want so that when their families send them off to work they know that they have that level of protection that they never had before.

Mr DEMPSEY: The minister is interrupting again. He is saying that it is inappropriate. It is inappropriate and unacceptable to put someone in a work position and not give them the proper laws to protect them. There were 286 assaults in 2008 and 260 for 2009. We need to be able to protect those people because, at the end of the day, there is a duty of care. We also have to make sure that we create proper workplaces. If not, what will happen is that the police will enhance their strategic alliances, their tactical output to counter those people who are committing these serious assaults. There again, it is too uncompromising. The community expectations are there. With those words, I fully support the shadow Attorney-General in his attempts with this bill.

Mr DOWLING: (Redlands—LNP) (9.36 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Criminal Code (Serious Assaults on Police and Particular Other Persons) Amendment Bill introduced by the shadow Attorney-General, the member for Southern Downs, and I take great pleasure in doing so. As we have heard, this legislation is all about trying to protect our law enforcement officers, our fire and rescue officers, our ambulance officers and our rural fire brigade officers—those people who are at the front line every day. They have no choice. It is hard work.

An opposition member: It’s hard work.

Mr DOWLING: Exactly right; it is tough work. They uphold the law, they uphold the good order of the community and they hold it up for absolutely everyone except themselves. It is not held up for them. As we have heard from a former serving officer, police are called into brawls, domestic violence situations, road crashes—times when people are emotionally charged. But that does not give those people the right to assault and attack these front-line officers.

I know an officer who is a resident of my electorate. His name is Matthew Burchard and he was recently the recipient of the Valour Award. He confronted a situation in which a party had got out of hand. As I understand it, he was then trapped in a shed where his partner had been bludgeoned by a bottle. Matthew Burchard protected that officer. He dragged him to the corner of the shed and used only his courage, his wits and his baton to protect his mate. He held people at bay for up to half an hour before the reinforcements could get there and save him. That other officer spent ages in hospital. I will not go into the details, but he is still suffering some side effects. When will officers expect the protection that this bill provides?

Two officers in my electorate work in single-officer environments on Macleay Island and Russell Island. They are working out there all alone. The backup is not a phone call away. The best-case scenario is 30 minutes before they are going to get any help. Those guys, Mick Verry and Brad Rantall, need the support that this legislation will provide. I have also been out to the community where there is an expectation that this government will provide good law and order and protection. We either want law and order or we do not. This is about re-establishing some law and order. I have heard members opposite say that it has not been proven that these mandatory sentences actually work. If they did not work why is it that in every other circumstance we have mandatory penalties? This is the only area where we do not have mandatory penalties for offences committed against the laws of the land.

Mrs Sullivan: That’s bullshit.

Mr DOWLING: It is not ‘BS’. I take the interjection from the member for Pumicestone. If you are speeding down the highway the fine is set; there is no grey area, there is no wriggle room. This should be the same. Fire and rescue officers also need protection. We heard from the member for Chatsworth that he had seen and had had experiences where he had been caught up in circumstances where people were behaving badly. Those officers demand this protection and they should have it. Ambulance officers get caught up in the worst possible circumstances. They go out and deal with junkies who have overdosed on drugs, domestic violence situations and car crashes. They are at the front line and are at risk of assault in the line of their duty.

If there was any other workplace anywhere in society where the staff or the people who were sent out to perform the job were bashed, assaulted, spat upon or sworn at, those employers would not be allowed to maintain those practices. It is not acceptable for any other workplace, and nor should it be. It should not be acceptable that these men and women who go out and put their lives on the line in order to actually protect the values and the lifestyles that we want, the peace of mind that we want as a community, do not get the protection that they deserve. It is an absolute minimum expectation that they should get that protection.

I have talked to many police officers, fires and ambos. Plenty of them declined to comment when asked the question about mandatory sentencing, but I did not get one that said it was a bad idea. Everyone whom I spoke to who was prepared to answer said this is a good bit of legislation, it is long overdue and it is the sort of protection that they need. They will be so disappointed when they hear the comments of the Attorney-General tonight and those opposite if they do not support this legislation. This is the protection that they need and want so that when their families send them off to work they know that they have that level of protection that they never had before.
I have been out to community groups, school P&Cs, Neighbourhood Watch meetings and I cannot find a single person out there who does not think that this is a good idea—not one. I defy those opposite to find one person, other than the members opposite, who could argue the toss that this is a bad piece of legislation. While three months may seem like a fairly short period of time—it is almost a non-existent minimum sentence—it is a hell of a lot more than they are getting at the moment. The only flexibility that there should be on that piece of legislation is that the judge has that as a starting point. The judge can actually add to it to measure up to the severity of the incident.

The comments that we heard here tonight from the Attorney-General are a tragic joke. He criticised the drafting of the legislation by the opposition because somehow we have so many resources. I have been here now a little over 12 months and I can recall a suite of amendments for just about every bit of legislation that this government has rammed through. It has the entire resources of government yet it cannot get its legislation right. What on earth is going on? How on earth can that be a valid criticism? It is a complete joke. I have sat here and watched amendment after amendment after amendment on serious legislation. No matter how much time and effort the government seems to throw at it, it seems to get it wrong. It is about mismanagement. It is rife. It is through the entire Labor side of government. Imagine hiding behind some of these offenders—the poor swines, they are drug influenced and they have had a moment of madness. What kind of defence is that? Just as ignorance of the law is no defence, an offender cannot walk into a court and say he did not know that that was the law. Lack of sobriety is no defence whatsoever. It is a joke to hide behind that.

I have spoken to a number of people in the police force, the police union, the police media wing and staff of government departments in Western Australia. I was actually surprised that they were good enough to talk me through some of their legislation. Their requirement for assault is a serious assault. They almost require broken limbs, stitches or hospitalisation. They do not have spitting and biting in their legislation. I think it is critical that in this legislation we have done that. The shadow Attorney-General, the member for Southern Downs, is to be commended for actually putting that into the bill. I think it is essential. The mandatory sentences in Western Australia are starting to bite. Certainly that is the indication that was given to me talking to officers in Western Australia. What they did say was that it was relatively new legislation and that over time they would get a much better handle on the way things are going.

This legislation is long overdue. It should be introduced into this House by the government, as it has been by the shadow Attorney-General. It should be supported by those opposite instead of running and hiding. It is an absolute joke that they are running and hiding, hair splitting and dodging the real issue. This is good legislation and deserves support. I will be supporting it when the vote comes.

Debate, on motion of Mr Dowling, adjourned.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Acting Leader of the House) (9.46 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

Reedy Creek Interchange

Ms BATES (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (9.46 pm): I rise this evening to speak yet again on behalf of the long-suffering residents of Reedy Creek. The exit 85 upgrade is currently underway and with the final construction beginning to take shape and residents becoming increasingly more aware of what the finished project will look like, there remain grave concerns from locals about the supposed 20-year traffic modelling which led to the design of this interchange.

I have been approached by many locals voicing their concern over the fact that the finished project will only serve to increase their frustrations, not alleviate them. Frustrations run high in peak periods as residents and parents try to negotiate traffic to reach work, home or drop their children off at the three Christian schools within walking distance of one another. An average two-kilometre trip takes up to 40 minutes and, sadly, this does not look like changing even when the current project is completed. From the project plans it is easy to see that when completed a motorist wanting to travel south will have to travel through at least five sets of traffic lights, adding considerable time to their trip.

The planning or lack thereof clearly shows this Labor government’s inability to consult with the community on any meaningful level other than a glossy brochure stuffed in with the Woolworths brochure which is then binned by the majority of residents. If the minister and his cronies actually took the time to ask residents what they need they would have a greater understanding of the local area and the way in which traffic flows through this congested interchange. It is not rocket science. A recent traffic count performed by the Gold Coast City Council would have uncovered that approximately 4,000 cars from Reedy Creek and the observatory use the interchange to head either south or north on the M1. Of these 4,000 vehicles, 2,000 of them actually want to head south. It is absolutely absurd that residents who wish to travel south have to endure five sets of traffic lights before getting onto the M1.
There is a very easy solution to fix the problem and I ask the Minister for Main Roads to take some notes. The Bermuda Street interchange is nowhere near capacity. Old Coach Road which runs parallel with the M1 and requires a mere 285 metres of bitumen to join it to exit 89 has the potential to take 2,000 car trips a day off the exit 85 interchange, thereby alleviating much of the congestion both now and into the future, cutting a considerable amount of time off trips in peak periods. The Bermuda Street interchange is more than capable of dealing with the extra volume of traffic and I see no valid reason that this project could not be started today.

In my electorate alone I have three major road projects currently under construction causing havoc for commuters. How is this forward planning? Whilst residents have been crying out for these interchanges and the upgrade to the M1 to commence, they are all 10 years too late already. I call on the Minister for Main Roads to come down to the electorate of Mudgeeraba, meet with myself and residents and witness the problem firsthand. I also call on the member for Burleigh, whose electorate the Bermuda Street interchange is in, to work with her local Councillor, Daphne McDonald, myself and the soon to be federal member for McPherson, Karen Andrews, as a show of bipartisan support for a traffic dilemma affecting both sides of our electorates. I eagerly await the meeting with the member for Burleigh that I have requested in writing some months ago. I am sure that the residents of Reedy Creek will eagerly anticipate that meeting as well.

Petrie to Kippa-Ring Rail Line

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (9.49 pm): There is something that I have been wanting to tell the House for 23 years, and that is that the Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail link is about to be constructed. This is going to change completely the lives and the lifestyles of the people I represent. People who will eagerly anticipate that meeting as well.

Burleigh that I have requested in writing some months ago. I am sure that the residents of Reedy Creek traffic dilemma affecting both sides of our electorates. I eagerly await the meeting with the member for the soon to be federal member for McPherson, Karen Andrews, as a show of bipartisan support for a traffic dilemma affecting both sides of our electorates. I eagerly await the meeting with the member for Burleigh that I have requested in writing some months ago. I am sure that the residents of Reedy Creek will eagerly anticipate that meeting as well.

Petrie to Kippa-Ring Rail Line

Hon. DM WELLS (Murrumba—ALP) (9.49 pm): There is something that I have been wanting to tell the House for 23 years, and that is that the Petrie to Kippa-Ring rail link is about to be constructed. This is going to change completely the lives and the lifestyles of the people I represent. People who currently cannot get jobs because they have no transport to the kind of work that they would like to do will be able to get jobs. People who were previously unable to access the kinds of cultural activities or the kinds of entertainments that they are interested in will be able to do so. Children who have not been able to get to events relevant to their education will be able to do so. When this railway line is built, it will transform the lives of the people of the Redcliffe peninsula, North Lakes and Mango Hill.

This is a massive and incredible achievement. It is an achievement that is so considerable for our area that some people do not believe it. Some journalists have said to me, with the kind of cynicism that I found rather amazing, 'Why should we believe it? It's been promised before.' The reason that they should believe it is because it is actually an intergovernmental agreement. There are some things that people in public office cannot and do not tell fibs about. Members of parliament and governments do not tell fibs about what they are going to do when they make an intergovernmental agreement about it, because if they did the consequence would be that the person that they are squibbing on is actually the legal person of another government and they are guaranteed of getting a front-page pasting every time that other government accuses them of squibbing.

This is an intergovernmental agreement because the federal government and the state government have come on board. The persistence and the diligence of the federal member for Petrie, Yvette D’Ath, has delivered $742 million from the Commonwealth government. The vision and the insight of the mayor of the Moreton Bay Regional Council, Alian Sutherland, has ensured that $105 million will come from the local council. Now the railway line is going to be built. When the railway line is completed, Hercules Road State School will not only be a very fine state school but also it will be the site of a rail terminus. If that school lasts for another 500 years, the children will still be taught that line is completed, Hercules Road State School will not only be a very fine state school but also it will be the site of a rail terminus. If that school lasts for another 500 years, the children will still be taught that the Herculean decision to build the line was taken while Bligh was the Premier, O’Neill was the member for Kallangur, van Litsenburg was the member for Redcliffe and Wells was the member for Murrumba.

(Time expired)

Padman, Mr L

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (9.52 pm): I rise to commemorate the life of Lester Padman OBE. Lester passed away on 11 July 2010 at the grand old age of 93. Up until his passing, he was an enthusiastic and committed community member who devoted a large portion of his time and his business life to serving the community, not only where he lived but also throughout Queensland and Australia. He was a long-term member of the Liberal Party of Australia. He was an alderman for Clayfield in the Brisbane City Council for two terms as a member of the CMO. A little while ago he turned out at two particularly significant preselections. As a member of the CMO, Les was one of a small band that bore up under the weight of Clem Jones and the ALP in the Brisbane City Council of the 1960s.

Les had a long, interesting and fulfilling life. He was educated at Sydney Technical High School. As a child of the Depression he was interested in one thing and one thing only, which was getting and keeping a job. As a result, he was apprenticed as a photolithographer at 12s 6d per week. He carried on in that role until 1940, at which time he resigned to join the Army. He served in Darwin, was commissioned as a lieutenant and posted to the 2/3 composite anti-aircraft regiment of the 9th Division,
with a posting to Borneo from 1944 to 1945. He was demobbed in 1946 and in 1947 he married his wife and love, Linfaye. He rejoined his old employer and within three years had become a director of that company, which was then employing over 80 people.

In 1959 he moved to Brisbane and bought a small, underperforming company called Press Etching Pty Ltd. In 1964 he was elected President of the Printing Industries Association of Australia. During 1964-65 in Queensland the industry was running short of skilled labour, so he joined a state government led trade mission to the United Kingdom to try to find skilled printers. He succeeded in doing so, bringing 50 printers back to Brisbane. However, while in the UK he received an offer from the cultural workers union of Moscow to visit the USSR, which he did, despite some considerable opposition. He found it one of the most enjoyable and interesting experiences of his life.

Les was President of the Queensland YMCA from 1969 to 1975. He was a long-term member of the Australian Institute of Management, serving as president from 1981 to 1982, and was also an honorary life member. For a period of 10 years from 1979 he was chairman of Brisbane's Warana Festival and he subsequently supported Sir Llew Edwards at World Expo 88 in providing cultural and artistic entertainments and shows. He was appointed chairman for the Year of the Disabled in Queensland and served in that role in the mid-1980s. I think one of his great achievements was that he found jobs for 5,747 disabled job seekers. In 1986 he was awarded an OBE and was appointed honorary consul for Belgium for 10 years from 1984. He was also the founder of the Queensland publishing company, Boolarong Publications.

Les was a tremendous supporter of the community. He was a great man and he will be sorely missed. I pass on my condolences to Linfaye, Craig, Sally Anne and their families.

**Courier-Mail Article**

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (9.55 pm): I rise in relation to a story in the Courier-Mail dated 11 June titled ‘MPs need time to sleep on it’ written by Anna Caldwell, with a photo taken several years ago of me speaking during debate. The story strongly suggested that I was asleep in the parliament chamber after 10.30 pm on Wednesday, 9 July during the last sitting week. Upon reading the article, my parliamentary colleagues from both sides of the House expressed to me their concern over the story, saying it was unfair, particularly as they were aware that I had been taking medication all week due to an eye infection and also saying that I was the least likely person to sleep during debate.

On Tuesday of that same week I was granted leave from the whip to get some antibiotics for my right eye, which had become swollen and quite painful. Late on the Wednesday evening I had again asked for leave from the chamber because of my painful eye infection. It was difficult for the whip to grant leave at that time, so I remained in the chamber fully alert but with my eyes closed to ease my condition. I could hear and was fully aware of the debate, with divisions imminent. I had no idea that the Courier-Mail was planning to do a story on the lateness of parliament’s sitting hours and that I was going to be the subject. Simply, the Courier-Mail wanted ‘an example’ to add weight to its story about parliamentary sitting hours and I had my eyes closed at the time.

Does this mean that members of parliament are not able to feel ill in the parliament, rest strained eyes or even blink without being accused by the media of sleeping on the job? Considering the number of hours we spend in the chamber, it is likely that we will blink or close our eyes regularly. I believe that, if sometimes it is necessary to sit until the early hours of the morning to get important legislation through, it is my job as an elected member to do just that.

My colleagues said that I should dispute the article in debate in the House, but I decided instead to write a letter to the editor. I spoke to Colleen Ryan in the letters section of the Courier-Mail. It seems that letters from members of parliament are not given a lot of priority compared to those from other members of the public. Colleen said that she would check with the editor. I then received a phone call from Anna Caldwell, the writer of the article, apologising to me after reading my letter to the editor. She offered to put my explanation on the parliament page for the next day.

Although the resulting article, ‘Eyes have it’, in the Courier-Mail of Saturday, 12 June was not what I had anticipated and less than I had expected, I was pleased that there was at least some clarification made and that I was able to give my explanation of what really occurred that evening. Despite the original story being published without my prior knowledge and without my comments being sought, I think it was pretty decent of Anna Caldwell to call me and apologise. Other journalists may not have cared what was printed, particularly about politicians, and would not have even contemplated contacting me. It is good when someone recognises that things are not always as they seem at first, that there is always another side to every story and that everyone should be allowed their right of reply.
North Stradbroke Island

Dr ROBINSON (Cleveland—LNP) (9.58 pm): On 20 June 2010 the Premier announced a long-term plan for North Stradbroke Island and its residents without warning and without consultation with the community. Since then, my office and the office of the federal member for Bowman, Andrew Laming, received many requests for more information. I wrote to the Premier and asked the Minister for Mines and Energy during estimates to release all impact assessments—job, economic, environment, tourism and et cetera—to the public, but nothing looking like a proper study or report has been provided thus far.

Yesterday, the Minister for Sustainability incorrectly stated that the LNP accepted the Premier’s decision. To correct the minister, the LNP did not accept it, but we did welcome the news that the Premier had finally agreed to the LNP’s call to make 50 per cent national park available in 2011. But that is where our similarities and support ends.

Straddie is not only an island of great beauty, natural wonder, beautiful beaches and a native koala population, among other features, but it also has a sizeable permanent population of more than 2,000 people. It has three main townships, police stations, a primary and a secondary school and during holidays has tens of thousands of visitors. So Straddie is a unique island in many respects and needs to be treated that way. In terms of its population and economy, it is at a difficult juncture.

In reference to Straddie, for her endorsement of the Premier’s rushed and imposed plan, the Minister for Sustainability should be called the ‘minister for unsustainability’ as Labor’s plan will only produce an unsustainable island. Labor’s plan will produce an unsustainable island population. Since 2001, the permanent population has been slowly shrinking. If the Premier shuts down sandmining, it will likely shrink further and faster. Labor’s plan will produce an unsustainable island economy with a loss of $130 million of economic benefit. The Premier is in dream land if she thinks that ecotourism is just suddenly going to fill that gap. In fact, Labor cannot even keep the ferries at Toondah Harbour, the gateway channel to Straddie, from running aground at low tide as they do now.

The Premier’s plan will produce an unsustainable job situation, with more than 600 jobs to go and with a replacement guarantee of no more than 12 ranger jobs in the national park. The ‘minister for unsustainability’ needs to leave her George Street bunker and listen to island residents as I have done. After the minister and Premier flew in to talk to the TV cameras and a few select locals, I sent a survey to every residential home—636 people, almost half the adult population, responded. To start with, 95 per cent of residents surveyed said they had not been consulted by the Premier. They thanked me for asking and caring. This makes a joke of the unsustainability minister’s claim they are consulting the people. A telling 88 per cent of residents outright rejected the Premier’s plan and there is more detail yet to follow.

The island residents who I represent live in hope that Queensland Labor in any shape or form will start listening to them. But they have stopped listening. They are sending Straddie backward, not forward, and the only way to make them listen is to move them out.

(Time expired)

Tropical North Queensland Tourism Opportunity Plan

Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (10.01 pm): Last Tuesday I had the pleasure of assisting tourism minister Peter Lawlor to launch the Tropical North Queensland Tourism Opportunity Plan. This is a plan that will provide direction for the sustainable development of tourism in the tropical north.

Tourism is a major industry for Tropical North Queensland—2.1 million people visited the region in the year to March 2010 and spent more than $2.6 billion. The industry is crucial to the region’s economy, employing 20 per cent of the workforce or about 20,000 people and supporting hundreds of businesses.

The tourism opportunity plan was produced by Tourism Queensland, the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, and Tourism Tropical North Queensland, and is the product of extensive consultation. It recommended 18 ‘catalyst projects’ including: Cairns arts, cultural and events precinct; Australian World Heritage Centre, Cairns; Port Douglas waterfront development; Daintree sustainable tourism gateway; welcome to country experience; education and wellbeing tourism; Clump Point safe boat haven; Tablelands adventure cycle and recreation trails; Barron Gorge tourism precinct; Torres Strait islands experience; Cape York wilderness experience; Great Green Way nature trail; Tropical North Queensland culinary tourism; Tablelands accommodation; Cooktown port and marina; Tropical North Queensland drive tourism private-public partnership; gulf monsoon centre; gulf barramundi program and discovery centre.

The plan also identifies another 30 projects considered to be of regional significance which aim to create a range of investment and employment opportunities. As the tropical north relies heavily on tourism, it has been hard hit by the global economic downturn. That is why the Bligh government’s focus over the past 18 months has been on hard-hitting tactical marketing campaigns aimed at driving bookings to the region—campaigns which, incidentally, have been very successful.
However, the tropical north tourism industry is beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel—and this is great news. As we look towards a hopefully brighter year ahead, it is important that we shift our focus towards identifying new opportunities for the region so that it can continue to prosper. While the region already features a wide variety of quality tourism products and experiences, it is important that we explore new opportunities.

The tourism opportunity plan will help guide how public and private investment and infrastructure can come together to meet the region’s needs. The Bligh government will ensure the region’s potential is realised while at the same time preserving the character, the diversity and the environment that we love about the tropical north.

**Gold Coast Hospital**

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—LNP) (10.04 pm): This year the Gold Coast Hospital has some major milestones—4,000 deliveries; 65,000 patient separations from the casualty-emergency department—it is the busiest in the state; and 20 per cent of those are admitted to hospital. There was a record number of elective surgical cases. Tragically it also had the worst Queensland Health payroll failures in the state’s history. But most of the building infrastructure is in good shape.

The existing Gold Coast Hospital is a major piece of modern health infrastructure. It is crucially located close to the heart of Southport and is immediately adjacent to major inner Southport roads. It has some older buildings that could be demolished. It is situated immediately adjacent to existing major medical establishments that include radiology; radiotherapy—newly constructed with three new bunkers; specialist outpatient and major pathology services. There is also a very large private inpatient hospital, Allamanda, and a separate series of major modern day hospitals located either side of the central hospital. It has been hard to estimate the true cost of it. But a sum of $500 million, exclusive of the land, would not be unreasonable to cite. All our transport systems are directed towards it, as is the rapid transit scheme now being proposed.

There is an 1,100 car space council owned car park and parking for over 2,000 cars in an affordable council owned car park located nearby. The main hospital tower is only 30 years old. It is not in danger of collapse and has many years of serviceable use ahead of it. The hospital site is built on reclaimed land, built largely from the former Ferry Road mineral sands facility.

Today, 2,632 Gold Coasters have petitioned to maintain the existing facility in some form so as to maintain a full service and hopefully expand its service onsite. It will then give medical service capacity for the Gold Coast region when the new Gold Coast University Hospital comes on line in 2013. Why were there so many petitioners, you might ask? It is because state Labor will not make a decision on the site and the incumbent government must realize that ‘no decision’ means nothing is going to happen. Health planning is ultimately all about making a decision, and proper health planning says that decisions are made impartially on the basis of need of patients, and affordability, well in advance to provide certainty to all providers of service.

This existing hospital site needs to be retained as a health facility for the next 30 years, and that is a no-brainer. We need every one of the current 400 plus beds. It is wrong to put doubt out there in the community. Everyone needs certainty. Health decisions are expensive. There are big, long-term implications for an incorrect decision. Near-sighted Brisbane-centric administrative views of the needs of the Gold Coast community may potentially lead to medical disasters. Labor spent 10 years ignoring Robina Hospital, calling it a National Party plot. Similar ignorant views have consigned Coolangatta and now Coomera regions to an even worse situation. Mistakes are made by ignorance and intolerance. To say ‘I was not told’ is never a defence. The Gold Coast Hospital and site must be retained so as to keep the bed percentage at 1.9 per 1,000 of population.

*(Time expired)*

**Cerebral Palsy League, Picnic in the Park**

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (10.08 pm): Families looking for a fun weekend outing enjoyed a treat when Brisbane’s largest free picnic event, Picnic in the Park, run by the Cerebral Palsy League, returned to Roma Street Parklands in my electorate of Brisbane Central on Sunday, 31 July. Picnic in the Park boasted free entry and had something for everyone to enjoy, from amusement rides through to market stalls, all-day entertainment to gourmet food stalls. It was great to be in the company of Minister for Disability Services, Annastacia Palaszczuk, and federal Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children’s Services, Bill Shorten, who delivered a great speech on the day, supporting those who were there enjoying the day, particularly those who were members of the Cerebral Palsy League.

It was also great to be joined by many directors of the Cerebral Palsy League. In particular, Helen Darch did a great job stepping in for the chair, Rowena McNally, who was not able to join us. Also in attendance were directors Susan Rix, Des Orr and Ron Porter, and it was great to catch up with all of them. CEO, Angela Tillmanns, staff and volunteers did an excellent job organising the day. But, in
particular, I want to make a specific mention of Mrs Joan Williams, past director and president of the Parents and Guardians Committee of the CPL, who has worked tirelessly for many years in all of the activities of the Cerebral Palsy League.

Over 4,000Queenslanders were expected to attend the CPL’s Picnic in the Park, supported by the Treasury Casino and Hotel. Congratulations go to CEO, Geoff Hogg, and his daughter Jasmine who was also in attendance for their ongoing support of this fine event. The annual event aims to raise awareness and celebrate the achievements of people with cerebral palsy and a physical disability and it marked the start of Cerebral Palsy Awareness Week from 1 to 7 August. All funds raised on the day will help CPL continue to make a real difference to the lives of Queenslanders with a physical disability.

CPL has its headquarters in New Farm, a wonderful suburb in my electorate of Brisbane Central. It was formed in 1948 by a group of concerned parents to provide services that were not otherwise available from other community agencies. Today, CPL is the largest non-government disability services provider for people with a physical disability in Queensland. It currently assists more than 3,000 people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities and is supported through fund-raising activities and support from the community, the corporate sector and state and federal governments. CPL spends millions of dollars a year to provide services to assist thousands of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities to reach their goals. These goals may include educational attainment, independent living, meaningful employment and participating and contributing within the wider community. I know all in attendance had a wonderful day. It truly is a great event. Congratulations go to the organisers and all the supporters of the Cerebral Palsy League.

Disability Services

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (10.11 pm): I wish to bring to the attention of the House the plight of at least two of my constituents in Hervey Bay at the hands of Disability Services. I was approached last year by one of my constituents, Bryan McConochie, who is the sufferer of multiple sclerosis. This is a degenerative disease that affects Bryan’s ability to walk and shower unaided, among other symptoms. Up until that time, he was receiving care from his daughter and support from one of the care providers in Hervey Bay and from Disability Services. The support from the care provider was withdrawn in early November 2009 and Bryan was placed in the Hervey Base Hospital and he was then transferred to the Maryborough Base Hospital where he remains today. It appears that Bryan has become a statistic—a statistic of a government that is in crisis, a government that no longer has the ability to care for its people.

It was said on the television news recently that Disability Services had implied that this was not their problem. Well, I ask this House for direction as to whose problem this is. Bryan is not sick in the sense that he requires hospitalisation, which keeps someone out of his hospital bed. In fact, I am informed that the hospital has written to Disability Services asking them to consider sending him home. Bryan wants to go home to be cared for in his home by his other daughter with help from a care provider.

I appreciate that funding is always an issue, but in this case something has to be done. This is very unique. In cases like this, these people are disadvantaged. Why can’t they get some sort of care? They are in hospital taking up a hospital bed. Bryan has his own home but he cannot find a carer to care for him in his own home. It is time that we started looking at how we do this and how we get these people with a disability out of the hospital system and into their own homes where they do not take up these hospital beds.

Townsville Visual and Performing Arts Sector

Ms JOHNSTONE (Townsville—ALP) (10.13 pm): The Townsville visual and performing arts sector provides locals and visitors with opportunities to experience world-class productions and exhibitions. Townsville has approximately 50 arts and cultural groups. These range from amateur to professional, young to not so young, and local artists and performers and visiting artists and performers. My family recently attended Props Youth Theatre’s production of Peter Pan at the Pimlico Performing Arts Centre. It was simply sensational. Congratulations go to director, Todd Barty, and the entire cast on a fantastic interpretation of this children’s classic. We were totally blown away.

I would like to acknowledge some other arts events that have been happening in Townsville in the past fortnight. The Barrier Reef Orchestra celebrated its 10th birthday on Sunday, 25 July with a spectacular concert. Visiting conductor Rick McIntyre worked his magic with the entire ensemble and soloists. The event was made even more special with the announcement of three life memberships to Donna McMahon, Jenny Carr and Carol Dal’Osto. They join existing life member, David Pearce. Congratulations to chairperson, Mr Simon McConnell, and the current and past committee members of the ensemble for their volunteer hours, dedication and commitment to this essential community based orchestra in Townsville.
Then on Wednesday last week I had the privilege of opening a miniature and small painting exhibition titled ‘Townsville Is!’ at the Perc Tucker Regional Gallery. Artists from the Townsville Watercolour Group and the Townsville Seniors Arts Group, ably led by teacher Marion O’Shea, have captured the true essence of Townsville. Pieces exhibited captured everything from the former Ross River Meatworks iconic chimney to Castle Hill to the Town Common and Magnetic Island to the V8 Supercars. Artists who had work on display included Helen Radford, Geoff Maidens, Judy Lappin and Julie Boyd among many others. Julie Boyd’s Ross River Meatworks Chimney held special meaning to many of my friends because it was only through the hard work of the late AMIEU organiser, Ray Murphy, and the member for Mundingburra that this remaining piece of the old meatworks and this symbol of Townsville’s working-class history was protected from almost certain demolition if the council had had its way.

This performing and visual arts extravaganza was topped off on Friday with the opening events of the Australian Festival of Chamber Music—a 10-day event which has reached international fame over its 20-year history. Artistic director Piers Lane has compiled a plethora of local, national and international performers who will entertain and delight chamber music lovers who flock to Townsville once a year from all over the world.

Finally, I would like to give quick congratulations to my children’s school, Holy Spirit Cranbrook, on the completion of its solar schools grant project over the recent holidays. The photovoltaic panels that were connected to the Ergon grid and the installation of other essential equipment mean that the school will make significant savings on its electricity bills. Congratulations also go to the school on the success of its inaugural 10,000 Steps Challenge which was held last Friday. Way to go, Mr Lucas, and the entire Holy Spirit team.

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.
Motion agreed to.
The House adjourned at 10.17 pm.

ATTENDANCE