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TUESDAY, 30 APRIL 2013

The Legislative Assembly met at 9.30 am.

Madam Speaker (Hon. Fiona Simpson, Maroochydore) read prayers and took the chair.

For the sitting week, Madam Speaker acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land upon which this parliament is assembled.

ASSENT TO BILLS

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have to report that I have received from Her Excellency the Governor a letter in respect of assent to certain bills, the contents of which will be incorporated in the Record of Proceedings. I table the letter for the information of members.

The Honourable F. Simpson MP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

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

Date of assent: 29 April 2013

"A Bill for An Act to amend the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000, the Crime and Misconduct Act 2001, the Criminal Code, the Disability Services Act 2006, the Drugs Misuse Act 1986, the Drugs Misuse Regulation 1987 and the Evidence Act 1977, and to make minor and consequential amendments of other Acts as stated in the schedule, for particular purposes"

"A Bill for An Act to amend the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000 and the Corrective Services Act 2006 for particular purposes, and to make consequential amendments of the Act mentioned in the schedule"

"A Bill for An Act to establish the Gasfields Commission and to amend this and another Act for particular purposes"

"A Bill for An Act to adopt in Queensland a national law relating to electronic conveyancing and to amend this Act, the Land Act 1994 and the Land Title Act 1994 for particular purposes"


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

Yours sincerely

Governor

29 April 2013

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 29 April 2013, from Her Excellency the Governor to the Speaker advising of assent to certain bills [2502].

SPEAKER’S RULING

Tabling of Papers

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, on Tuesday of the previous sitting week, I ruled out of order attempts to table documents by both the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Bundamba. I indicated that I would follow up my rulings with detailed reasons. Unlike other houses of parliament, members of this House have an almost unfettered right to table documents, at least in the first instance. In most other houses of parliament, the tabling of documents is limited to particular classes of documents or tablings by ministers of the Crown or otherwise only unless the leave of the House or the chair is first sought and given. If a member rises on a legitimate point of order or a matter of privilege suddenly arising and seeks to table a document that is relevant to that point of order or matter of privilege, then I form the view that they would ordinarily be allowed to table such a document.
However, where documents are not immediately and obviously relevant to a legitimate point of order or matter of privilege, I am not prepared to allow members to table such documents during that point of order. Similarly, I am not prepared to allow members to table documents in circumstances when there is a ruling that there is no point of order or there is not a legitimate matter of privilege. In both the cases of the member for Bundamba and the Leader of the Opposition on 16 April, I had ruled that there was no point of order.

If members were able to table documents under such circumstances, rising under points of orders or matters of privilege would become an artifice for tabling a document. In my view, such actions could constitute an abuse of the rules of the House and the liberal rules regarding the tabling of documents.

Statements have been made by a number of previous Speakers that describe and contrast the liberal rules relating to the tabling of documents in the Queensland Legislative Assembly with other houses of parliament. Those rulings make it clear that the Speaker has the right, indeed the duty, to ensure that no tabling or tabled document offends the rules of the House and to take such action as is expedient in all the circumstances.

If the Speaker determines that a breach of standing orders or rules of the House has occurred and that a tabled document offends the rules of the House or the ruling of the chair, the chair has broad options available including making a ruling that the tabling of the document was out of order.

The tabling of documents has been ruled out of order if the document offends the sub judice rule; the document contains unparliamentarily material; the document contained information or words that would not be allowed in verbal speeches, such as inferences, imputations and reflections; or the document is irrelevant to the debate or matter under consideration.

I particularly refer to the rulings by Speaker Fouras on 28 April 1994 at page 131 of the Record of Proceedings; Speaker Reynolds on 21 February 2007 at pages 389-91 of the Record of Proceedings; Speaker Reynolds on 11 September 2008 at pages 2703-4 of the Record of Proceedings; Speaker Mickel on 17 September 2009 at page 2393 of the Record of Proceedings; Speaker Mickel on 15 November 2011 at page 3611 of the Record of Proceedings; and my ruling on 19 March 2013 at page 718 of the Record of Proceedings.

I remind members that if they believe they have an issue that requires raising in the House, a range of speaking options is available to them to address this and table the related documents.

REPORT

Auditor-General

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have to report that I have received from the Auditor-General a report titled Report to parliament No. 11 for 2012-13—results of audits: Education sector entities 2012. I table the report for the information of members.

Tabled paper: Auditor-General of Queensland: Report to parliament No. 11—Results of audits: Education sector entities 2012 [2503].

PETITIONS

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

Townsville Port Rail Corridor

Mrs Menkens, from 315 petitioners, requesting the House to consider a route for the proposed Townsville Port Rail Corridor that takes freight trains away from the southern suburbs of the city of Townsville [2504].

Taroom, Mining Applications

Mr Seeney, from 459 petitioners, requesting the House to ensure that no mining applications are granted within 10 km of the township of Taroom and that a 10 km buffer zone is established around the town [2505].
The Clerk presented the following e-petitions, sponsored by the honourable members indicated—

**Eventide Nursing Home and Zillmere’s Ashworth House, Closure**

*Ms Palaszczuk,* from 1,404 petitioners, requesting the House to reverse the decision to close facilities at Eventide Nursing Home and Zillmere’s Ashworth House but if the facilities do close to rule out selling the land to developers for purposes such as high-rise units [2506].

**Wynnum Hospital and Moreton Bay Nursing Care Unit, Closure**

*Mrs Miller,* from 748 petitioners, requesting the House to seek an assurance from the Government that it will not close the Wynnum Hospital and the Moreton Bay Nursing Care Unit [2507].

**Ipswich Midwifery Group Practice, Staffing**

*Mr Choat,* from 419 petitioners, requesting the House to adequately staff the Ipswich Midwifery Group Practice so that all low risk women can continue to access continuity of midwifery care with all its health benefits to mothers and babies [2508].

Petitions received.

**TABLED PAPERS**

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

19 April 2013—

2469  Response from the Minister for Health (Mr Springborg) to a paper petition (2077-13) presented by Ms Palaszczuk, from 3,659 petitioners, requesting the House to reverse the decision to close facilities at Eventide Nursing Home and Zillmere’s Ashworth House but if the facilities do close to rule out selling the land to developers for purposes such as high-rise units

2470  Response from the Minister Police and Community Safety (Mr Dempsey) to an ePetition (1988-12) sponsored by Mr Gibson, from 177 petitioners, requesting the House to condemn, in the strongest possible terms the failure of the Gillard Labor Government to provide an emergency SMS service for deaf Australians and request the Minister for Disabilities and the Minister for Police and Community Safety to lobby the Federal Government to review this decision

2471  Response from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (Mr Emerson) to a paper petition (2078-13) and an ePetition (2074-13) sponsored by Mr Judge, from 959 petitioners respectively, requesting the House to extend the consultation period of the South East Queensland bus network review and undertake to review a diverse range of bus commuters in order to provide a thorough and reliable basis for any rationalisation and/or termination of bus services

22 April 2013—

2472  Final Probity Advisor’s Report: Sunshine Coast University Hospital: Public Private Partnership Request for Binding Bids Process, prepared by Argyle Corporate Advisers, dated August 2012

2473  Sunshine Coast University Hospital—Projects Agreement Summary, prepared by Freehills for Queensland Health

2474  State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee: Report No. 22—Subordinate legislation tabled on 12 February 2013

2475  Health and Community Services Committee: Report No. 20—Report on Subordinate legislation tabled between 1 December 2012 and 12 February 2013

23 April 2013—

2476  Response from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (Mr Emerson) to a paper petition (2080-13) and an ePetition (2074-13) sponsored by Mr Judge, from 959 petitioners respectively, requesting the House to extend the consultation period of the South East Queensland bus network review and undertake to review a diverse range of bus commuters in order to provide a thorough and reliable basis for any rationalisation and/or termination of bus services


2479  Island Industries Board (IIB) operating as Islanders Board of Industry and Service (IBIS)—Annual Report for the Financial Year ended 31 January 2013

2480  Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee: Report No. 20—Land, Water and Other Legislation Amendment Bill
Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee: Report No. 21—Subordinate legislation tabled between 27 November 2012 and 12 February 2013

24 April 2013—

Mental Health Court—Annual Report 2011-12

Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee: Report No. 28—Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013

26 April 2013—

Land, Water And Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2013: Erratum to Explanatory Notes

Health and Community Services Committee: Report No. 21—Oversight of the Health Quality and Complaints Commission

Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee: Report No. 22—Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013

29 April 2013—

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 1 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 2 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 3 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 4 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 5 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 6 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 7 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 8 of 9]

Report by the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (Mr Seeney), pursuant to s 424 of the Sustainable Planning Act 2009, in relation to the Ministerial Call In of a development application by Stockland (North Lakes) Pty Ltd at Cook Court, North Lakes [Volume 9 of 9]


Response from the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines (Mr Cripps) to an ePetition (1991-12) sponsored by Ms Palaszczuk, from 758 petitioners, requesting the House to preserve the current prohibition on uranium mining in Queensland

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

The following statutory instruments were tabled by the Clerk—

Superannuation (State Public Sector) Act 1990—

Superannuation (State Public Sector) Amendment of Deed Regulation (No. 2) 2013, No. 50

Superannuation (State Public Sector) Amendment of Deed Regulation (No. 2) 2013, No. 50, explanatory notes
Aboriginal Land Act 1991—

Aboriginal Land Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2013, No. 51

Aboriginal Land Amendment Regulation (No. 2) 2013, No. 51, explanatory notes

Disability Services (Your Life Your Choice) Amendment Act 2012—

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, 2013, No. 52

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, 2013, No. 52, explanatory notes

Legal Profession Act 2007—

Legal Profession (Society Rules) Amendment Notice (No. 2) 2013, No. 53

Legal Profession (Society Rules) Amendment Notice (No. 2) 2013, No. 53, explanatory notes

Racing and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2012—

Proclamation commencing certain provisions, 2013, No. 54

Proclamation commencing certain provisions, 2013, No. 54, explanatory notes

Economic Development Act 2012—

Economic Development Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, No. 55

Economic Development Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, No. 55, explanatory notes

Education and Care Services National Law (Queensland) Act 2011—

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, 2013, No. 56

Proclamation commencing remaining provisions, 2013, No. 56, explanatory notes

Gold Coast Waterways Authority Act 2012—

Gold Coast Waterways Authority Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, No. 57

Gold Coast Waterways Authority Amendment Regulation (No. 1) 2013, No. 57, explanatory notes

MEMBER’S PAPER TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following member’s paper was tabled by the Clerk—

Member for Gaven (Dr Douglas)—

Document titled ‘Is the Childrens Court Working?’ by Judge CF Wall QC

REPORT TABLED BY THE CLERK

The following report was tabled by the Clerk—

Report pursuant to Standing Order 165 (Clerical errors or formal changes to any Bill) detailing amendments to certain Bills, made by the Clerk, prior to assent by Her Excellency the Governor, viz—

Criminal Law (Child Exploitation and Dangerous Drugs) Amendment Bill 2012

Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—

‘Criminal Law (Child Exploitation and Dangerous Drugs) Amendment Act 2012’

Insert—

‘Criminal Law (Child Exploitation and Dangerous Drugs) Amendment Act 2013’.

Police Powers and Responsibilities (Motor Vehicle Impoundment) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012

Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—

‘Police Powers and Responsibilities (Motor Vehicle Impoundment) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2012’

Insert—

‘Police Powers and Responsibilities (Motor Vehicle Impoundment) and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013’.
Gasfields Commission Bill 2012
Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—
‘Gasfields Commission Act 2012’

Insert—
‘Gasfields Commission Act 2013’.

Electronic Conveyancing National Law (Queensland) Bill 2012
Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—
‘Electronic Conveyancing National Law (Queensland) Act 2012’

Insert—

Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012
Amendments made to Bill

Short title and consequential references to short title—

Omit—
‘Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012’

Insert—
‘Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2013’.

MINISTERIAL PAPERS
The following ministerial papers were tabled—

Treasurer and Minister for Trade (Mr Nicholls)—
2498 Queensland Commission of Audit Final Report—February 2013—Volume 1
2500 Queensland Commission of Audit Final Report—February 2013—Volume 3

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS
Commission of Audit

Hon. CKT NEWMAN (Ashgrove—LNP) (Premier) (9.38 am): Today represents a significant and positive step for Queensland’s future towards strengthening the economy, restoring the state’s financial position and ensuring that we can continue to provide the services that Queenslanders deserve. Today, the Treasurer has tabled the final report of the independent Queensland Commission of Audit and the government’s response to that report. I want to thank publicly Peter Costello, Professor Sandra Harding and Dr Doug McTaggart for all of their hard work.

At the outset I would like to say that I greatly appreciate and I know the entire government appreciates the hard work of the Treasurer, his team, his office and his department on delivering this report. They have been extremely professional in the way that they have gone about the business of preparing the response, taking it through a process in the cabinet and then through the parliamentary party room meeting of LNP members yesterday. I publicly thank the Treasurer for his great work.

I also acknowledge the cabinet and my parliamentary colleagues for the tough decisions they had to make in the best interests of Queensland. When my government was elected we committed to undertaking a commission of audit into the state’s finances. Today the Treasurer has tabled not only
the report with its 155 recommendations but also our government’s response so that Queenslanders know exactly where they stand and they know how their government can better serve the needs of all Queenslanders.

Ms Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr NEWMAN: I hear the Leader of the Opposition interjecting already. Queenslanders were never extended that courtesy by the Bligh Labor government four years ago.

No matter where I go in Queensland—whether it is in my own electorate of Ashgrove, regional communities like Barcaldine or Ayr, or major centres like Cairns—people tell me about the government services they need, the financial support needed for projects like fixing broken concrete in school playgrounds, getting early childhood teachers, or even a local ambulance service. After years of economic mismanagement and misplaced agendas under the former Labor government, there is not much money available for these basic, and quite reasonable, requests. That is why we are saying in our response to this vital report that enough is enough—we cannot continue to accept debt, deficit and inefficiency.

We are moving forward with a positive outlook that will ensure the future economic resilience of Queensland so that we can be a great state with great opportunities well into the future—with a government focused on delivering the great jobs, great lifestyle and great services that Queenslanders deserve. This plan outlined in the Commission of Audit report is a plan for Queensland’s future. It is about making Queensland the best state in Australia. It is about making this the best government in Australia: efficient, effective and totally committed to delivering for the people of Queensland. It is a plan to supercharge the state’s economy, making the most of our natural resources and the talents of our people, while ensuring we enhance essential services and protect those who need a helping hand. It is about being upfront and honest about our vision. We will not be deceitful and underhanded or take the people of Queensland for granted as has happened in the past. It is all about securing a bright future for our kids, and the generations to follow.

The Queensland government’s overarching economic strategy is unashamedly pro-growth. A strong and vibrant economy is essential to improving the wellbeing of Queenslanders. Without economic growth, the state will not have the income to deliver new services and make sure that we have the money to improve our schools and hospitals so our kids have a bright, prosperous and healthy future. To rebuild revenues, the government has already changed the economic focus of Queensland by concentrating its efforts on the real strengths of our state—the four pillars of tourism, construction, resources and agriculture.

While reducing debt is fundamental to restoring Queensland’s finances, the government is equally dedicated and committed to boosting economic growth. The report highlights the tough challenges facing Queensland. We know that many of the recommendations in this report are going to be hotly debated, but this government is about doing what is right for the state because we were elected to get Queensland back on track and deliver our pledges. Much has been said already about the recommendations surrounding the sale of government businesses in the context of this report. That issue—asset sales—is, interestingly, addressed in only five of the 155 recommendations in the report.

Unlike the former Labor government, we will not take the easy way out and have a fire sale of state assets—especially a fire sale that we keep secret until after an election. So let me be absolutely clear today that we decided to not consider divestment of Energex, Ergon or Powerlink to pay down the debt that was accrued by the former financially inept government and we certainly will not be seeking any mandate to undertake a sale of those assets at the next election. It is a pity you could not get that honesty from the Australian Labor Party.

We will ‘save the farm’ as the Courier-Mail so eloquently put it in today’s headline. The report concludes that a key action a state government can take to lift economic performance is to ensure that it is operating as efficiently as possible. Instead of selling the farm, we will be looking at innovative ways to draw the best possible returns from our assets and ensure quality of services for all Queenslanders. We have already started to lock in higher public sector productivity to help reduce the level of taxes needed to deliver government services. Increased productivity will put downward pressure on the cost of doing business for firms using those services.

The final report is fundamentally about ways in which the quality and quantity of front-line services can be improved, including models that make better use of the skills, capacity and innovation of the private and not-for-profit sectors. It recommends changes to the way the Public Service is
structured, organised and managed to be more flexible, responsive and efficient in supporting Queenslanders in a modern 21st century economy. The bottom line is that the Queensland government wants to be able to provide more services to Queenslanders and improve the quality of those services.

It must not be forgotten that we have a federal government that has just announced a $12 billion black hole in its budget, and is out there talking up its plans today for increasing taxes and, amazingly, spending more money. As a society, we face difficult choices. Queensland cannot be a low-tax state and, at the same time, succumb to pressure to lift spending to levels determined by Canberra—the math just does not work.

Today in Queensland there are Queenslanders who need services and are not receiving them because the way we deliver them has not changed for decades. There are public servants who want to do more for their fellow Queenslanders but have not been provided with the tools to help them to do it. There are private sector operators and non-government organisations that have new ideas and ways of approaching problems that are not being heard. This has to change. The government’s response to the final report is about ensuring the Queensland public sector is the best public service in Australia, delivering services to all Queenslanders.

Some recommendations can be implemented quickly. Others will take several years or will be ongoing in nature. Many of the recommendations relate to contestability. Let us be clear: contestability is not the same as outsourcing. Contestability is about government testing the market to ensure it is providing people with the solution they demand and deserve at the best possible price. I see the Leader of the Opposition shaking her head. Clearly, they should pay high prices for the services. The government will continue to deliver services that it does well. I stress that the government will continue to deliver services that it demonstrates it can do well.

The final report has also recommended the commercial operations of the Gladstone Ports Corporation and Port of Townsville Ltd be offered for long-term lease to private operators. The government particularly notes the findings of the Commission of Audit in relation to the constraints imposed by government ownership of these businesses. Offering a long-term lease for the operation of these commercial enterprises means the government will retain ownership of the ports.

We believe that this proposal is worthy of an open and transparent community debate to establish its viability and to inform stakeholders of the costs and benefits involved. Therefore, we commit to undertake further detailed investigation of this particular proposal to ensure that the debate is fully informed before making any decision. But, regardless of the outcome of these considerations, the government will ensure that these businesses and other government enterprises are running as efficiently and effectively as possible. We will adopt a prudent approach to ensure that, whatever the outcome, Queenslanders will benefit. This is an opportunity today for many of the unions that represent workers in these government owned businesses to work with us—and I urge them to do so—to show that public ownership can be something that results in the efficient delivery of services. I would urge them to work with the government and stop playing political games.

Madam Speaker, the government response is focused on delivering better government services for all Queenslanders. The independent commission’s final report represents a significant and positive step towards the government fulfilling the five pledges it made to the people of Queensland on entering office: grow a four-pillar economy, lower the cost of living, deliver better infrastructure, revitalise front-line services and restore accountability in government. This report endorses the Queensland government’s strategy to restore the Queensland economy and deliver on our pledges. Getting there will not always be easy, but today marks a significant step in addressing the problems of the past and locking in opportunities for Queenslanders well into the future.

Commission of Audit

Hon. TJ NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade) (9.50 am): The independent Commission of Audit final report outlines a roadmap for fundamental reform which will help the Newman government and all future governments meet the fiscal and economic challenges facing Queensland. I join with the Premier in thanking the independent commissioners—the Hon. Peter Costello AC, Dr Doug McTaggart and Professor Sandra Harding—for their work over the last 12 months. The report is a comprehensive review of the way the state of Queensland goes about its business. I also take the opportunity to thank the Premier and my colleagues for this historic opportunity to help deliver a plan for better services and a better outcome for all Queenslanders.
The report covers five main areas: the economic and fiscal challenges the state faces, government commercial enterprises, financial management of our funds, front-line service delivery and the public sector. What is clear from this report is that business as usual is not an option.

The government has carefully considered the comprehensive appraisal of the challenges identified by the independent commissioners and their recommendations—all 155 of them. It is fair to say that there are no easy answers to the challenges presented, but there is a resolve in this government to tackle those challenges head-on. The government has accepted in full, part or in principle 131 recommendations; has not accepted six recommendations; notes 13 recommendations; and identified five recommendations for further consideration. In total, more than 75 per cent of the recommendations made have been accepted by the government.

As the Premier has indicated, the government has decided not to consider the divestment of Ergon, Energex or Powerlink at the next election at this time. The government has formed a view that these businesses should remain in public ownership, and the government will take steps to ensure that these businesses are run as efficiently as possible to deliver services to Queenslanders. The government will maintain its policy not to sell government businesses without a mandate from the people. It will consider options to deal with the two electricity generators CS Energy and Stanwell, the ports of Townsville and Gladstone, and the QIC. But I stress that no decision has been made, and I note also that the report recommends no sale of the generators until after 2015-16. A decision to divest would only be made after the government receives a mandate. We respect the people of Queensland too much to betray them the way Labor did. We need a mature debate about choices. The choices are clear: higher taxes, fewer services or better managing the state’s balance sheet. This is a debate we are prepared to have with the people of Queensland.

The independent commission has sounded a warning bell for action. In recent years the Queensland economy has been supported by mining investment and historically high terms of trade, along with population growth and increased workforce participation. Those were extraordinary economic times that are unlikely to return anytime soon. The report makes clear that the good times that were experienced are now over. Growth is still essential but it will be slower. Now is the time to knuckle down to the hard work necessary to grow our economy and our state and to deliver the services Queenslanders expect.

The report shows that our workforce is ageing, with Queensland facing a tripling in the number of people over 65 by 2050. Over a third of the Public Service will retire over the next five years and a further third in the next five years after that. This means fewer workers driving economic growth and supporting our population. This change is locked in and nothing we can say or do will change it radically. The commission’s modelling shows us that the economic growth rate over the next 40 years will be lower than it has been over the last 25 years. At the same time, the government is facing a growing demand for services with limited options for raising additional revenue. As the report points out, these factors add up to a situation where without change the gap between revenue and spending will continue to widen. If we do nothing, Queenslanders will not be able to escape the debt burden foisted on them by the previous Labor government. The crunch when it comes will be that much worse if no action is taken now to meet these challenges.

Every year since 2007-08 Queensland’s productivity has declined. Last financial year it was below the level recorded a decade ago. So, although scarce taxpayer dollars have been committed to provide government services, this additional spending has not been matched with an increase in outcomes. Under Labor, Queenslanders were paying more and getting less. We need to improve productivity by one per cent each year to solve this problem. But each year this is not done it compounds the task the following year. The only way we can expand and improve services is to fundamentally reform the way they are structured and managed. The message from the commission is clear: in a modern 21st century Queensland people care less about who is the provider; they care more about access, quality and timeliness of the services they receive, not by whom or how the service is delivered. Outcomes are more important than process.

Let me be clear: the government is not retreating from its obligation to provide services. What the independent commission says is that government should be an enabler, not necessarily the doer. While other Australian states have adopted more efficient delivery models, misguided Labor government policy based on ideology has meant Queensland has in many instances been left in the Dark Ages and is an inefficient provider of the services Queenslanders need. The commission has
outlined changes to the way the Public Service should be structured, organised and managed to be more flexible, responsive and efficient in supporting quality service delivery in a modern 21st century economy. Our goal is clear: to make the Queensland public sector the best public service in Australia, delivering the services Queenslanders need at a price they can afford.

The commission recommends the government continue to provide core services such as policing, public safety, emergency and justice services. However, we need to change the way we do it to ensure that we drive every dollar further to fix the decline in productivity. It also recommends the government work more closely with non-government providers to find the best and most cost-effective way to deliver social services. In this vein many of the recommendations in the report relate to contestability.

Contestability in its own right is not an outcome or a fait accompli that the private sector—the non-government sector—will deliver a particular service. In fact, it is an opportunity to test or benchmark the services provided by the public sector against non-government delivery. The overarching goal through this process must be on achieving better outcomes for Queenslanders—by doing more with less. The Commission of Audit also recommends that government services that have a strong commercial element should be opened up to the private sector. The government will further investigate opportunities to open this work up to the private sector if it can be demonstrated that better value for money can be achieved and quality of services maintained. In many cases there are deep and mature markets which can provide these services at a much lower cost. Our primary objective is to ensure we get the best services and the maximum value for taxpayers.

The commission has also identified the need to strengthen the financial management system. These reforms will seek to install a robust framework to prevent the financial mismanagement so typified by the former Labor government. We need to fix these systems to ensure that government is open and accountable about how it spends taxpayer funds. We owe this to Queenslanders.

The Commission of Audit recommendations chart a course that can make Queensland’s government a leader in service delivery. There are clearly better ways we can be doing things and we need to seek them out. One of the key planks in achieving that goal will be enhancing the skills and capacity of our Public Service. The report makes a series of recommendations about improving the industrial arrangements covering the Public Service and, importantly, focusing on long-term planning and development. The Newman government has accepted these recommendations which are in line with our overall policy for public sector renewal.

The commission has also shown that, whilst information and communication technology is essential to enable the business of government, ICT itself is not a business of government. Moving forward, the government will view ICT as a service and will seek to retain these services from private providers that operate in contestable markets. In many cases, there is a well-functioning, mature ICT industry which can provide a service to government at a lower cost than the present internal systems. The changes proposed will ensure that service delivery for Queenslanders is enhanced and funding currently allocated to the ICT area can be redirected to the front-line services that Queenslanders expect.

(Time expired)

Mr STEVENS (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (10.00 am): I move—

That as much of standing orders as required be suspended to allow the Treasurer to complete his ministerial statement.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. TJ NICHOLLS (Clayfield—LNP) (Treasurer and Minister for Trade) (10.00 am): I thank the House for its indulgence.

Finally, the report identifies the need for clear delineation of responsibilities between the Australian and Queensland governments. This is clearly in line with our view that the Queensland government is elected to deliver those services within its constitutional remit. Ever-increasing federal government interference in areas of state responsibility together with the cost shifting that accompanies it must stop. With the resolution of these areas of responsibility between the appropriate levels of government will come proper accountability leading to the better delivery of better outcomes for Queenslanders.
All of these reforms will support future economic growth, not just in the four pillars of our economy but across the economy at large. It is this economic growth that will increase the standard of living and enhance the lives of Queenslanders today, tomorrow and well into the future. Unlike those opposite, the Newman government is focused on the future and ensuring that Queensland has a clear road map to be Australia's leading state. The recommendations that the government has accepted cannot be implemented overnight. In fact, many will take a number of years to enact. There will be challenges, as implementing many of these recommendations will require new skills and capabilities in large parts of the Public Service. As a government, we are committed to supporting our people to develop these new skills. Our people will be fundamental to the government's success.

Today is a turning point for Queensland. It is a day in which we set out a road map that will provide a brighter future and correct the mistakes of the past. This plan is not everything the government must do to fix this state, but it is about ensuring everything we do is done in the best way possible. To do any less would be a disservice to Queenslanders. By this report and our response we can ensure that Queensland is once again a great state with great opportunity.

NOTICE OF MOTION

Sale of Public Assets

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.02 am): I give notice that I shall move—

That this House:
• notes reports that 55 state schools are on the Newman government’s hit list to be sold and asks the minister to table the schools impacted throughout Queensland;
• notes that the Newman government has not received a mandate to sell schools or school ovals; and
• censures the Newman government for breaking its promise to Queenslanders by failing to gain a mandate from the people to sell schools.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Sale of Public Assets

Ms PALASZCZUK (10.03 am): My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Treasurer's comments in the Australian Financial Review before the 2012 election about government owned buildings in the CBD that 'we won't be selling the real estate without ... a mandate from the people' and ask: how can the Premier justify the fire sale of these seven high-rise buildings when he failed to seek a mandate as promised?

Mr NEWMAN: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her question. In relation to the issue of the buildings, to clarify the situation we have seen some government owned real estate being transferred across to the Queensland Investment Corporation, which the last time I checked was owned by the people of Queensland.

A government member interjected.

Mr NEWMAN: Yes, that is interesting. We have said in our response to the Commission of Audit report, which has recommended that the QIC be sold, that, yes, we will consider that recommendation but we will not be doing it without getting a mandate from the people of Queensland.

Mr Stevens interjected.

Mr NEWMAN: It is a bit of a dorothy dixer. I thank the Manager of Government Business. The point I would make is that the government has bought and sold real estate forever. QR have had to acquire corridors for railway lines and shunting yards. When the former government was building a busway or two in the city, it had to acquire land. If it had still been in office instead of us right now, I dare say that the surplus land would be sold off.

When we talk about asset sales, we are very clear. We are talking about the large government owned corporations. We will not sell those without seeking a mandate. They can try to nickel and dime this and carry on like—

A government member: It is semantics.
Mr NEWMAN: Well, they can get into the semantics because what those on the opposite side of the chamber clearly are is the party of no position. They have no position on anything. They are contrarians or opportunists. Once upon a time the shadow Treasurer had on his website—when I say ‘once upon a time’ it was actually only a few weeks ago—all the facts about asset sales and how they were good. I ask: will he release a position today, tomorrow or next week about how he would restore the finances of the state of Queensland? Will he have the ticker to even ask the Treasurer of Queensland, who is doing an outstanding job, a question today? My heart beats with anticipation.

Mr Nicholls: Not as much as mine, Premier.

Mr NEWMAN: The Treasurer would welcome his question. I hope that explains the situation. By the same token, it applies to this nonsense they are talking about in relation to schools. Here are these ‘Mythbusters—Sale of Assets’.

(Time expired)

Sale of Public Assets

Ms PALASZCZUK: My question is to the Premier. I refer to the sale of government owned buildings in the city, the ElectraNet electricity business and QR National shares, and ask: will the Premier confirm that the total proceeds from these asset sales, which were undertaken without an election mandate, have already exceeded $3 billion?

Mr Seeney interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: It is no laughing matter.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Before I call the Premier, I remind members on my right that we listen to the questions in silence. I call the Premier.

Mr NEWMAN: I do agree with the interjections of the Deputy Premier. How could the Leader of the Opposition possibly stand up with a straight face and ask that sort of question? It is just ludicrous. We just heard about ElectraNet. I would like to ask a rhetorical question. Who said that Powerlink could investigate and put ElectraNet on the market? That is right: the guilty party over there kicked off the process. Was it an asset sale or not? Government owned corporations buy and sell utes, land and computers. They buy and sell all sorts of items to carry out their normal activities. This is just a desperate opposition clutching at straws.

Perhaps I should remind them about some of their asset sales that maybe they never talked about. Let us have a look at a few things they sold: 77 Grey Street, South Brisbane, $4.9 million; Gympie Conference Centre, $2.87 million; the Cairns government office building No. 2, 36 Shields Street, Cairns, $4.5 million; lot No. 3 Emerald, Hospital Road, $460,000; Yungaba—who could forget Yungaba?—and Kangaroo Point Bridge land, corner of Holman Street and Wharf Street for $10.1 million—sounds a bit cheap to me—the old Union Bank Building, 311 Kent Street, Maryborough, $556,000; and the ex-QBuild depot. Do these people think they have no past in this place? Do they live in an alternative universe? Do they live in an alternative—

Mr Seeney: ‘It wasn’t me. I wasn’t here.’

Mr NEWMAN: They were not there. We well remember that the now Leader of the Opposition was the minister for transport, and what happened to QR? They actually sold the only bit that made money. That is great financial management! Sell the bit that makes money and keep the bit that costs a bundle to run and never, ever do anything about trying to reform it because you are totally in the hands of the union.

Come on. I urge them today to ask me or the Treasurer the real questions. They have 155 recommendations. It is going to be a great Labour Day this year—not October; I am talking about Sunday or whenever those opposite are doing it. It is going to be a great day. They will be able to maintain the rage. There will be lots of meat for them but, again, we will remind Queenslanders of their breathtaking hypocrisy.

Commission of Audit

Mr WATTS: My question without notice is to the Premier. Can the Premier please inform the House of how the Commission of Audit final report will ensure the ongoing security and resilience of our great state and the wellbeing of all Queenslanders?
Mr NEWMAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Commission of Audit final report is indeed a very positive step for the future of this great state of Queensland. Once implemented, the recommendations in this report will ensure that we fulfil the five pledges that we made to the people of Queensland. Again, because the opposition never want to listen, this is what we are about. We have a plan. They have no position, but we have a plan. We have a position and we are upfront, open and honest and we tell people what we are about. This is what we are about: growing a four-pillar economy, lowering the cost of living, delivering better infrastructure, revitalising front-line services and restoring accountability in government.

The final report and its wide-ranging recommendations form a comprehensive plan to make this the most modern and service oriented state in Australia. I would like to digress for a moment and say that right now it is my opinion that the great state of WA, under the leadership of Colin Barnett, is leading the way in terms of delivery of service. In another time and place I will be able to table some material about that. We certainly aspire to, firstly, get ourselves to a position where we are delivering as well as WA and then we want to exceed them and to do even better.

While the report recommends ways of reducing debt to restore Queensland’s finances that were left in tatters by those opposite—by the Bligh-Fraser government—it also endorses the government’s blueprint for boosting economic growth.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr NEWMAN: They are fascinated! Whenever we approve something you can be sure that the party of no position will oppose it because they do not support jobs for hardworking Queenslanders and they do not really support economic growth. They will always jump on the bandwagon. We have been here for 12 months and there has not been one policy from them and we are going to have to wait until May Day. It is a long time to wait until October.

I make the point that, with the tabling of the final report, we are being totally upfront and honest with Queenslanders about the agenda. We are not hoodwinking people like those opposite did with asset sales. They clearly did not have a plan and they never bothered to consult people. This government has accepted the overwhelming majority of the recommendations in this final report. In fact, we are already well on the way to tackling many of the matters that the report canvasses. I particularly acknowledge the work of the health minister with the health blueprint to get these things on the road.

There are many recommendations other than asset sales. Some involve major change. However, I assure the House that we are absolutely committed to driving this state forward to make sure it is a great state with great opportunity.

ECG Advisory Solutions

Mr MULHERIN: My question is directed to the Premier. What steps has the Premier taken to ensure Peter Costello’s company, ECG Advisory Solutions, and its clients will not benefit from any of the Queensland asset sales and privatisation of government services through outsourcing?

Mr NEWMAN: I thank the ‘member for South-East Queensland’ for his question. We know that he is a paragon—not—of financial management and probity.

Madam SPEAKER: Premier, I ask you to refer to the member by his correct title.

Mr NEWMAN: I withdraw. Of course I am referring to the member for Mackay. For those who have not heard what I have said in recent weeks, the reason I referred to him that way, somewhat tongue in cheek—I acknowledge with a bit of levity—is we know he does not support a great planning exercise being undertaken in his electorate on 10 May. We know—

Mr MULHERIN: I rise to a point of order. I find the Premier’s remarks offensive and I ask him to withdraw. At no stage did I make those comments.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! I ask the Premier to please withdraw.

Mr NEWMAN: I withdraw unequivocally and I will have to give the Treasurer $20; he won this morning. To explain, the Treasurer was convinced that the member for Mackay would rise to the occasion and he certainly did. Talk about a glass jaw!
Mr PITT: I rise to a point of order. I ask you to rule on relevance. The question was a very direct question to the Premier. He is not answering the question.

Madam SPEAKER: Please take your seat. Order! I call the Premier. There is time on the clock. I ask the Premier to answer the question.

Mr NEWMAN: As I was saying, they do indeed have glass jaws over there. They can dish it out, as they did throughout 2011 and into 2012.

Mr Pitt: Answer the question, Premier.

Mr NEWMAN: ‘Answer the question,’ he says. I will answer another question today. I see the Australian newspaper of 20-21 April talked about Labor and a $20 million racing payment rushed before the poll defeat. This demands some sort of inquiry. We need to get to the bottom of this regarding the member for Mackay. What did he do? What did he know? What did—

Mr PITT: I rise to a point of order. Madam Speaker, I ask again if you could please talk to the Premier regarding relevance under 118(b). This is completely off base in terms of what the question asked.

Madam SPEAKER: I call the Premier to answer the question.

Mr NEWMAN: I have 45 seconds left on the clock. I simply say that, unlike the former racing minister, Peter Costello knows how to conduct himself. He knows the way that business should be done ethically and appropriately. The idea of him personally promoting his clients in some way is complete and utter nonsense. It is the most convoluted figment of their imagination that I could possibly contrive, just like the other filth and nonsense that the member for South Brisbane was trawling when she was running the Labor Party campaign. I am speaking of the innuendo and nonsense that was directed towards my family personally.

Commission of Audit

Dr FLEGG: My question without notice is to the Treasurer and Minister for Trade. Can the Treasurer please inform the House as to the major challenges identified by the independent Commission of Audit, the government’s broad response and whether there are any alternative views?

Mr NICHOLLS: I thank the member for Moggill for his question. The report does identify major challenges that the Queensland economy faces, as the member for Moggill well knows. We have had many discussions about those challenges. I commend to those interested in those challenges and particularly the shadow Treasurer, who is yet to ask me a question about economics at all, the 1,000-page report that was so secret that we put out a 30-page executive summary. I also commend to him the secret—it was obviously secret to him anyway—response that we have put out covering more than 34 pages with 155 responses. That outlines the problems and the responses the government will undertake to address them.

The commission report provides a stark warning for Queenslanders. That warning is: clearly, the way things used to be done under Labor is not sustainable. We will not be able to deliver the services that Queenslanders want at a price they are prepared to pay if we continue business as usual. The report identifies that we need to improve our productivity by just one per cent a year if we are to continue to deliver the services. That is what we are seeking: an improvement in government productivity of one per cent a year. What was happening under Labor? Productivity was going backwards. Productivity in Queensland was lower last year than it was a decade ago. We were paying more under Labor but we were getting less. The value was being captured in between by the way Labor administered government—by the way they tugged their forelock to their union mates, by the way they kowtowed to ever-increasing demands for wage increases beyond the pale. It was not fair and reasonable; it was beyond the pale.
We do have a plan. That plan is outlined in our response to the 155 recommendations that were carefully considered not just by Treasury, not just by the Premier’s department and not just by cabinet but by the entire LNP team. We take people into our confidence to deliver the right outcomes for Queensland.

The member for Moggill asks if I am aware of any alternative views. I am sorry, but I am not. I have been searching in vain, high and low. I trawled the web and I trundled around looking for an alternative view. What about those in the opposition? Would they have an alternative view? How many days have I been waiting for that alternative view? It has been 402 days since the last election and there has been not one alternative policy advanced. Those opposite still think Mines to Minds is a good policy. There is no alternative. There is only the plan we have put forward.

(Time expired)

Commission of Audit

Mr PITT: My question without notice is to the Premier.

Government members interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr PITT: Obviously the Treasurer has forgotten estimates. My question without notice is to the Premier. I refer to two independent reports released last week—by Deloitte Access Economics and CommSec—that found that the LNP cut too fast and too hard which flattened the economy, led to a hike in unemployment and increased debt. I ask: have the proceeds from the LNP’s fire sales, undertaken without a mandate, been used to hide the LNP’s mismanagement of the economy?

Mr NEWMAN: Before I answer the question, I just say how disappointed the Treasurer is. This was the day for the shadow Treasurer to ask a question. I guess it shows what a terrific Treasurer we have, because clearly I am the soft touch here. I am obviously the soft target, the underbelly of the government, in being asked these questions. They are obviously terrified of the Treasurer and his stunning repartee!

I note that a couple of reports have been released. Of course, the shadow Treasurer is very selective in his quoting of those reports. A number of industry surveys have said various things about the Queensland economy. I note what Deloittes said on that, but I will make a few comments. I mention the CommSec report. I remember the final year of the Bligh Labor government and I remember CommSec reports that came out that year, particularly in the cold, dark winter of 2011. In what position was the state of Queensland in those CommSec reports during that period? It was always in last place. Where are we now?

Mr Nicholls: Third.

Mr NEWMAN: That is right, Treasurer. We are in third place and coming up. Indeed, what are the various documents put out there saying about where the state is going, which is the more important thing? They say that Queensland is on the up. Various surveys, from bodies like the Property Council and Westpac, are all saying that the leading indicators are showing a return of confidence in Queensland. Whether it be in agriculture, construction or tourism, we are seeing those sorts of things. Clearly, the resources sector could be doing better, but that is very much an international phenomenon. This government has taken steps across-the-board to reduce red tape, keep a lid on government taxes and charges on business and ensure Queensland is the best place in Australia to run a business. That is why this state has very bright prospects for the future. That is why we will be the lead economy of this nation over the next couple of years.

In relation to people reflecting on job cuts and so on, it is easy for the armchair experts. We had to make tough decisions. Despite tough decisions—I do not know what the shadow Treasurer says about that—we still have a very significant fiscal deficit both this year and next year. Those are plain facts, but that is the dish that was served up by Anna Bligh and Andrew Fraser—and Curtis Pitt.

Labor Governments, Debt

Dr DAVIS: My question without notice is to the Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning. Can the Deputy Premier please outline to the House what measures his department has taken to address the legacy of debt left by the previous Labor government?
Mr SEENEY: I thank the member for Stafford for the question. It is a good question because the legacy that Labor left is the overriding factor with which governments will have to cope for the next decade. The legacy of 14 years of Labor government can be summed up by three things: the loss of the AAA credit rating, the accumulation of $85 billion worth of debt and the panicked fire sale of $15 billion worth of the state’s best assets. That is the Labor legacy. That is what Queenslanders have after 14 years of Labor government. It cannot be ignored.

For the next decade, any decisions made by this government or any other government have to be made from the perspective of dealing with Labor’s legacy—dealing with the loss of the AAA credit rating, dealing with that mountain of debt and dealing with the panicked fire sale of the state’s best assets. The remnants of that Labor government come into the chamber today and, with dripping hypocrisy, ask questions that want us to assume that they have just deleted it all. They have pressed ‘delete all’ and wiped clean the record of the last 14 years. Well, the people of Queensland know that that is not possible. You cannot just delete 14 years of Labor mismanagement. You cannot just delete the effects and the impacts of so many years of fiscal ineptitude.

The Labor legacy will colour the decisions and affect the strategies of governments for the next decade. It will take a decade of proper government to turn around 14 years of mismanagement. I think that has been made abundantly clear by the report tabled today in the House by the Treasurer. The 155 recommendations, many of which have been accepted by the government, indicate the size of the task—the size of the challenge that has been left to this government because of 14 years of Labor mismanagement. In the one year we have been in government we have already started on that task.

Economic growth will be critically important. We need at least a decade of economic growth to deal with Labor’s debt legacy. Ten years of economic growth is the challenge that our government has to face as a result of those years of failure. My department has begun that task, but what we have done to date is only the beginning. What we have done to date is only setting in place the framework for a decade of economic growth that will be necessary to recover from the mismanagement and the failures of the Labor governments that governed this state for 14 years. That is the perspective and the position from which we must start. The people of Queensland should never forget the legacy of 14 years of Labor government.

Queensland Investment Corporation, Superannuation Funds

Mrs MILLER: My question is to the Premier. Premier, what safeguards will the government put in place to ensure that billions of dollars in superannuation funds for Queensland police, Queensland nurses, Queensland teachers and Queensland public servants will be protected when the Queensland Investment Corporation is sold off?

Mr NEWMAN: I thank the honourable member for the question. Again, I ask those opposite to go back and read what the response is today. They cannot just come in here and say that it says something else when they have a comprehensive response. Go and read it. That is what I urge them to do: go and read it. All we have said today is that the Costello Commission of Audit has said, ‘Here’s a course of action,’ and we have essentially responded that it will be under consideration. Unlike those opposite, we will consider it. We will have the debate. If we decide to put QIC up for sale, then it will be put to the people prior to an election.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr NEWMAN: Those opposite are interjecting—those hypocrites—when they never consulted their own caucus. Did they ever give their own caucus a chance to debate these changes? No! I have to pay this: the member for Bundamba was the only one who ever said more than squeak against asset sales. It was a little squeak; it was not exactly a relentless campaign. I say to those opposite today: don’t you dare go out there and say something to the people of Queensland that has not been said today. I make it very clear: we are not selling anything prior to—

Mr Pitt: You haven’t ruled it out.

Mrs Miller: No, they haven’t ruled it out.

Mr NEWMAN: Oh, dear! What an infantile—

Mr Seeney interjected.
Mr NEWMAN: Yes, I agree; the interjection from those opposite is pathetic and infantile, Deputy Premier. We are very clear. We are ruling out today the sale of Energex and Ergon and Powerlink, but other things are under consideration. Why? Because we have a financial disaster that we are cleaning up from those opposite. The hypocrisy of those who are interjecting when there are Curtis Pitt’s Mythbusters about the sale of assets! It was there only until a few weeks ago when he went, ‘Oops, dear me, caught out. I’m still promoting asset sales and privatisation but, dear me, I don’t have a position. Oh, we’ve changed our position?’ Back only a few years ago it was a great thing to be privatising assets. There were all of these things about protections for workers—all of these things—but they did it and did it without consulting their own caucus, and that must hurt them. It really hurts them over there. They did not get a say. They were presented with a fait accompli whereas those on this side of the chamber had a say and made a decision.

(Time expired)

Health Services

Mr MOLHOEK: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health. Given the LNP was elected with an undisputed mandate to overhaul Labor’s diabolical mismanagement of Queensland Health, what does the Commission of Audit mean for better delivery of health services across Queensland?

Mr SPRINGBORG: I thank the honourable member for Southport for the question and his strong advocacy for the people of his electorate and their healthcare needs. If anyone doubts that Queensland Health was in a diabolical position when we took over with such a clear mandate to clean it up, then we should go no further than what the former Premier said about Queensland Health just before the election. She actually said that Queenslanders can no longer tolerate the sick administrative performance of this mammoth organisation. She said that enough is enough after 14 years of Labor legacy. That is what the former Premier said with regard to Labor’s legacy. What we now clearly see through the LNP’s Blueprint for Better Healthcare in Queensland, which very much dovetails into the Commission of Audit report, is a new way of doing health care in Queensland which is about accountability for each and every dollar that is spent to ensure that, with the scarce resources we have, the people of Queensland get better services, and already we are starting to see that throughout Queensland.

For those people who have been running around saying that in some way we are no longer committed to the free public hospital system, we are committed to the universal free public hospital system. There is absolutely nothing which undermines that whatsoever. There will be no privatisation of public hospitals which we currently own in Queensland, but we will look at alternatives for new hospitals which come online. Outsourcing will be full steam ahead, as it was under the previous government when it outsourced almost a billion dollars worth of work in its last year in office.

With regard to the patient travel assistance scheme in Queensland, we will certainly be adopting the recommendation from the Costello audit. Whilst it is very true that we have doubled the amount of money which people are eligible to receive kilometrically and overnight, it is also of concern that the audit has pointed out that there is double-dipping, and we will be moving to address that. We will also be moving to ensure that with our new telehealth initiative there will be less requirement for people to travel so far for medical appointments.

With regard to dental or oral health services, we do have what is the most accessible service in all of Australia, with 40 per cent of all Queenslanders being eligible. However, the audit has recommended that we look at co-payments in certain circumstances, and that is something that we will be looking at because there is no universal free oral healthcare system that operates across Australia. We need to ensure that it is sustainable in addressing what is a waiting list of 161,000 Queenslanders who were left with oral health problems by the previous government, some of them on the list for as long as 15 years.

(Time expired)

Cecil Plains, LNG Industry

Mr HOPPER: My question is to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Minister, at a rally at Cecil Plains on Saturday to try to stop Arrow Energy from drilling prime agricultural land, the federal member for Groom—

Mr Rickuss interjected.
Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for Condamine, take your seat. I warn the member for Lockyer under 253A and remind members that the person with the call asking the question deserves to be heard in silence. I call the member for Condamine to start again.

Mr HOPPER: Thank you. His electorate is next, Madam Speaker.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! I ask you to withdraw that and respect that this is about keeping order. Please ask your question.

Mr HOPPER: I withdraw. My question is to the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. Minister, at a rally at Cecil Plains on Saturday to try to stop Arrow Energy from drilling prime agricultural land, the federal member for Groom, the Hon. Ian Macfarlane, said in his speech that the LNP believes that it is a farmer’s right to say whether a mining company can enter their land or not. Does the minister agree with the federal member for Groom’s comments?

Mr CRIPPS: I take the interjection from the Minister for Health. It was a very interesting revelation in the lead-up to last year’s state election when it was actually revealed that the leader of the member for Condamine’s party, the federal member for Kennedy, was actually the former minister for mines who introduced the legislation into the Queensland parliament that provided for the access arrangements for mining companies onto farmers’ land in the 1980s and then had the temerity and the audacity to complain and attack the LNP and even the previous Labor government about those arrangements. It was a fantastic and incredible display of hypocrisy on the part of the federal member for Kennedy when he was the architect of those arrangements that facilitated those land access arrangements.

I can only speak for the work of the Newman government in relation to our efforts to improve the relationship between the resources sector and the agricultural sector and local communities in Queensland since we have been in government, and I want to list for the member for Condamine and the benefit of other members those initiatives to date. Under the leadership of the Deputy Premier, we have embarked upon the development of statutory regional plans for the Darling Downs and Central Queensland, where the competition in land use between the resources sector and the agricultural sector and local communities has been the most acute. That process is ongoing and is genuine consultation—unlike the statutory regional plans developed by the previous government.

We have already put through the House the GasFields Commission legislation and that will be a mechanism that will develop true, ongoing engagement between the resources sector, the agricultural sector and local communities facilitated by independent people who know what they are talking about. We are reviewing the land access arrangements for resource companies with landowners throughout the state. That has been well received by the rural sector in giving more confidence and transparency in the arrangements between resource companies and landowners. Lastly, we have released the first ever baseline groundwater report for the Darling Downs, which for the first time has given us a reference point for the impact of the CSG industry on groundwater in that area. From there, we can undertake full and transparent monitoring of the impact of the CSG industry on groundwater and we can pursue ongoing arrangements to not only improve the relationship and the sustainability of that very important industry for the state of Queensland but also give rural landowners and farmers the confidence to be able to move forward with their rural businesses. So I say to the member for Condamine that I can only speak for the Newman government and those are the initiatives that we have pursued.

(Time expired)

Schools Maintenance

Madam SPEAKER: I call the member for Murrumba.

Mr GULLEY: Thank you, Madam. My question without notice is to the Minister for Education, Training and Employment. Can the minister please inform the House of the parlous state of school maintenance left by Labor that the Commission of Audit identified and what the Newman government is doing about this?

Madam SPEAKER: I call the Minister for Education, Training and Employment.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Madam—Speaker.

Madam SPEAKER: Thank you.
Mr LANGBROEK: I did say ‘Speaker’, Madam Speaker. I thank the honourable member for the question. This is actually a very serious topic. Members are acutely aware of the issue of maintenance in our schools. We inherited a $300 million maintenance black hole. Owing to ongoing waste from the previous government, not enough money had been spent on schools in our state and every school had a maintenance backlog. It was $300 million. That is what happens when you waste money, when you cannot control the budget, when you cannot prioritise spending. But schools were left to rot. The Premier and I and other members I have been with have seen many of these schools. No wonder there are problems with morale among our teachers when they are having to work in environments that are not safe and have not received enough maintenance funding.

So in keeping with a theme across every other portfolio, the government inherited our schooling infrastructure in a state of disrepair. We said that the parents of children in Queensland deserved better. So what did we do? The Treasurer announced $200 million in last year’s budget to address the maintenance backlog. That was backed up by a further $100 million that was announced by the Premier and me at Rockhampton State High School last month. This school was built in the early 1960s. It is typical of many schools that were built from 1957 when Jack Pizzey became the education minister, when there were 34 state high schools in the whole state. By 1969, there were 101, yet this year we have built two. So we look back at the difference between this government and what the previous government has done in terms of planning. From 1957 to 1969, the former coalition government trebled the number of state high schools. Of course, that has left us with schools that are over 50 years old that are in need of significant maintenance, but at least we are planning to pay for that and funding it.

We have allowed schools to go direct to market for maintenance work. The members for Townsville and Thuringowa have told me of great examples in their areas. Last week I saw them after the Ayr community cabinet that we had with the member for Burdekin at Ayr State High School—a school built in 1937, a beautiful heritage school. But Hermit Park State School is one that needs a significant amount of maintenance. Those schools have banded with other schools in their region. They have clustered, gone to market and achieved massive savings. Out of that, they do not have to give the money back. Anything that they have left after they have achieved the work can go back into their schools for other school improvements.

Importantly, QBuild is sharpening its pencil, too. That is an important acknowledgement for the Minister for Housing and Public Works. This is the contestability that the Premier has spoken about—government agencies sharpening their pencils and doing 60 per cent to 80 per cent more work when they are in a contestable market.

Nambour General Hospital, Car Parking

Mr WELLINGTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Will the minister provide an update on the government’s plans to relieve car-parking pressures at the Nambour General Hospital?

Mr SPRINGBORG: I thank the honourable member for his question. As members are aware, the honourable member has raised this issue in this parliament on a number of occasions in the past and also publicly. It is a matter that he is very concerned about, as indeed are many people in his electorate. Certainly, some time ago when the Premier and I visited that hospital people raised the matter with us as being a matter of significant concern. Certainly, when I was there the other day I again gained an appreciation of the challenges that exist for people accessing car parking at the Nambour Hospital. There is a small amount of multilevel car parking and another option has been implemented, which is basically a park-and-ride. Neither of those options is meeting the need. Therefore, it is essential that something needs to be done about it.

I can understand the frustration of the honourable member. This is not only an issue that he is frustrated with; in a number of other communities around Queensland car parking around a hospital is one of the major concerns. One would think that, as the Minister for Health, all the letters I receive are about delays in surgery and outpatient appointments—those sorts of things. But it is quite remarkable to see the correspondence and representations that I receive with regard to car parking not only at the hospital in the electorate of the honourable member but also at a range of other hospitals around Queensland—from Cairns all the way down to the Logan Hospital and all centres in between.
As a consequence of the issues that have been raised by the honourable member and others, I commissioned my department to look at how we could deal with the matter right across Queensland. I will be receiving a finalised report in the not-too-distant future that will outline the options. I say to the honourable member that Nambour Hospital is one of the 14 hospitals that are included in that report where we can consider what to do next.

I think it is important to note that providing car parking, particularly secure, multilevel car parking, comes at a price. We will need to look at other options of paying for that around Queensland. Similarly, we have to look at options where private providers have come in and been given a hand to construct car parks. These are the options that we need to consider. Otherwise we will be spending public money to the tune of possibly $10 million, $20 million, $30 million or $40 million on car parking when those scarce resources are not there and we should be spending them on core hospital services.

I assure the honourable member, as I do other members that have issues in their electorates, that we are not far away from a solution. Those solutions will not be without some degree of contention, but we need to bite the bullet. We need to do something about it. I will keep the honourable member informed.

(Time expired)

Electricity Industry

Mr HOLSWICH: My question is to the Minister for Energy and Water Supply. Regarding the Commission of Audit, can the minister advise what the government's decision in relation to Powerlink, Ergon and Energex means for the future of those businesses?

Mr McARDLE: I thank the member for the question. At the outset, can I say how proud I am to be part of a government that is not afraid to tackle the hard questions openly and honestly and, in fact, bring in all LNP members to talk about the issues and talk about the solutions. That is in contrast to the Labor Party in the last sale of assets that they put through this House. In fact, I can recall one member of this House in the Labor Party—in fact, a minister for transport—who was asked a question by the then shadow Treasurer about the sale of QR and who had no idea that it was going to be sold. In fact, she stood here and made the comment, 'It will not be sold. It will not be sold.' Two days later, what happened? The boom came down. They even excluded their own ministry from understanding the issues, let alone the solutions—'It will not be sold.' It was a bit like a dalek moving forward saying, 'Exterminate, exterminate.'

I make the comment that when this government inherited Ergon, Energex and Powerlink, it inherited a debt of somewhere between $12 billion to $13 billion. But these entities are important to Queensland. They are important to the four pillars to developing this state so that we can grow the state in conjunction with the people, in conjunction with the business and in conjunction with local government. But the task will not be easy. The task will be hard. It will be long. We need to make certain that these entities turn up their productivity even higher, turn their focus on the bottom line even harder and make certain that they get the best of their assets for the long-term benefit of Queensland.

It is important that we understand that these entities are commercial entities. They are expected by this government and the people of this state to return a dollar, to return a quality product and to return an outcome that is beneficial for all concerned. This government has made certain they understand that they are expected to turn around the course that they were set on by the Labor Party in years gone by, a course that delivered a $14 billion debt to the people of this state—a debt that we continue to pay on an ongoing basis. There will be no more statements that 'it is not happening', 'it is not going on'. We are here to make certain we get the outcomes. We are not going to exterminate assets; we are going to make them profitable. We are going to make certain that they do turn the corner. We are going to make the people of Queensland as proud of Ergon, Energex and Powerlink as we are—as I am. We have good people in this government working hard with those entities to make certain that we do get what we want, they are proud of who they work for, they are proud of who they are and, more importantly, the people of this state are proud of them and what they do.
Questions Without Notice

Education Reform

Mr KNUTH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Education. Can the minister please outline why the government intends to spend more than $600 million transferring year 7 into high school, which does nothing to improve the education standards in this state, while at the same time closing down 55 schools to save money?

Mr LANGBROEK: This is a question that has been asked by other members of the honourable member’s party since we have been in this parliament. It is an interesting thing for us to look at because it is a commitment that was made by the former government that this government is continuing. It is called Flying Start and it is putting year 7 into high school in 2015. It does involve significant preparation for infrastructure.

Mr STEVENS: I rise to a point of order. The question related to the 5.30 debate and therefore it is pre-empting this evening’s debate.

Madam SPEAKER: I have not received a copy of tonight’s motion. Could I please have a look? Looking at the notice of motion and the question that was put, it is substantially a different matter. I will call the minister to answer the question.

Mr LANGBROEK: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was aware of the fact that the latter half of the question which was to do with this evening’s debate is subject to privilege under standing order 113. Speaking more about the substantive matter in relation to Flying Start, which moves year 7 into high school, in the early 1960s year 8 was put into high school. That was under Jack Pizzey. That was the system at the time. At that time not many people went on to high school, but as time has gone on we have found that with prep being added some years ago these students will then be in their eighth year of school. Given the diversity of subjects that students do in high school, especially subjects like science and the arts, with the differentiation that is required in high school, it is appropriate, as every other state in Australia has done apart from South Australia, to put these students from year 7 into high school. As I was saying before we had that ruling on that point of order, we have made a significant commitment to both infrastructure and ongoing costs that does total over $600 million, but we are doing it because it is in the best interests of our education system and our students.

As I have said already, every other state except South Australia has plans to do it. It is important that as we progress our education system, we look at the maturity of our students and them getting the best opportunities in an ever-changing world. It is important that we do not remain stuck in the fifties or sixties, as the honourable member’s party is, relishing the old times and saying this is how it always has been and how it should remain.

I want to reassure the honourable member that in areas like his where there are significant concerns about primary schools that are going to lose their year 7 cohort, I have made a commitment to teachers and senior administrators in all of those schools that we will look at our resourcing model in terms of human resources. There is no way that we want our primary schools to feel like they are going to be second best. I invite him to consult with me about the concerns of schools in his electorate, as I know other members will, to make sure that all of our schools—all the way from early childhood through to schooling, universities, TAFEs and training—will get the best outcomes for Queenslanders and their education.

Ports

Mr CRANDON: My question without notice is to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Can the minister outline for the House how the Commission of Audit will deliver better ports for Queensland?

Mr EMERSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Let us go back to what the Commission of Audit is all about. It has identified some major challenges for this state. There is no doubt about what those challenges are and what has caused those challenges. It has been that legacy of 14 years of Labor: that massive debt, the fiscal mismanagement we saw and the loss of the AAA credit rating. As the Commission of Audit indicated, we are still potentially at risk of another downgrade. That is why we have had to look at a number of these recommendations. Across-the-board we have looked at those recommendations and we have made some decisions.
Going to the member for Coomera’s question, in terms of North Queensland Bulk Ports, we have accepted that recommendation of retaining them as GOCs. But in terms of the Port of Townsville and the Gladstone port we are now considering the possibility of a long-term lease. I have to stress that: a long-term lease—not a sale, but a long-term lease—to look at how we can drive down that debt of Labor. Because that is the reality of it: we have to get the debt down, as the member for South Brisbane would know. She was part of the party that drove up the debt, kept spending and spending and spending, putting us in that situation that forced us to do the Commission of Audit because of the constant Labor waste. We will now look at that.

But we have to send the clear message that this is for consideration of a 99-year lease, not for sale. ‘For consideration’ means if we come down to that decision of leasing out these ports we will take it to an election. We will seek a mandate from the people—exactly what Labor did not do. Queenslanders remember that the previous government could not tell the truth. They were divorced from honesty with the public of Queensland. They could not tell them what their plans were. It deceived the public before the 2009 election. As a government we have made a clear commitment. If we make a decision to do these actions we will take it to the public. We will take it to the election. We will deal with the waste, we will deal with the fiscal mismanagement, we will deal with cleaning up the mess of Labor. That is what we have had to do. But let us be very clear regarding these two ports. We are considering it. We have made no decision. If we make a decision we will take it to the election—for lease, not for sale.

Queensland Rail, Passenger Services

Ms TRAD: My question without notice is to the Premier. Given the government’s acceptance of Peter Costello’s recommendation to break up QR passenger services into separate franchise areas, will the Premier guarantee that the outsourcing and privatisation of Queensland Rail’s passenger services will not lead to increased fares, a reduction in rail services and massive job losses?

Mr NEWMAN: I can guarantee a couple of things. Firstly I can guarantee that the public transport fare increase of 15 per cent for the current year we are in will not be happening—the Labor 15 per cent increase will not be happening. I can confirm that the other fare increase of 15 per cent that the current Leader of the Opposition put in place will not be happening as well. They will be halved. I can confirm that. I remind those opposite that they are the people who sold off the very profitable and lucrative bit of QR and left the stuff that did not make money—

Mr Seeney: And sold it rather cheaply.

Mr NEWMAN: They sold it rather cheaply, as we can probably see right now. What was said by the then transport minister in this House? As we heard from Minister McArdle earlier on, in this place a direct question was asked of the then minister for transport about whether QR would be sold off. That minister for transport said that it would not be sold off; it was not going to happen. Two days later, it was on the chopping block. There are a couple of things I need to draw out about that. Firstly, the people of Queensland did not know; they had been told there would be no asset sales. Secondly, the then cabinet of Premier Anna Bligh and Treasurer Andrew Fraser was not even told. Clearly the caucus was not told and then just told to suck it up.

Let us contrast that with our way of doing business. We have a very clear position that we will not be selling off assets without going to the people of Queensland. We have had our cabinet involved in a full discussion that provided a set of recommendations to our party room. The party room, a fine group of men and women, spent seven hours yesterday debating the issue and coming up with this endorsed response. What a breathtaking contrast that is with those hypocrites opposite.

In terms of the issue about passenger services on the South-East Queensland rail network, we are about competitive, efficient services. On the contestability issue, our position is that if the hardworking men and women in QR can do it as inexpensively on the public purse as can private sector operators—and there are many benchmarks interstate—it shall be done by them. At the end of the day, it is about the people of Queensland; it is about the commuters and the fares they have to pay. We are trying to keep those fares down. Those opposite just wanted to hit commuters with a 15 per cent increase, year after year. That is the difference.

(Time expired)
Social Housing

Mr DAVIES: My question without notice is to the Minister for Housing and Public Works. In response to the Commission of Audit recommendations regarding the future ownership and management of public housing stock, will the minister clarify what the government’s intentions are?

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you have two minutes.

Mr MANDER: I thank the honourable member for his question. On numerous occasions in this House I have said that tackling the legacy of Labor’s chronic mismanagement in social housing is something that we simply cannot do on our own. We must partner with the non-government sector to deliver the results that social housing tenants deserve. I note the Commission of Audit recommendation on this matter and I am happy to advise the House that the Newman government is committed to outsourcing tenancy management of the majority of the state social housing supply by 2020.

Mrs Miller: Shame on you.

Mr MANDER: That is very predictable from the member for Bundamba. I can predict what the member for Bundamba will no doubt do, that is, engage in hysterical scaremongering aimed at those people in social housing at the moment. This does not mean that we will be embarking on some sort of wholesale sell-off of the state’s public housing stock. We are committed to making sure our tenants receive the best possible level of support. Because social housing places are allocated according to level of need, many of our tenants require significant support in order to sustain a tenancy. However, too often tenants are simply handed the keys to a home and then, more or less, left to their own devices.

Of course, from time to time we may need to transfer small parcels of land to our partners in the community housing sector. That is nothing unusual. Again, before the opposition gets too excited about this, let us not forget that now in this state there are almost 10,000 social housing properties that are fully owned by the community housing sector. While we might see some more of those transfers, the government will still regulate the industry and make sure that the prices for social housing, the rents, stay at the right rate and that the services provided are sufficient.

(Time expired)

Madam SPEAKER: The time for questions has expired.

SPEAKER’S STATEMENT

School Group Tours

Madam SPEAKER: I wish to acknowledge the schools visiting the parliament from Citipointe Christian College in the electorate of Mansfield and the school captains, vice-captains and coordinators from the Lockyer District State High School in the electorate of Lockyer.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Commission of Audit

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.04 am): After 61 days of waiting, finally, the secret Costello report has been handed down. How long were government backbenchers given to consider this report? One day! How much does the cabinet trust its backbench on the secret Costello report? They were given one day to consider the recommendations of the secret Costello report.

Now that the report has been made public and that we have received the government’s response to it, I can tell Queenslanders that the devil is in the detail. Today, we heard the Premier and the Treasurer gloss over what is largely about outsourcing and privatisation. This government intends to sell most government services, which means it will have nothing left to do. We hear the Treasurer talk about the government being an enabler. We know that this government has only one priority. It has only one infrastructure project on the cards. What is that infrastructure project?

Mr Mulherin: 1 William Street.
Ms PALASZCZUK: Exactly: the executive building at 1 William Street. Once they have sold off the services and once they have sold out the people of Queensland, what is the government going to do next?

Mr Crandon interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! There are too many interjections across the chamber. I appreciate the topic may lead to heated debate, but we will have order. I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms PALASZCZUK: What will be left for government ministers to do? They will be sitting there in their brand-new luxurious offices overlooking the Brisbane River, with their feet up on the tables, hands behind their heads—

Mr Crandon interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Ms PALASZCZUK: Obviously, they do not like what I am saying.

Mr Crandon interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for Coomera. I warn you under standing order 253A. I ask you to stop interjecting across the chamber. I appreciate there are comments across the chamber that people are responding to, but the noise level is too high.

Ms PALASZCZUK: This government, when in opposition, promised to seek a mandate if it was to sell assets. Clearly, what we have seen today is the fact that this government has sold assets without a government mandate.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Yes, they have. Seven high-rise buildings in the CBD are assets. Fifty-five schools throughout Queensland are assets.

Mr LANGBROEK: I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, I ask you for a ruling under standing order 113(1)(b) about pre-empting debate. It has already been decided that that matter will be debated at 5.30.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I am moving on, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition needs to consider anticipation of the debate tonight in any comments that she makes. I ask her to stay away from the topic.

Ms PALASZCZUK: This government has no intention whatsoever of seeking a mandate from the people of Queensland. Today we saw the Premier’s inability to answer any question posed by the opposition about asset sales. Who gave him the answers? The Treasurer! The Treasurer was giving the Premier the answers. In his own words he said he is a soft touch. I agree with the Premier. We will continue to ask him the tough questions in this House. We will continue to condemn him for this so-called independent report and the government’s response to it, because they do not have a mandate from the people. We will continue to make this an issue in the lead-up to the next election.

What did those opposite say about asset sales when they were in opposition? I am quite happy to go through that now. The now Premier said in November 2011—

I have actually no plans to sell any sort of government owned corporations or assets. If we do, I can tell you right now we will tell people prior to the election—we’ll put it on the table.

Can anyone remember being told prior to the March 2012 election that seven CBD buildings were going to be sold—no, no, no. Nobody was told about the nursing homes going. No-one was told about the ElectraNet sale. No-one was told about the $2.3 billion in QR shares going. You have misled the people of Queensland and today you have glossed over the detail.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: You can laugh.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Mr Deputy Speaker, there are 74 members trying to interject on me. I would like some order, please.
Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! If the Leader of the Opposition does not take interjections it is easier to protect her. I call the Leader of the Opposition.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Now I would like to go through in a bit of detail what is actually in the government’s response to the Commission of Audit final report so the people of Queensland can be very clear about what they are being conned about by this government. Recommendation 133 which relates to employees has been accepted. Every public servant needs to know this. It says that employees should no longer be appointed to a particular position in a particular agency; rather they should be engaged under the Public Service Act on the basis that their employment is with the Queensland government at a particular broad banded level.

A government member interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: That is treating the workforce with complete and utter contempt. Let us move on to transport. I am going to read this out so the people of Queensland are very clear about what this government intends to do. Recommendation 15 states—

City passenger rail services and network infrastructure be opened up to contestability, like bus services, to allow different providers, including private providers, to bid to operate services and maintain below-rail assets in a particular franchised area under franchise and lease arrangements.

This will lead to higher prices for the public. Is there a mandate for the government to do this? No, there is absolutely no mandate from the Queensland public to do this. They also want to outsource. They can use outsource, they can use contestability, but, at the end of the day, it means sell, sell, sell.

Then the maintenance of the rail network and the safety of the rail network are to be outsourced—are to be sold off. How can we guarantee the safety of the public when they are travelling on our public rail network? But that is not all. At the moment pensioners receive a subsidy when they travel with Queensland Rail. There is a review of the routes being undertaken. Does that mean the closure of the railway route from Brisbane to Charleville or from Townsville to Mount Isa? We know from the recommendations that the government is clearly looking at selling off the railway line from Mount Isa to Townsville with the port. That is the consideration.

Mrs Ostapovitch: How do you know?

Ms PALASZCZUK: Because it is in the recommendations if you care to have a look at them. At least I have had the opportunity to read them.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will direct her comments through the chair and the member for Stretton will cease interjecting.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Let us move to health.

Mr Watts: Let’s move to health!

Ms PALASZCZUK: Yes, let us read about health. The recommendations state—

To achieve improved efficiency of public hospital services, the Government should progressively expand contestable markets—which means sale—initially in metropolitan areas, for the private provision of:

- clinical services—which happens already with some elective surgery, but in greenfield hospital developments could go far wider.
- clinical support services such as pathology, radiology and pharmacy.

Sell, sell sell—public transport and health services.

Let us move onto disability services. Let us read into the record the recommendations about disability services so everybody is very clear. They state—

The Government continue to support and monitor the development of the non-government sector’s governance capability as part of the move to market contestability in specialist disability services.

The government wants to sell off to someone else the services provided to people who need the highest care in this state. They will not be looked after in the government’s hands.

Mr Davies interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The member for Capalaba will cease interjecting.
Ms PALASZCZUK: This is a con. Today all the ministers have glossed over the details. They have glossed over the details. The Premier failed to answer any questions. The government has kept this under wraps for a long time. The backbench, all 74 of them, were only given one day to consider it. Let me be very clear: the people of Queensland will wake up to what it is. It is a sale. It is a sell-off. It is asset sales, pure and simple.

(Time expired)

Tourism

Mr PUCCI (Logan—LNP) (11.15 am): Imagine a small corner of the world—one where you can stop, take a breath and enjoy what is around you. Imagine that spot where the water is warm and the people even warmer. From the coral clear waters to the tropical rainforests, this unique slice of paradise is not found in some far-off land. It is right here at home; right here in our great state of Queensland.

Over the Easter holidays my family and I travelled to the beautiful Far North Queensland. I am always in awe of our great country and how vast our great southern land is, especially when one can spend 2½ hours in a plane and not even leave the state. Touching down in Cairns, natural beauty and opportunity awaited us. This magnificent slice of Australiana is tremendously represented by my northern brothers, the members for Cairns, Cook and, of course, Barron River.

When the people of Queensland elected this LNP government we set out to establish a four-pillar economy to rectify the mess and climb out of the hole left behind by Labor. One of those four pillars focused on tourism. Over Easter, my family experienced everything that makes Far North Queensland paradise, as my honourable colleague for Whitsunday would put it.

From hot-air ballooning with Hot Air Cairns to the Minjin Jungle Swing with AJ Hackett, from horseback riding and quad bike riding at Blazing Saddles to whitewater rafting the Barron River and snorkelling on Fitzroy Island with Raging Thunder, the excitement and wonder that can be had right here in our own state is limitless. From family activities or to more adventurous challenges, Cairns has it all. With local markets like those in Kuranda—

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: What is your point of order?

Mrs MILLER: I would ask you to rule on relevance. Do members really have to listen to a speech about this member's vacation in Queensland?

Government members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. That is an extraordinary point of order. I think it was very frivolous. I warn the member for Bundamba under standing order 253A. I call the member for Logan.

Mr PUCCI: From family activities or to more adventurous challenges, Cairns has it all. With local markets like those in Kuranda nestled on the tip of the Atherton Tablelands, the slow and easy pace can set an enjoyable tone for any vacation. Whether it is action packed or just laying by the beach at spectacular Port Douglas, our local tourism opportunities can forge wonderful memories that will last a lifetime. It is those memories we will always fondly look back on. For my children, they form memories that will become part of a rich tapestry of experiences and will undoubtedly give them and children like them a great appreciation of our great country.

As our government launches the buy local initiative, we are encouraging our constituents to invest back into our own communities. In conjunction with buy local, we must continue our government's strong commitment to initiatives that support the vital tourism lifeline that connects our state at a regional, domestic and international level—initiatives like the recently announced $3 million boost for Queensland tourism destinations in which our 13 regional tourism organisations can each apply for a share of funding that will help boost our tourism industry.

It is essential that we continue to invest in our tourism industry. Whilst promoting the wonders that our state holds around the globe, it is vital that we continue to look at holidaying options at home. From Barron River to Broadwater and every electorate in between, our great state has opportunities unlike any other. One of the ways we can capitalise on those opportunities—

Mr Krause: What about the Scenic Rim?
Mr PUCCI: The Scenic Rim and Logan are also wonderful places to visit. One of the ways we can capitalise on those opportunities is our ability, as a state, to sell ourselves. The honourable member for Barron River, Mr Michael Trout, joined by his northern parliamentary colleagues, the honourable members for Cairns and Cook, Mr Gavin King and Mr David Kempston respectively, are ensuring everyone is aware of the natural wonders and treasures of Far North Queensland.

Recently our government passed the Nature Conservation and Other Legislation Bill. This bill will serve as a massive shot in the arm for our state’s ecotourism industry. As international travel becomes more affordable, we must continue to encourage the benefits of domestic travel. Between the wondrous to behold and the adventures to be had, Queenslanders, and Australians for that matter, should continue to enjoy the Queensland treasures our country holds dear.

Our government continues to achieve great results in developing tourism and tourism industry opportunities. As we prepare ourselves for the 2018 Commonwealth Games, Queensland will be thrust onto the global stage. What we already know to be true—that Queensland is beautiful one day and perfect the next—will be showcased to the world. We must not turn our backs on domestic tourism. We must get behind our own industry by supporting our state and seizing its opportunities. Queensland should always be the No. 1 destination for Australians and, as long as there is an LNP government, we will make those opportunities available to all Queenslanders and Australians. Our government will continue to work hard to attract tourists to our great state.

Our state’s tourism is in safe hands. As I mentioned, my northern colleagues are helping to boost our great state’s tourism industry. I also must acknowledge the tremendous work of our Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games, the Hon. Jann Stuckey, and her ministerial and departmental team. Together our LNP government is rebuilding tourism and getting our state back on track.

(TIME EXPIRED)

Townsville Electorate, Kapyong Day and Anzac Day

Mr HATHAWAY (Townsville—LNP) (11.20 am): I take this opportunity to record some historical observations recently following commemorations for Kapyong Day and Anzac Day in Townsville. I recognise the importance of these commemorations right across Australia. However, in a garrison city like Townsville—where 11 per cent of its population is made up of serving Defence members and their families and estimates that the figure may be as high as 25 per cent if you consider ex-serving members and their families—you can understand that any military celebration and particularly those that acknowledge our fallen are held close to the heart by all the community. Accordingly, I thought it worthy to note for the House the most recent observance of these days in Townsville.

With each year passing, the ranks of our World War II veterans continue to thin dramatically as indeed cohorts of veterans from previous conflicts get smaller. It is somewhat sobering yet quietly welcoming to see the baton of remembrance passed on to the younger veterans from our very recent and contemporary conflicts. A point to note is that this year has now marked our 13th year of continuous operations in the Middle East that has now seen more service men and women deployed to that theatre than our contribution to South Vietnam.

Members may well also recall during my maiden speech in this House the importance that I place on the military tradition, the service men and women and the wider community of our garrison city that is Townsville. During that speech I also highlighted the honour, dignity, pride and, regretfully more often than not, the loss that I have felt commemorating our fallen in the city that I represent. I was fortunate last Wednesday to observe and commemorate with the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, along with their battalion family, both past and present, and many of the Townsville community including my colleague from Thuringowa, the 62nd anniversary of the Battle of Kapyong. The Battle of Kapyong was fought in Korea in 1951 by the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment; the 2nd Battalion, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry; and Company A, 72nd Heavy Tank Battalion (US), against mass communist Chinese forces. For their extraordinary heroism they were awarded the United States Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. The cost to 3RAR during this battle was high, with 31 members killed in action, 58 wounded and three POWs.
As part of its celebration, the battalion held a well-attended open day, which included demonstrations of its major weapon systems and also attachments from supporting armour, artillery, engineers and logistic support units. A first for the battalion, and possibly any unit in Townsville, was that the parade ground was held by some of the Army’s latest weapon acquisitions including the very recently acquired M777 155 millimetre from 4th Regiment, following an explosive combined infantry-armour assault onto the parade ground with two M1A1 Abrams tanks from the 1st Armoured Regiment.

The year 2012 was an extremely demanding and complex year for 3RAR. Having only just arrived in Townsville in January, there was the dedication of its new lines on Kapyong Day 2012 and the preparation for and deployment to Afghanistan, set against a backdrop of re-rolling from the Army’s Airborne (Parachute) Battalion—a role that they have uniquely held since 1983—to Light Infantry. The battalion acknowledged its fallen with precision, presence and due solemnity, a rededication of its colours and commitments by its members to their task and their battalion known affectionately since Korea as ‘Old Faithful’. History may have been made, and a first I believe for any infantry battalion within the Royal Australian Regiment, in that it was the first time a female had marched amongst its number as the battalion 2IC—Major Tina McBride, a grand-daughter of a 3RAR Korean veteran herself and, I am proud to add, a former adjutant of mine from some years ago. Well done to the CO, Lieutenant-Colonel Gavin Keating, and all ranks of the 3rd Battalion.

The very next day, Anzac Day, saw record numbers across the garrison city at dawn services, with crowd estimates as high as 25,000 across Townsville, Thuringowa and Magnetic Island, where I attended and, as the sun rose, the waves lapped the shore and, as if on cue, the kookaburras called their praise. Later on Anzac Day many more thousands participated in and were spectators at the marches in both Townsville and Thuringowa to mark the remembrance of our service men and women on Anzac Day.

Despite our political divide, I note the attendance of the Prime Minister at both Townsville’s dawn service and march. The Prime Minister spoke solemnly about Australia’s contribution both past and present and also acknowledged that there were seven members of the Army who could not answer rollcall since the last Anzac Day. Regrettably their silent calls are known only too well by our Townsville community. Equally, I note for the historical record that it was the first time in 60 years that the foundation battalions of the Royal Australian Regiment—1st, 2nd and 3rd battalions—have paraded together in their city of garrison, and on this occasion complete with their battalion colours, since 21 March 1953 at Camp Casey in South Korea. Lest we forget.

Commission of Audit

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.25 am): What we have from the LNP today is a political document tabled in this parliament that has been doctored by a Liberal Party political operative—a report doctored so that the government could hide the sale of key electricity assets and claim that it is not selling the farm or electricity assets. In the government response it says that they will sell some assets without a mandate—assets like the government owned mines that provide the coal for our power stations, mines like Meandu and Kogan Creek. If this is not selling the farm, I do not know what is. Not only this, but it says they will further consider selling the state’s electricity generators and the retail arm of Ergon Energy. This only stands to hike up the cost of electricity in regional communities.

This has been a report from a lifetime member of the Liberal Party who during his time as a Treasurer in the Howard government oversaw the privatisation of $72 billion worth of public assets—a lifetime Liberal with a clear financial interest in increasing ‘contestability’, a word being used as a euphemism for placing essential services on the chopping block for privatisation and outsourcing; a lifetime Liberal who attended two fundraisers that we know of for the LNP prior to the election; a lifetime Liberal who has presented what is a false ultimatum, an ultimatum that Queensland must either sell assets and privatise essential services or increase taxes. This ultimatum is based on a claim that a fiscal surplus of one per cent of revenue would take 50 years to repay $25 billion in debt, a claim based on an assumption that the government’s revenue will not grow for half a century.

Last week we heard the Premier tell ABC radio that this report ‘paints a picture’. We all know from the first Costello report what that picture is. It is a picture of horror and of gloom and doom based on hysterical thought bubbles rather than based on facts. It is a picture designed to scare and con
Queenslanders and the LNP backbench into accepting an ideological program of asset sales and privatisation of essential services that the Treasurer and Premier have planned all along. An independent analysis by Federation Fellow and Professor in Economics John Quiggin, among others, concluded in relation to the first Costello report—

The Commission has not discovered any ‘black holes’ or substantial mis-statements in the budget estimates of the outgoing Labor Government.

This means that the LNP knew full well the state of Queensland’s finances when they made $4 billion in unfunded election promises—more than four times the cost of commitments made by the previous government. So far the LNP’s cuts to front-line services and more than 14,000 jobs have all been about funding their priorities, with gross debt still set to increase under the LNP by $20 billion over four years. These LNP cuts have been too hard and too fast and have both slowed Queensland’s economic growth and lifted unemployment.

Two independent reports by CommSec and Deloitte Access Economics have set out in the last week that the LNP government’s cuts have contributed to higher unemployment and a slowing economy. Deloitte Access Economics have nearly halved their forecast for Queensland’s growth this financial year from four per cent to 2.3 per cent, which is slower than the nation and well below the decade average. CommSec’s report has set out that the trend jobless rate in Queensland is 14.2 per cent above the decade average.

The LNP’s draconian austerity is now contributing to lower payroll tax, transfer duty and royalties through decreased economic activity which is actually increasing the deficit next financial year and debt. In fact, debt would likely be higher under the LNP had it not been for a program of asset sales without a mandate and undertaken largely by stealth totalling more than $3.3 billion, asset sales that include the fire sale of seven office buildings in the city for $562 million—less than the cost of the Premier’s new tower of power at $650 million.

The opposition has a responsible plan to pay down debt and return a AAA rating without crippling economic growth over the short term which only serves to increase debt through lowering revenue. We have a plan to utilise economic growth over coming years to return the budget to surplus as soon as is practical and to pay down debt without selling our assets and long-term future or undermining our tax competitiveness. This economic growth is forecast by both Treasury and Deloitte Access Economics from projects initiated under the former state government that will continue despite the LNP government—certainly not because of it.

**Member for Moggill, Courier-Mail**

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (11.29 am): Over a five-day period around 12 November 2012, the *Courier-Mail* ran a massive series of articles personally attacking me and my family totalling almost 10 pages of their paper. I intend to set the record straight today. Firstly, I make it clear that journalist Steve Wardill never once during that time contacted me to ensure a balanced report. A list of email subject lines alone—only the subject lines—was released by a disgruntled former staffer. The *Courier-Mail*, like me, had never, ever seen the content of most of those emails and just took public statements at face value.

On 14 November a full front-page photograph and article under the provocative headline ‘How does this man keep his job?’ alleged that I tabled incorrect documents despite the fact that they had never seen the content of those emails. Perhaps their motivations would be best understood by the reaction of journalist Steve Wardill in the media gallery witnessed by members of this House when I did the right thing, took one for the team and resigned—fist pumping as though his soccer team had scored a goal and backslapping and high fiving another journalist. It is impossible to imagine we could get any fair, balanced or truthful reporting in that environment.

Last year I told this House that I would seek the advice of the Integrity Commissioner and, if appropriate, make any corrections to my lobbyist register. I am pleased to say that it has not been found necessary to make any adjustment at all to the ministerial lobbying register, but this whole disgraceful episode raises some very serious issues. The 15 November follow-up article by Mr Wardill was a front-page article based on a leaked email from that disgruntled former staffer in which Mr Wardill attacked my family by falsely claiming my son had improperly lobbied me. The *Courier-Mail* printed a doctored version of that email, suggesting it had originated from my son when in fact it had originated from a principal of the lobbying firm in question. The correct version was printed in the Fairfax media thanks to the *Brisbane Times*. Why would the *Courier-Mail* have doctored the email to give a false impression of access by my son? Beyond the attitude of Mr Wardill, it is important to note...
that the wife of the editor of the *Courier-Mail*, Madonna King, was in fact a business associate of the lobbying firm and its principal. It is no surprise that the *Courier-Mail* hid the email’s origin. The *Courier-Mail’s* version of this email was again doctored when the email was produced as a court document. Imagine the lack of principles and ethics you would have as an editor to attack a young person and force them out of their job just to protect a business associate of your wife and cover up her connection to the lobbying firm. The Integrity Commissioner examined this email which contained a CV that did not relate to any position available in the Department of Housing and Public Works. He advised that it was not an attempt to lobby by my son, and it did not require an adjustment to the lobbyist register. In fact, not a single senior public servant in my department was replaced. No surprise I neither opened nor remembered the email.

Serious questions in relation to the *Courier-Mail’s* willingness to be truthful and report fairly to the people of Queensland hang over numerous of their articles—in fact, too many to detail here—but I do note they even managed to position a large photograph of myself above an unrelated headline that said ‘Paedophile cover-up’. Earlier the paper ran large articles about a property I own overseas and used the global resources of News Ltd to obtain international banking and property information. Rather than just reporting it, if in fact it was newsworthy at all, they made up a completely fictional story about a Mrs Miriam Cope, where the only word of truth in the story was that there is a Miriam Cope. At no point did they ever contact me as minister or my office to check any detail. They simply alleged that Mrs Cope, after decades of living in housing commission property, was being evicted and contrasted that to my investment property. (Time expired)

Mr STEVENS (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (11.35 am): I move—

That the member be further heard.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Dr FLEGG (Moggill—LNP) (11.35 am): The truth was that Mrs Cope was not in an underoccupied dwelling and had not received any communication by phone or letter other than standard information sent to every housing commission tenant. This was simply a dishonest personal attack trying to accuse me of the heartless eviction of a poor tenant whilst being a property owner myself.

Perhaps one of the grubbiest articles produced by the *Courier-Mail*, because it attacks a couple of young people trying to make the most of their lives who are not politicians or public figures, was printed on just 2 April this year. The article was headed ‘Flegg flags son’s partner for award’. On close examination, the date contained in the article would make it clear that any nomination for recognition in relation to International Women’s Day occurred well before any business relationship. Madam Speaker asked members to nominate a constituent known to us who demonstrated the hallmarks of a pioneering woman. The young woman in question clearly meets that to the highest degree and, whilst known to me, was not well known to me. For goodness sake, an acknowledgement on International Women’s Day is a page 3 lead falsely implying some patronage or gain. They have got to be joking! Even more so the *Courier-Mail’s* assumption that because there is a family relationship with an independent adult family member, who was overseas at the time, and therefore all his business affairs would be known to me, that he would not be independent and that this was in some way improper is absurd. Case in point: the wife of the editor of the *Courier-Mail*. David Fagan’s wife, Madonna King, for years presented the morning political program on Brisbane 612 ABC. Is it therefore to be considered, as the *Courier-Mail* have asserted in this article, that the editor of the *Courier-Mail* was privy to the inside workings of the ABC? A wife is clearly a much closer relationship than an independent adult son. It is very important to me to note that I raised my concerns about the *Courier-Mail’s* conduct in November 2012 at a very high level with News Ltd. I greatly appreciated the time given to me by Mr Kim Williams, and I have a very high regard for Mr Williams. However, the article on 2 April was obviously payback because I had made this complaint.

There has been no offer by the *Courier-Mail* to print any retraction on any of these issues. Following my further complaint in relation to the 2 April article, the *Courier-Mail’s* editor has offered to meet me. To this day I believe I did the right thing in stepping down, partly because the *Courier-Mail* was clearly going to continue its personal vilification without either being truthful or balanced and this was a serious distraction to the government. Being a minister is a great privilege and should be seen as service to our community and not as personal gain or prestige. I took responsibility for the circumstances and allowed the government to get on with the job. Whilst few people in Queensland
have been subjected to the level of personal attack that I have, you could argue that it goes with the territory but what is not acceptable is the attacks on our families. They did not choose this avenue of community service. I am now absolutely focused on my constituents of Moggill, who have been badly let down by 20 years of Labor government, particularly in the area of transport. My new position on the backbench will leave me much more time and much freer to pursue realistic solutions, and I am sure the Minister for Transport and the Premier will get sick of hearing from me.

As a final note highlighting that readers of the Courier-Mail are not being presented with fair and accurate reporting, when Madam Speaker released her findings to parliament that there was no matter in relation to the lobbyists register to go to the Ethics Committee, despite having found 10 pages to write personal attacks, the Courier-Mail was not prepared to report it separately. It was buried as the last paragraph in a completely unrelated article about lobbyist Santo Santoro.

There is no hiding from the damaging impact these dishonest articles have had on me and my family. Honourable members should imagine how they would feel waking day after day with no warning to front page after front page, article after article—not reporting news but simply personal vilification.

(Time expired)

Newman Government, Performance

Mr MULHERIN (Mackay—ALP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.40 am): The Newman LNP government has misled the people of Queensland numerous times since it was elected 13 months ago. The Premier told public servants they had nothing to fear from an LNP government and then proceeded to sack 14,000 of them. The LNP said it would seek a mandate from the people before selling any assets and then promptly disposed of assets worth more than $3.3 billion without seeking the authorisation of the voting public. But perhaps the most significant deception undertaken by the Newman government since March 2012 was its claim that the Costello Commission of Audit was independent. Peter Costello has never been independent. The Labor opposition has always maintained the audit would have been more credible if the former Liberal Treasurer had not been involved, let alone chaired it. Who would believe that a life member of the Liberal Party hired by an LNP government would give it anything but highly politicised advice and attack the Labor Party?

Nobody should be surprised, especially because in December 2011 Peter Costello and his business partner Jonathan Epstein hosted an LNP fundraiser in Melbourne with the now Queensland Treasurer, the member for Clayfield, as their guest. I understand that Melbourne businesspeople attending the event were told by the would-be Treasurer that Mr Costello would play an influential role in an LNP government in Queensland. Not only that, but ECG Advisory Solutions, the lobbying firm in which Mr Costello is a partner, would have unparalleled access to government decision makers. Then in February last year, in the lead-up to the 2012 election, the now Treasurer released his economic blueprint, which included establishing a Commission of Audit. Little did anyone know then, but he had already settled on Mr Costello as its chair.

In March, just weeks before the election, Mr Costello appeared at an LNP QForum fundraising dinner in Brisbane where those in attendance were asked to make donations of up to $22,000. Days after the 2012 election, the Treasurer announced Mr Costello as the ‘independent’ head of the Commission of Audit. As a significant fundraiser for the LNP, how could he be independent? As someone actively involved in a lobbying firm through his shareholding in ECG Advisory Solutions, how can Mr Costello make recommendations on asset sales or privatisation of government services through outsourcing without questions being raised about the inside running his firm may enjoy among its clients seeking to pick up a share of those assets or services? When these conflicts of interest were raised in the media earlier this year, Mr Costello released several responses to tell his side of the story. But his responses further highlighted the fact that he is not independent. In response to queries about the December 2011 fundraising breakfast attended by Mr Nicholls, the member for Clayfield, Mr Costello’s firm released a statement which included the following lines—

Mr Costello does not organise these gatherings and he does not collect the membership dues.

This was the case for the breakfast in December 2011. He was not paid to attend and collected no money.

This was also the case for any other functions for QForum. He was not paid to attend. He did not ask anyone else to pay to attend. He was invited as an honorary speaker, a role he has performed at thousands of Liberal Party events for over 30 years in every State of Australia.
Let me repeat the words prepared by Mr Costello’s own firm, ‘thousands of Liberal Party events’. By his own admission, his political bias is further laid bare for all to see apart from those on the government benches in this chamber. Further, Mr Costello’s report is as predictable as it is biased. The recommendations bear a striking familiarity to audits commissioned by the Kennett Liberal government in Victoria in the early nineties, the Howard and Borbidge governments in the mid-nineties and, more recently, the O’Farrell coalition government in New South Wales. For the price of a bottle of correction fluid, the Premier and Treasurer could have saved Queenslanders $2.2 million by simply digging out one of the old, standard conservative audit reports and inserting ‘Queensland’ instead of ‘Victoria’, ‘New South Wales’ or ‘Australia’. They would have been saved from this charade perpetuated by the Premier and the Treasurer that Peter Costello is somehow unbiased.

The people of Queensland want a government that makes decisions in the public interest. Unfortunately, we have a government that is more interested in making decisions in the interests of their political mates.

United Australia Party

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—Ind) (11.45 am): I would like to formally announce today that I have joined the United Australia Party, the UAP, and intend to sit in this Parliament now as a UAP member. I have previously stated that, after resigning from the Liberal National Party last November, I would be intending to form and become a member of a party that follows the type of principles the LNP once espoused and focused on representing the joint interests of its members and constituents. The UAP, historically, emerged as a moderate party that uniquely linked former Labor leaders Joe Lyons, Billy Hughes and the long-serving former Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies and many others. It emerged during the World War II years when, like the Campbell Newman Party, it became all about the executive and lobbyists’ interests and not about the party members and the public at large. It was conceptually the singular most admirable and pragmatic party ever to emerge in Australia’s history. We intend to ensure this history becomes reality again. It is no secret that the principles of the UAP announced last week, whilst excluding lobbyists from the executive, are intending to be inclusive of all those in Australia who want better representatives and a party through which they can be represented fully.

It would seem that the emergence of the UAP, which has occurred organically over the last year, seems to more than irritate some commentators who claim greater knowledge of these things. Equally, some are trying to find some fine points in the history of the UAP that mean it is fatally flawed. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Political parties are about people who share a common vision but who do not necessarily all share the same skill set. Policies are what they develop by reaching consensus after extensive informed discussion. They then entrust their executive to enable that to occur via their link to their elected representatives. These elected representatives are not like barristers, who are like guns for hire. In contrast, elected representatives should be party members who share the common vision but whose job it is to enable those policies to formulate public policy and legislate change, for that is what governments do. It must not happen the other way around, that is, a top-down approach as opposed to a bottom-up approach. Political parties that are bottom-up are far more likely to succeed. Those that are top-down and cults, which is what they really are, ultimately fail. The UAP has emerged for these very reasons, embracing a bottom-up approach.

I hope there are many here amongst you who may well join the UAP in the future. I am a fourth generation Queensland politician. My family has worked through all types of parties since its inception and split away from New South Wales in the 1850s. We are very experienced in running parties and, arguably, have far greater knowledge and a skill set than do some of these so-called experts who are predicting negative outcomes. These qualities will lead to success because they are built on the basis of a long history of what works and what does not work. What does not work is a party that is built around a single person who sets the policies and ignores the wishes of those in the party itself. Secondly, if external parties determine the policies critical for their own personal interests then failure is certain. The UAP is correcting this problem that the CNP—the Campbell Newman party—is facing. We have stated what our policies are and we intend to add further to them. The UAP will adhere to what it says it will do and it is listening to what the majority of Queenslanders and Australians have been pleading for.
The UAP is a party for everyone. It has been set up professionally. It is well funded and it is broadly funded. At the forthcoming federal election it will run candidates in every seat in the House of Representatives and for the Senate—in every state of Australia. It is also preparing for any snap election proposed by the current Queensland state government.

I believe that this party will grow. We welcome anyone who is sick of being stood over, threatened or dictated to or who wants to work collectively in a representative democratic party. This party will focus on bringing people together rather than dividing them. I look forward to a long history as the UAP representative for Gaven.

The reaction in my electorate, on the Gold Coast and across the state has been very encouraging. The party will follow policies developed by stakeholders. It will go back to the members if policies need change and it will not sell the public out, as the Premier is proposing. The UAP has its first parliamentary member, and there will be many more to come.

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**Labor Governments, Debt; Burleigh Heads State School; Miami State High School**

Mr Hart (Burleigh—LNP) (11.50 am): I rise to inform the House of some very important milestones that have been reached in my electorate in the past month or so. Before I do that, I will address a couple of points raised by members opposite this morning.

I was very pleased to hear from the shadow Treasurer, the member for Mulgrave, that the Labor Party has a plan to pay down the debt of this state. I have not heard that plan, and I have been a member of this parliament for over 12 months. I have not heard a plan from those opposite on anything at all. It is not surprising that the people of Queensland have lost faith in the Labor Party in this state. The member for Mackay had five minutes to outline the plan that his side of politics has but, again, there was absolutely no plan. I do not think those opposite will ever produce a plan that has anything to do with paying down debt. They are very good at racking up debt and very good at denying debt, but they are not very good at paying it down.

The Leader of the Opposition brought up the matter of contestability. The Leader of the Opposition needs to look up ‘contestability’ in the dictionary to see what it is all about. Those in my household believe that there are a lot of government services delivered in a very good and timely manner. I wonder whether the Leader of the Opposition would agree with that. Does she believe that government services cannot stand up against those delivered by the private sector? Does she have a complete lack of faith in government entities that provide those services?

I rose to speak about the 96th anniversary of the Burleigh Heads State School which was celebrated on 19 March. The current principal, Mr Peter Tong, is ably supported by Ms Carol Brown, who has been at the school for over 30 years. Ms Brown is still loving it. It is a great thing to hear that one of our teachers has been at a school for over 30 years and is still thoroughly loving and enjoying her job.

The Burleigh Heads State School—which was referred to as No. 1568 in the old days—opened on 19 March 1917 in Tabilban Street, Burleigh Heads, with an enrolment of 11 pupils. That school is currently located on the lower Gold Coast Highway in the middle of Burleigh, where it has been since August 1935. This school, which started with 11 pupils, reached a peak enrolment of 1,200 students before other schools were built in the area. It now has a consistent student population of between 570 and 600.

Over the school’s 96 years a multitude of students have gone on to become doctors, lawyers, business leaders and sportspeople including Olympians. Most notably from this House, the Minister for Education, Training and Employment and member for Surfers Paradise is a past student, as is his sister, Kate. In fact, his father was a teacher at the school.

This school is central to the Burleigh community. It hosts markets on a Saturday morning and fashion markets on a Sunday morning. The people of Burleigh come and enjoy their days out in the sun. The school hosts fantastic events for the people of Burleigh.

Also, Miami State High School will this weekend celebrate its 50th birthday. Principal Jim Baker is doing a fantastic job putting together an agenda for the weekend. I look forward to attending. The school captain, Joel Ringland, will in fact come with me to Mackay on 10 May to be part of young people having input into the Queensland Plan. I am also looking forward to that.
Mr JUDGE (Yeerongpilly—Ind) (11.55 am): I rise to proudly announce my membership of and allegiance to the United Australia Party, a party which stands to bring people together and restore honesty to government.

Today I reaffirm what I stated in my maiden speech on 31 May last year. That is, I value and respect my community. I continue to feel humbled and privileged to represent the people of Yeerongpilly in this parliament and I thank them for placing their trust in me. On that point, my decision to join the UAP has been made after careful consideration and with their interests in my heart and mind.

I thoroughly comprehend the importance of restoring public confidence in politicians and accountability in governments. For this to happen, politicians must have the conviction not to compromise their integrity and to commit to their respective communities. I can assure my constituents that this is my firm position.

Furthermore, it is my firm belief that governments at all levels—local, state and federal—must remain true to their pre-election promises. The Gillard government had an obligation to be honest and transparent about the introduction of the carbon tax. The public was unforgivably deceived. Likewise, the Newman government had an obligation to be honest and transparent about the intended approach to job cuts in the Public Service. Again, the public was unforgivably deceived.

As I stated previously in this place before ending my association with the Newman government, we all have a choice about how we conduct ourselves. It is my view that politicians must be transparent, accountable and genuinely concerned with the good people in their electorates. Today I have become a member of the United Australia Party because I believe that it is a party that supports these principles and will offer people a truly worthy alternative to the other so-called mainstream political parties.

Mr Dowling interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! The member for Redlands will cease interjecting.

Mr JUDGE: Political parties like the ALP or the LNP do not deserve to be elected by essentially bidding for votes or by default. Importantly, the United Australia Party will take action that is in the best interests of our nation, states and territories and will restore accountability and honesty to government. I have every confidence—

Mr Dowling interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I warn the member for Redlands.

Mr JUDGE: I have every confidence in the party in this regard, including my UAP colleague in this parliament, Dr Alex Douglas, the member for Gaven. As the founding state members of the United Australia Party we will work to serve our respective electorates well and truly, as well as all other Queenslanders alike. Together we will also work diligently to support the United Australia Party executive and all candidates contesting state seats at the pending federal election. The federal leader of the United Australia Party, Clive Palmer—

Mr Dowling interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Yeerongpilly, take your seat. I warn the member for Redlands under standing order 253A.

Mr JUDGE: The federal leader of the United Australia Party, Clive Palmer, has confirmed that the party’s policies will be progressively released in the coming weeks and months, just like other parties do, and well before the federal election on 14 September.

The difference with the UAP is that we are a moderate progressive conservative party. Clive Palmer, on behalf of the UAP, has confirmed five specific and important expectations: party officials will not be allowed to be lobbyists; the carbon tax will be abolished from when it was introduced and rebated accordingly; there will be humane onshore processing of asylum seekers at airports to help people get off leaky boats, saving lives and the expenditure on border protection; a royalties for regions program involving one-quarter of the wealth generated from industries such as tourism and mining will remain in the regions; and it will be an objective to process mineral wealth from places like Queensland and Western Australia in places like New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania to help create more jobs to sustain industries.
In closing, I want to reiterate that I am extremely proud to be among the first members of the United Australia Party, which I believe will become a mainstream federal party as well as in all states and territories. I am particularly heartened to be part of a new democratic movement dedicated to bringing people together, including in my electorate of Yeerongpilly.

**Rural Fire Service, Review**

Mr MALONE (Mirani—LNP) (12.00 pm): Last week the Malone review of the Rural Fire Service was presented to cabinet and cabinet adopted all of the recommendations in the review. In total, my report presented 91 recommendations formed as a result of extensive consultation with more than 1,500 volunteers and Rural Fire Service staff, including consideration of more than 240 written submissions received by the team. The review team, which I led, recommended a new model that supports volunteers and returns decision making to local officers with local knowledge.

The renamed Rural Fire Service Queensland will now answer to its own deputy commissioner. The new model will increase local engagement and decision making; properly recognise the role of volunteers and increase support for them to do their job; re-establish the balance between mitigation and response, giving greater emphasis to bushfire mitigation and land management through the establishment of a district fire management group; address concerns that existing rural fire and SES arrangements could be made more efficient and coordinated; recognise the expertise of rural fire volunteers in bushfire management and establish structures that allow them to independently implement this expertise; and establish advisory mechanisms that draw on the experience of a wide range of stakeholders in volunteer management, land management, fire operations and disaster management.

The Rural Fire Service is the backbone of the state’s protection from bushfires and there are approximately 35,000 rural firefighters in communities right across Queensland. I want to thank the members of my team for helping me sound out volunteers and other community members and to document their concerns, which was quite a job. I want to thank the member for Sandgate, Kerry Millard; Andrew Houley from Reef Catchments Mackay; Mike Garrahay, President of the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland; and Bryan Cifuentes, the northern district inspector of rural fires in the peninsula. The review report contains very positive messages about the capability of rural and regional people to know best how to manage their land and what support they need from the government to enable them to do that. The report suggests practical, local solutions that strengthen fire management and reduce red tape and bureaucracy.

The final report of the Keelty review into police and emergency services will be handed down on 30 June 2013. It is likely that recommendations from that review will overlap some of the rural fire review recommendations, but mostly only with regard to its fit within emergency services in Queensland in the upcoming period. In the meantime, I will be engaging with the implementation group to implement the review’s recommendations as quickly as possible.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! The time allotted for matters of public interest has expired.

**QUEENSLAND RAIL TRANSIT AUTHORITY BILL**

Resumed from 16 April (see p. 948).

Second Reading

Hon. SA EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (12.03 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

I want to thank the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee for its timely consideration of the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013. I note that the committee tabled its report on the bill on 26 April 2013. In its report the committee made two recommendations. The committee’s first recommendation, that the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013 be passed, is welcome and is supported by the government with no reservations. The second recommendation from the committee supports the inclusion of clause 43 in the bill but recommends clarifying the application of clause 43 by including the criterion that the information could be commercially detrimental to the authority. The Queensland government recognises that there may be some benefit in clarifying clause 43 and proposes an alternate amendment to that recommended by the committee,
as similar provisions to clause 43 are found in section 41 of the South East Queensland Water (Restructuring) Act 2007 and in section 19 of the South-East Queensland Water (Distribution and Retail Restructuring) Act 2009.

In particular, the government notes the sensitivity of commercial information is not indefinitely uniform. Commercial information is particularly valuable when it relates to the future—to plans not yet implemented or tenders not yet awarded. This is because the benefits attaching to future plans, tenders or processes have not been secured and the benefits are at risk of being usurped by others. After the potential benefits have been secured by contracts, deeds or agreements, the sensitivity or value of commercial information used to secure those agreements is significantly reduced but not always removed. This distinction between ex-ante and ex-post commercial information is evident in a wide range of laws and practices concerning the release of commercial information.

This government also notes that there is already a requirement in the public sector that the government demonstrate that its use of public resources has been effective, economical, efficient and that it complies with all laws and meets community standards of probity and propriety. In particular, the authority will need to comply with its obligations under the Financial Accountability Act 2009 and will be subject to auditing under the Auditor-General Act 2009. However, in light of the committee’s comment, the government does wish to amend clause 43 during consideration in detail to include an example when there may be a practical need to remove some commercially sensitive information from the annual report. This should reassure a person reading the bill that the clause will not be used to inappropriately conceal information.

I want to foreshadow that I intend to propose a couple of additional amendments to the bill during the consideration in detail stage of the bill. These amendments have been, or if not will be, circulated in my name. The first amendment will correct a minor word error in clause 9(1)(b). The remaining amendments will ensure that the clause concerning consultation regarding major workplace change—that is, clause 8—in the Rail Industry Award 2010 will apply regardless of any provision in a certified agreement to the contrary and will be treated in the same way as similar provisions in the awards which apply to many other public sector employees such as our nurses and teachers.

Passage of this bill will represent a significant first step in reforming Queensland Rail so that it delivers improved rail services. This is part of the Newman government’s plans to make public transport more affordable, reliable and improve the service experience. It also helps to shape a better outcome for industries that use rail services. The Queensland Rail Transit Authority is designed to be a body that is flexible, innovative and yet accountable to ensure it delivers on government expectations. The bill ensures that strategic and operational plans of the authority are approved by the responsible ministers. In the short term, rail commuters and industry will see very little change. However, this bill will provide the framework for Queensland Rail to deliver better rail services for Queenslanders. The transfer of employees to the new entity through this bill is done in a way to preserve their remuneration, leave and superannuation. The transferred employees will be subject to the state industrial relations legislation in the same way as many other public sector employees. In the longer term, this change will give the Queensland Rail Transit Authority sufficient ability to adapt to future initiatives and meet the needs of a growing state.

This is an exciting time for Queensland Rail. As members would be aware, we will soon be awarding a contract for 75 new trains for our suburban network. In the coming months we will also see a refurbished Cairns tilt train re-enter service, plus we will continue to lobby both the federal government and opposition for funding for the Cross River Rail project which will deliver new capacity in the inner-city network. As I said in this House earlier this month, this change will allow this government to start to fix the mess left by those opposite. It will allow us to build on our track record, which includes 150 additional weekly train services. We have taken peak on-time running from its lowest level in three years during the final months under Labor to the highest in eight years.

In our first year, we have reduced the number of major safety incidents by 10 per cent compared to the final year under Labor. Under those opposite, the cost of running Queensland Rail had been increasing year after year by $100 million a year. In 2009, they were warned that this was the most expensive rail network per kilometre in Australia. They chose to ignore the problem and buried the report. Just like this great state, Queensland Rail is an organisation with great opportunity. This bill will help Queensland Rail deliver on that opportunity.
Ms TRAD (South Brisbane—ALP) (12.09 pm): I rise to speak to the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013. From the outset, let us be clear about what this bill is all about. It is not about making Queensland Rail more efficient, it is not about improving service reliability, it is not about improving on-time running and it is certainly not about fair affordability. What this bill is about is twofold. Firstly, it is to legislatively erase the entitlements and conditions rightfully earned by Queensland Rail workers in good-faith negotiations over many years. In other words, this is another outright attack on Queensland workers by the Newman LNP government. Secondly, this is the legislative instrument that will enable the LNP to realise its plan for Queensland Rail passenger services, as revealed today in the final report authored by Liberal Party mate Peter Costello as follows—

... contestability into the delivery of commuter rail services—

to create—

... maximum competitive tension by breaking the rail system up into separate franchise areas and creating competition for each franchise, as well as allowing competitive benchmarking between franchises.

In other words, this is about privatisation. Those opposite can call it contestability, they can call it outsourcing and franchising, but it all boils down to services, once publicly provided, will now be provided by private entities operating to make a profit. Purely and simply, that is what this bill is about.

This legislation shows this LNP government for what it really is: sneaky, mean, tricky and shameless. They say one thing while they do the opposite. They try to conceal the true intent and extent of their actions. The worst thing is that they treat Queenslanders like mugs—as people who will believe their spin without question.

But this time they have overplayed their hand. This legislation will transfer the staff and assets of the government owned corporation Queensland Rail into a newly established statutory authority, the Queensland Rail Transit Authority—or QRTA—under the direct control of the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. And has he not proven himself to be effective to date! The new Queensland Rail Transit Authority will still have its own board and CEO but will report to the minister through the Department of Transport and Main Roads.

I want to talk firstly about the impacts that this will have on the workers at Queensland Rail. Most importantly, the legislation will transfer Queensland Rail employees from the federal to the state industrial relations system. As employees of the statutory authority rather than a government owned enterprise, they will effectively be public servants. Therefore, we are told that they will have the same rights and protections afforded to Queensland public servants. I am sure that was the comforting line that the minister spoonfed to the party room to make them swallow this legislation. But the reality is that, because of changes that the LNP has made to the state industrial relations system, those rights and protections are effectively worthless. And those opposite know it, because they voted for it. So I wonder if, during the LNP party room meeting when the minister told everyone not to worry because Queensland Rail employees will have the same protection as other public servants, any of the LNP backbenchers who represent Queensland Rail workers had the guts to stand up and call the minister out for his sleight of hand? Did the member for Ipswich stand up for the rail workers in his electorate? Did the member for Ipswich West?

Mr Berry: They voted for me. Thank you so much.

Ms TRAD: I think we have the answer from the member for Ipswich. The answer is no, he did not stand up for the rail workers who live in Ipswich. Did the member for Ipswich West stand up for the rail workers in his electorate? Did the member for Ipswich West?

The decision to strip Queensland Rail employees of their job security was a deliberate and conscious choice made by this government. You can always trust the LNP to create an imbalance—to load the dice, to rort the system and to create an uneven playing field so that workers will always be worse off. Before the last election the Premier told public servants that they had nothing to fear from an LNP government. Public servants now know from experience how much stock they can put in a solemn promise from this Premier and this LNP government. There is much to fear from the Newman...
Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill
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government. If you are a public servant, you can be sacked at will—and 14,000 and more know this for a fact—even if you had negotiated an agreement with the government that explicitly prohibits forced redundancies. Section 691C of the Industrial Relations Act 1999 currently provides that relevant industrial instruments have no effect where the following provisions apply—

(a) a contracting provision;
(b) an employment security provision;
(c) an organisational change provision.

The Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee report into the legislation explains that the effect of this provision in the state legislation will override the Queensland Rail enterprise bargaining agreements that were negotiated in good faith. Those EBAs and the provisions within them that relate to job security, contracting out and protecting workers during organisational change will be effectively worthless. So I say to every member: if you vote for this legislation you are, in fact, voting to take away the existing rights of Queensland Rail workers.

The Rail, Tram and Bus Union and the Electrical Trades Union in its submissions to the committee called out this move for what it is. The ETU called the legislation a—

... direct attack of the employment conditions of those employees who will work under the new system—

and—

... a self interested, ideological whim.

In its submission the RTBU said—

This move is simply designed to try remove security and bargained for conditions from our members using the cowardly approach of legislating on high rather than rolling up the sleeves and trying to negotiate change.

I am sure the minister paid little or no heed to those submissions or points of view because they came from unions. In fact, there was no consultation whatsoever regarding this legislation—no consultation with workers, or with Queensland Rail, or with unions. It was some idea dreamed up in Treasury or in the Department of Transport and Main Roads as a way to smooth the path towards the implementation of the Costello report and its ultimate goal, which is to outsource and franchise public transport services. I will talk more about the recommendations of the Costello report as they relate to Queensland Rail later. By driving down wages and stripping out working conditions, the government can make Queensland Rail a more attractive prospect for private operators. That is all this legislation does and nobody should be under any illusions that the minister is being honest when he says that he wants Queensland Rail to stay within government and that this legislation is all about doing that.

In moving on to structural and operational issues for the new authority, I first want to talk about dividends. The minister said when he announced this legislation that as a GOC Queensland Rail was set up to look for profit. But the legislation will still contain provisions that will allow the government to demand a dividend from Queensland Rail to be paid into consolidated revenue. It is just blatantly hypocritical to criticise the current GOC structure and the payment of dividends and then continue to keep the dividend option on the table.

I want to mention clause 90 which states that decisions made lawfully under the act by the new authority are not reviewable or able to be challenged by the courts. The Queensland Law Society in its submission was highly critical of this provision. It said—

As a matter of fundamental principle it is inappropriate for any decision-maker to be provided with an unreviewable discretion as this promotes poor internal processes, poor decision-making practices and also provides fertile ground for inappropriate conduct of officials.

In the explanatory notes the provision was justified in the following terms—

Given the complexity and possible need for speedy processes in future stages of the Queensland Rail reform process, it is essential to ensure possible legal proceedings do not unreasonably delay implementation. Delay may mean the State would suffer significant financial detriment. Therefore it is necessary to limit the ability of third parties to unreasonably delay the ongoing restructuring process.

What rubbish! This statement speaks volumes about the government’s true intent when it comes to this bill. The LNP want to outsource, franchise and privatisate the operations of Queensland Rail and they want it done quickly without any dissent, without any discussion and they do not want anyone to be able to stop them.

Finally, one of the recommendations that the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee made was in relation to clause 43 which the minister has touched upon earlier. This clause allows the deletion of commercially sensitive material from the QRTA’s annual report. I am
concerned that this provision may be used to hide information, particularly with respect to the franchising and outsourcing contracts that will be entered into once the Costello report recommendations are implemented. The committee felt that there should be specified criterion for circumstances in which material could be deleted. I see that the minister has made a tiny concession to this suggestion by offering up an example. But simply put, this is not good enough, minister. This is a little pat on the head of your backbench when, in fact, what they wanted was meaningful input.

I want to take a few moments before I conclude to discuss the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee report in some detail. It is clear from reading the report that the members of the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee were unimpressed with the legislation and the way the government has gone about introducing it and implementing it. The committee criticised the fact that the stated aims of the bill, to improve passenger rail services affordability and reliability, are in no way related to the actual provisions of the bill. The committee said—

The Committee strongly supports the broad aims of the Bill. However, the Committee is of the view that the Explanatory Notes do not clearly define how the strategies outlined in the Bill will accomplish the anticipated improvements in services, efficiency and affordability.

The committee went on to criticise the paucity of information provided and said—

The Committee notes that the broader context of the proposed reform has not been clearly articulated and considers that the contextual information pertaining to the broader reform plans should have been included in the Explanatory Notes. The absence of clearly stated intentions creates opportunities for misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Perhaps they were not included because the minister had not finished reading the Costello Commission of Audit yet to include them in the actual legislation. Unfortunately, I fear that this is less of an innocent oversight and more of a deliberate ploy to conceal the true intent of this legislation. The fact is that this legislation has been rushed through, as so many other pieces of legislation have been rushed through this House, and the process has been carelessly managed by the minister.

The committee noted in its report that it could not see the need for the urgency of this legislation. It said—

The Committee would suggest that, in future, a Minister provide adequate explanation for the urgency of a Bill to enable the Committee to develop a meaningful understanding of the full objectives of the Bill. The Committee notes that parties impacted by this Bill were not consulted during the development of the Bill.

It appears that the minister is not only treating Queenslanders as mugs but also his backbench. In the rush to get this legislation through, mistakes and omissions were made in the preparation of the explanatory notes. The committee felt this was serious enough to warrant a mention and it said—

The Committee considers that a number of the provisions in the Legislative Standards Act 1992 have not been met in a clear and precise way in the Explanatory Notes (for example, the policy objectives and implementation costs).

The Committee further notes that the Explanatory Notes contain numerous spelling and other errors (for example, the numbering of clauses 105 on page 2 and clauses 89 and 87 on page 3).

Of course, we know the real reason why this bill is so urgent. Firstly, the QR Passenger Pty Ltd Traincrew Union Collective Workplace Agreement 2009 expires on 1 June and before negotiations conclude the minister and the LNP wanted these 1,200 or so workers to come into the state IR system which the government has turned into an uneven playing field. Secondly, the government wants this bill passed and Queensland Rail restructured so that it can start implementing the recommendations of the Costello report to outsource passenger rail services straight away in the June budget. That will mean outsourcing and franchising could start sooner than people think.

Let us now turn to the Costello Commission of Audit and see what the report actually says about public transport services in a bit more detail, particularly those provided by Queensland Rail in this state. Recommendations 15 to 19 relate to public transport services. Recommendation 15 relates to the South-East Queensland urban passenger services and recommends—

City passenger rail services and network infrastructure be opened up to contestability, like bus services, to allow different providers, including private providers, to bid to operate services and maintain below-rail assets in a particular franchised area under franchise and lease arrangements.

The government has enthusiastically accepted that recommendation. Recommendation 16 relates to long distance passenger rail services and recommends—

Competitive tendering be introduced for long distance and tourist passenger rail service contracts, including:

- evaluating the number of routes serviced and frequencies, franchisees and franchise areas before initiating the tender
- owning the rollingstock required to provide the services in a State Government entity, and leasing this to the franchisee for the term of the contract.
Recommendation 17 relates to bus services, and I will talk more about that another time. Suffice it to say that it has been accepted and it recommends further route cuts and more franchising—and didn’t the minister handle that well earlier this year? More of what we have already seen from this minister and assistant minister and their botched bus review, no doubt.

Recommendation 18 relates to the Mount Isa freight line and recommends—
Mount Isa rail freight line be transferred to Port of Townsville to be managed as an integrated supply chain, with a view to divestment of the integrated business.

The government has accepted that recommendation in part. Recommendation 19 relates to maintenance of the rail network and recommends—
Queensland Rail remain the owner and operator of the regional rail network, but with the maintenance task to be outsourced through a competitive tendering process.

The government has accepted that recommendation and will move forward with the process of outsourcing rail maintenance in regional areas, just like it did with RoadTek.

Whether you call it contestability, privatisation, franchising, right sizing, outsourcing, assets management or whatever misnomer is fashionable on any one day, it all means the same thing: passenger rail services and rail maintenance in Queensland will be provided by private companies for a profit and not as a public service. That is something that I believe Queenslanders do not want. It is not what Queenslanders voted for last year. We have all seen the outcome of public transport franchising in Melbourne. I table an article from the Age entitled ‘Metro Trains rated Australia’s worst’.

The article states that Melbourne’s private train operator, Metro Trains, performed the worst in the 2011 survey of train passengers across the country. According to the article, Metro came last in all surveyed categories, which included reliability and performance, comfort of trains, safety, timetables and scheduling and signage and announcements.

Tabled paper: Copy of article from the Age entitled ‘Metro Trains rated Australia’s worst’ dated 15 June 2011, relating to a customer survey of metro trains [2527].

The private sector is not always better or more efficient. The franchising of Melbourne’s trains and trams is proof of that. The minister had better ensure that his Segway is a lot faster than 12 kilometres an hour to escape the anger of Queensland Rail workers and commuters when this Costello experiment of franchising fails here in Queensland, as it has in Victoria. The opposition will be opposing this legislation and we will continue to oppose any attempts to franchise, privatise or outsource the passenger rail network.

Mr HOBBS (Warrego—LNP) (12.30 pm): Today I am pleased to rise to talk in the debate on the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill. I thank the minister for his consideration of the committee’s report and the changes that will be put in place. The Assembly referred the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill to the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee on 16 April and the committee was required to report back on 26 April. The committee held a public briefing with the Department of Transport and Main Roads on Thursday, 18 April. The committee invited submissions by emailing 529 subscribers on the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee’s email subscriber list and emailed a further eight identified stakeholders on 17 April. The committee received three submissions. The committee did not hold a public hearing due to the short time frame for examination of this bill. The transcripts of the public briefing and the submissions are available on the committee’s website for those people who want more details.

It is important that we understand the aims of this bill. This morning we have heard lots of emotional words spoken, but at the end of the day we need to understand the aims of this bill. The bill seeks to restructure Queensland Rail by establishing a new statutory authority, the Queensland Rail Transit Authority. The QRTA will be unincorporated. It will have a board that will prepare both strategic and operational plans for ministerial approval. The bill seeks to transfer Queensland’s rail share to the QRTA with the effect of making Queensland Rail a subsidiary of the new authority so they form, in effect, a Queensland rail group. Queensland Rail Ltd will no longer be a GOC. Queensland Rail Ltd will retain its assets and liabilities, as well as its relevant licences, authorisations and so on. Importantly, in relation to service delivery, Queensland Rail Ltd will continue to provide rail services in practical terms. There will be a service agreement whereby QRTA provides strategic direction and staff to Queensland Rail for the continuation of rail services.

In transferring Queensland Rail’s employees and enterprise agreements to the QRTA, the bill provides protection for employee entitlements and clarifies the application of certain provisions of the Industrial Relations Act 1999 on the QRTA and its employees. The transfer of employees will mean the negotiations for replacement train crew agreements, which would normally expire on 30 June
2013, will be conducted under the Industrial Relations Act 1999. The bill provides for future transfers of assets, liabilities and instruments such as licences, authorities and contracts through transfer notices over time as rail reform progresses. Similar provisions for restructure, directions and transfer notices have been used in other legislation, including, for example, the Infrastructure Investment (Asset Restructuring and Disposal) Act 2009. Generally, those are the intentions or the aims of the bill.

The Newman government is taking steps to continue the reform program already underway in Queensland Rail to build a better rail business. We have to build a better rail business. We cannot continue to do things the way we have in the past. We have to learn from the mistakes of the past. We have to look to the future to improve and make things better for commuters.

A government member: A concept that is foreign to those opposite.

Mr HOBBS: That is true; it is foreign to those opposite. Over the past 12 months, much work has been done to improve services, efficiency and affordability, but more work needs to be done if we want to drive down the cost of fares and deliver more services. The Newman government is proposing to change Queensland’s rail to a statutory authority, as the previous government sold off the profit-making parts of the business. It makes no sense for Queensland Rail to continue as a GOC. The change will also bring Queensland Rail closer to government—not closer to privatisation but closer to government. Queensland Rail will have a greater customer focus and will deliver better train services. This will also help make it more efficient, which means that Queensland Rail can employ more train crews to deliver better services and add more trains to the network. That is particularly important. We really need to be able to improve those services.

The committee strongly supports the broad aims of the bill. However, as mentioned before, the committee is of the view that the explanatory notes do not clearly define how the strategies outlined in the bill will accomplish the anticipated improvements in services, efficiency and affordability. Of course, without that detail, the absence of clearly stated intentions creates opportunities for misunderstanding, misinterpretation and deliberate misinterpretation. It is very important that we understand that we can do better with these things. The intention of the bill is quite clear: we have to improve the services that we provide to the people of this state.

The three submissions made to this inquiry expressed their strong concern and dissatisfaction with the lack of consultation and the short consultation and reporting time frames for the bill. There will always be issues such as that if there is a short time frame. We need to understand that process and accept it. One issue raised was the transfer from the federal industrial relations system to the state system. Members opposite are getting quite excited about this, but at the end of the day this system can be done and has been done—and will be done this time—with the best interests of the employees at heart.

Clause 71 of the bill will result in the transfer of employees from Queensland Rail Ltd to the QRTA. The Industrial Relations Act 1999 will then apply to the employees. Existing agreements and contracts will transfer with the employees, but they will be subject to the Industrial Relations Act 1999 as if they were made under that act. The industrial relations changes arising from the transfer of employees and their agreement with the QRTA will not impact on remuneration, leave or superannuation. As with other public sector employees like nurses, teachers and firefighters, the transfer of Queensland Rail employees will come under the jurisdiction of the Industrial Relations Act 1999 regarding dispute resolution processes, consultation requirements for the development of certificated agreements, contracting, organisational change and opportunities for employment security. The Queensland Industrial Relations Act 1999 already generally applies to Queensland public sector employees. We have thousands and thousands of employees who work under this system at the present moment.

The committee notes that, upon the commencement of this legislation, Queensland Rail Ltd employees will be transferred from being employees of a government owned corporation under the auspices of the Commonwealth industrial relations system to being Queensland government employees subject to Queensland industrial relations legislation. The committee understands that that will have some minor impact on employment conditions, but the committee is of the view that the proposed changes are acceptable, as employees of the Queensland Rail Transit Authority will be afforded the same rights and conditions as other Queensland public sector employees, such as nurses and firefighters as I mentioned before.
At the public briefing, questions were asked of various people about how the commercial imperatives and the community service obligations of the QRTA will marry up. Staff of the Department of Transport and Main Roads advised that, while generally the expectation is that the authority will perform its functions commercially, the bill recognises that improved services will require the authority to have community service obligations that will not be able to be achieved commercially. Those community service obligations will be clearly defined and costed, and the authority will be transparently accountable for achieving them through the operational plan. That approach will help bring costs under control, once again while improving the services. The committee is aware that it is not uncommon for a statutory authority to perform its functions commercially while, at the same time, being responsible for delivering community service obligations and, therefore, the committee had no objections to that proposal.

Clause 43 is the clause the minister mentioned he is going to change by introducing an amendment. It provides that the QRTA board can make an application to the responsible minister that they delete a matter that is of a commercially sensitive nature from the copies of the annual report that are made public. At the public briefing the department was asked why the QRTA would need to delete commercially sensitive information from its annual report when the statutory authority becomes a public entity. The question was taken on notice. The Department of Transport and Main Roads subsequently advised that it involved the removal of commercially sensitive material upon the minister’s approval that may be made public as part of an annual report process. An example was information on contract negotiations for the procurement of goods and services included in the statutory authority’s operating plan. In the minister’s amendments he has made it quite clear by saying—

Example of a matter that might be deleted—

pricing information given to the Authority in response to an unfinished tender process

It is quite reasonable that commercially sensitive information should be taken out of the annual report. The committee indicated that this should be included in the bill. I believe that the minister’s amendment will be sufficient to make that clear.

The other issue that was talked about was that the dividend to be paid by the Queensland Rail Transit Authority should be directed towards providing infrastructure and service maintenance or improvements. The Department of Transport and Main Roads advised that the dividends would be paid directly into the state’s Consolidated Fund and the QRTA would be able to request funding through the CBRC process to enhance the network. It further advised that it is no different to what happens in the current process. That is how it operates now. They currently do not have a claim over the dividend through the preparation of their strategic and operational plans. We can then look to see how we reinvest that money into improving services. Here again we are talking about improved services and better services for the commuters of Queenslanders. The committee noted that the approach outlined in the bill with regard to dividend payments and the CBRC process for funding requests is in line with existing arrangements. The committee had no concerns with this approach.

This bill will make some improvements. It is a progression in terms of what had to happen. The previous government sold off the rest of QR. It is basically inevitable that the transit authority comes back into—

Ms Trad interjected.

Mr HOBBS: Let us not go into what you did with the money out of QR and what happened to that.

Ms Trad interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Robinson): Order! The member for South Brisbane will cease interjecting.

Mr HOBBS: What did you do with the money when you sold it?

Mr Johnson: Burnt it.

Mr HOBBS: I was going to say something else, but that is a way of explaining it. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr MINNIKIN (Chatsworth—LNP) (12.42 pm): I rise in support of the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013. The Newman government is taking steps to continue the reform program already underway in Queensland Rail to build a better rail business. The community is becoming increasingly aware of the taxpayer funded investment being made in rail in Queensland and understandably
expectations are growing in the areas of improving service quality—improved reliability, increased frequency and simplification of the timetables and scheduling; maintaining fare affordability; and improving service experience—real-time information, enhanced comfort, cleaner trains and stations and enhanced safety and security.

Current fiscal challenges whereby budget funds are limited, combined with the requirement to substantially increase capital investment in new transport infrastructure, is very self-evident, meaning the Newman government must explore new ways to deliver enhanced customer service levels, look for new innovations and provide greater cost efficiency. This includes reviewing the capability within the current Queensland Rail organisational structure to drive cost reduction initiatives through improved productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

Those Labor members opposite may be saying that change is not required. They try to convince people that everything is tickety-boo over there in Queensland Rail. Clearly this is not the case. But there is no sense trying to convince us if they cannot even convince members of their own party. One person, for example, who is not convinced is the Labor Party councillor for Wynnum Manly, Peter Cumming. Councillor Cumming is a pretty switched on chap so they should listen to what he has to say. For example, he wrote to Labor Party members in late 2011 saying—

I am a realist and expect Labor to lose this state election.

He was right. In fact, looking across the chamber right now he was very right. Back on 6 November 2012 Councillor Cumming also wrote to me, in my capacity as the Assistant Minister for Public Transport, about a Queensland Rail matter. This is what he stated—

It confirms my view what an utterly useless organisation Queensland Rail is and the fact that it has been getting worse over the years.

That is from the Labor councillor from Wynnum Manly. Let me repeat the last bit: ‘getting worse over the years’. Here was an elected member of the Australian Labor Party who was voicing the utter frustration of thousands of rail passengers who are fed up with the performance of the Labor state government and the then minister for transport and now Leader of the Opposition. For years they suffered as trains continually ran late or were cancelled. For the best part of 20 years those opposite—in fact, one member opposite—and their former failed comrades were responsible for running Queensland Rail.

Let me clearly state that I do not believe these views were a reflection on the staff of Queensland Rail. An organisational culture and performance is only as good as those at the top. In my career I have worked in both the private and public sector. It has been my experience that some of the finest employees I have had the privilege of working with have come from the public sector. If they are given the scope and flexibility to shine they are capable of fantastic things.

As an example, several years ago I had the honour to lead a team from local government that won the Australian customer service national award, beating the best service providers from around the country from the private sector.

Mr Dowling: Go Redlands.

Mr MINNIKIN: Indeed, Redland shire council. Customer service is dependent upon attitude, not whether one works for an ASX 200 private enterprise company. It is about the right corporate culture regardless of size or sector. Money and resources cannot buy a winning corporate attitude. It is a permanent state of mind to put the customer first. There is the famous customer service mantra I would always use with my own staff—‘If you are not serving a customer you are serving someone that is.’

I have spoken to a lot of Queensland Rail staff since becoming the Assistant Minister for Public Transport. I have to say that the vast majority of them are as committed to providing quality rail services for Queenslanders as the Newman government. These staff members, the travelling public, the councillor for Wynnum Manly and Queensland Rail as a whole have been let down previously by a distinct lack of leadership.

That lack of leadership started right at the top. We only need to look as far as the opposition benches to the Leader of the Opposition. As I continually state in this hallowed chamber, how can those opposite formerly run a large organisation like Queensland Rail when they lack cutting-edge business experience in the real world? I am pleased to say that things have changed considerably since March 2012. We now have a minister who is focused on improving the affordability, reliability and frequency of public transport. Minister Emerson is determined to get Queensland Rail back on track in every sense of the term.
Additionally, we have the Queensland Rail board, led by the chairman, Mr Glen Dawe, which has turned Queensland Rail back into a railway operation that is focused on delivering better rail services for all Queenslanders. If people want to see the power of proper leadership they do not have to look any further than Queensland Rail. Like any organisation undergoing cultural change, there will be teething problems. But there is a steely determination to turn the performance of Queensland Rail around. This bill will facilitate that task.

We now have a workforce that is focused on getting the train network running on time. The result is that we have now turned record low rail reliability in the dying days of the previous Labor government into results that many rail providers around the world could only dream of. Don’t get me wrong: we still have instances of trains running late, but what impresses me is that there is an organisational desire to do better and look for continuous improvement. That is why this bill is so important. It gives Queensland Rail as an organisation the tools it needs to make things better on its journey towards continuous improvement. It removes the distractions that come from being a government owned corporation, leaving it to focus on improving services for Queenslanders. Some of the significant benefits we will see because of this change include improved operation and management of rail services, more efficient delivery of rail services and, importantly, enhanced customer service for rail passengers.

With Queensland Rail currently receiving around 80 per cent of its funding directly from the government, it needs to be more directly accountable to government to improve operations and bring costs under control. It is important to note that the bill includes transitional provisions to ensure that the rail business is able to continue to operate and service the community and industry on commencement. This includes provision for transferring the board, chief executive and senior executive. The team has implemented a number of changes to improve the performance of Queensland Rail over the past 12 months, and this will allow these important actions to continue.

I mentioned previously that we have many great people working in Queensland Rail, so it is very important for us to ensure that the remuneration and leave entitlements etc are not impacted by this change. I am convinced that this bill does this. This government is totally committed in its belief about Queensland being a great state with great opportunities. This goes beyond creating opportunities for our kids or the opportunity for business to flourish. This change means that Queensland Rail will have the opportunity to deliver better rail services for all Queenslanders. I commend the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill to the House.

Mr GRIMWADE (Morayfield—LNP) (12.50 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013. The Newman government is committed to making public transport more affordable, reliable and frequent. Fundamentally, what this bill aims to do is transfer Queensland Rail to a statutory authority and allow Queensland Rail to focus on passengers rather than just profits. Public transport, and more so train travel, is an issue of high importance to my community in Morayfield. Under the previous government we witnessed fares go through the roof—15 per cent increases year in and year out—while at the same time patronage fell. We saw reliability slump to all-time lows through signalling faults and poorly maintained networks.

Before I was elected to this place I spent a lot of my time at train stations talking with commuters about what they wanted to see happen with Queensland Rail. The discussions always centred around the high fares and the reliability of the network. During my time as a candidate, I was very honoured to have the shadow minister, now thankfully the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, the Hon. Scott Emerson, accompany me on a platform visit. We spoke to many, many commuters that day in relation to what they wanted to see happen with Queensland Rail, what they thought about public transport fares and what they thought about reliability, frequency and a whole bunch of different issues. It was really great to have that opportunity, and I thank the minister for coming out and hearing firsthand what our commuters in our local communities actually want to do. We cannot continue to do business as usual—having fares going through the roof and having reliability issues. That is the way the Labor Party wants to do things in this place, but people elected us to make changes and to deliver better services. I think this legislation will ultimately allow the government to do that.

After one year in government we have already been working hard to address a lot of those issues in relation to affordability and reliability. I want to take time now to tell honourable members in this House about some of the initiatives that we have introduced that have benefited commuters. They include our commitment of free trips after nine journeys. This has been a big commitment to make public transport more affordable for our local communities. To give an example, a mum or dad catching a train Monday to Friday going to and from work or a university student catching the train...
Monday to Friday would take 10 trips—that is, five there and five back. With our initiative of free trips after nine journeys, the Friday trip home is free. It costs about $8 to go one way in peak time from the Burpengary Railway Station in my electorate, for example, to the city or vice versa. So that measure alone has actually saved commuters in my electorate, people going to and from work each day, around $400 a year. That is quite a big cost-of-living saving when people are already doing it tough.

The other initiative is that we have halved Labor’s fare increases. I mentioned before about the 15 per cent fare increases year in and year out. People cannot sustain 15 per cent increases to public transport fares when their cost of living is rising. We have managed to halve those increases which obviously makes public transport more affordable again.

An issue my local media has been highlighting is the reliability of the Caboolture line, which commutes in my electorate use. Recently I asked a question on notice to the minister to seek assurances that everything was being done to improve reliability on the Caboolture line. The minister’s response to my question highlighted—

Under the previous Labor Government we saw on time running on the Caboolture line drop to 76.93% ... in the third quarter of 2011/12.

To address reliability problems, last year Queensland Rail established the On Time Running Taskforce, aimed at identifying and implementing initiatives to improve reliability. In October 2012, the Taskforce undertook a comprehensive investigation of the Caboolture line and Queensland Rail is subsequently implementing an action plan to boost reliability of the line.

The minister went on to further advise that ‘a number of initiatives have already been completed as a result of the action plan and subsequently the Caboolture line performance has significantly improved’ since we have been in government and that, in the second quarter of 2012-13, 87.94 per cent of services actually ran on time. Again, this is pleasing news for my community because we can see from the detailed data that the reliability of our trains is already on the mend. The minister’s answer to my question on notice concluded by saying—

Queensland Rail also has an ongoing maintenance programme to ensure customers have a rail network they can rely on. Over the coming months Queensland Rail will be undertaking an important signalling upgrade. The upgrade forms part of an $11.5 million signalling improvement project, to replace essential signalling hardware across the network.

This signalling upgrade will continue to boost the reliability of the Caboolture line and improve the daily commute for customers.

Transferring Queensland Rail from its current structure to a statutory authority will, in effect, bring Queensland Rail closer to government and not privatisation. The Labor Party want to make this debate all about privatisation. They want to make it about industrial relations. Instead, it needs to be about delivering better services for Queenslanders, because it is better services that Queenslanders want delivered, and that is what this bill aims to do.

This is a good opportunity for both the state and Queensland Rail. I will highlight some of the future development of assets and services that this government is putting into Queensland Rail. I think this is important for the debate. We are going to see some new generation rolling stock—75 new six-car trains. These will be delivered as a public-private partnership. The government is down to the final two bidders of Bombardier and the AdvanceRail consortium. This announcement will also include new maintenance facilities to be built, and the expected contract will be awarded later this year. We also have the Cairns tilt train.

Mr Costigan: Great service.

Mr GRIMWADE: I take the interjection from the member for Whitsundays. It is a great service because people all the way up the eastern seaboard rely on this service. As I detailed in this place in the last sitting, being someone who has done a fair bit of travel on long distance trains as part of a government review, I can also say that some of these announcements and things we are doing will benefit all of those people who use long distance rail from here to Cairns. We are refurbishing two existing tilt trains and a third train is being built. Members will remember when we talk about building trains or buying trains that the previous government botched that project and ordered trains without seats! Members will remember that.

The Moreton Bay Rail Link is another project that this government will be undertaking in relation to building infrastructure and new stations. It is a $1.47 billion project which is jointly funded by the federal, state and local governments. It does not actually come into my electorate, I acknowledge that. But it is part of the Moreton Bay area which my electorate fits into. The government is down to the two final bidders to get that project underway. We also have new stations at Kallangur, Murrumba Downs, Mango Hill, Mango Hill East, Rothwell and Kippa-Ring. This is new infrastructure—new stations.
Mr Crandon: Great place, Kippa-Ring.

Mr GRIMWADE: The successful tenderer will be announced in the coming months. I take the interjection that Kippa-Ring is a great place, because I grew up in Kippa-Ring. I spent the best part of about 20 years living in and around that region. Being a Kippa-Ring State School boy myself, I can attest to it being a great place. For the 20 years I was growing up in Kippa-Ring, I remember that the previous government promised a Redcliffe rail link. It was one of those projects that was promised—‘We will finally get a rail link to Redcliffe. We will take you into the city. This is what we will do.’ For 20 years it was promised. I was talking to my parents last week at Charleville. They were driving around in their caravan and I came across them while I was out there reviewing the long distance passenger rail. They said to me, ‘Can you believe it? The Newman government is finally delivering the rail link to Moreton Bay and to Redcliffe?’ It is interesting that a government like ours can deliver on our election commitments and deliver for the people in Queensland.

Mr Berry: On time.

Mr GRIMWADE: On time—I take the interjection. Contrary to what the opposition may say, Queensland Rail will need more drivers. Obviously, if we are going to build this infrastructure and have more trains and more platforms coming on, we are going to need more drivers, we are going to need more guards and we are going to need more front-line services to deliver on these initiatives. More people will be coming under the Queensland Rail banner. We simply cannot have more trains and more platforms without having more staff.

Sitting suspended from 1.00 pm to 2.30 pm.

Mr GRIMWADE: What I was saying before the lunch break was that, contrary to what the opposition may say in this place, Queensland Rail will need more drivers, more guards and more front-line staff to deliver these initiatives. The changes proposed in this legislation will provide a clear direction for Queensland Rail—which is what it actually needs—and will assist Queensland Rail to bring its costs under control and provide more and better services to Queenslanders.

Before I finalise my comments today, it is important for honourable members to understand that Queensland Rail used to be a statutory GOC before it was transferred in 2007 by the previous government. This legislation will mean that approximately 6,600 employees or thereabouts will transfer to the authority. I would have thought that 6,600 more employees coming into an authority would be something the unions and the Labor Party would support.

To address the industrial relations side of the debate, all employees transferred to the authority will have their employment conditions protected and it will mean the staff of Queensland Rail will come under the same system as Queensland teachers, nurses and other public servants. It is bringing everyone under the same banner.

In summing-up, I feel this legislation needs to be passed to allow the minister to make decisions that will further allow this government to make public transport on our train network affordable, reliable and more frequent. It is for this reason that I will be supporting the legislation. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr KNUTH (Dalrymple—KAP) (2.31 pm): In rising to speak to the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013, I will quote from the explanatory notes, which state—

1. Establishing a new statutory authority (the Queensland Rail Transit Authority [QRTA]). The QRTA will be incorporated. The QRTA will have a Board which will prepare both strategic and operational plans for ministerial approval.

The explanatory notes also state—

Fiscal challenges whereby budget funds are limited and the requirement to substantially increase capital investment in new transport infrastructure is evident, meaning Government must explore new ways to deliver enhanced service levels, new innovations and greater cost efficiency. This includes reviewing the capability within the current organisational structure to drive cost reduction initiatives through improved productivity, efficiency and effectiveness.

The government sees this as some form of initiative to return Queensland Rail back to public ownership. Many of our assets that have been sold were run very effectively and efficiently under the public ownership system of operation. The minister in his second reading speech mentioned that there will be boards in Queensland Rail. This is a concern because the local health boards were there to fight powerfully for their regions, whereas local hospital boards operate under the government’s criteria. If you want to sack health workers in the region then the board will do it and the board will be blamed. It is back to front, because the board was there to fight for the services of the region, not to be the government’s puppet.
Queensland Rail is a great Queensland icon. It was built by hardworking Queenslanders. It is more than 150 years old. It employed more than 26,000 employees in the 1990s. It was a great employer of Aboriginals, Torres Strait Islanders and South Sea Islanders. It provided jobs for Queenslanders year in, year out, day in, day out. The flow-on effects of the railway impacted many communities. For example, there was a railway station in nearly every small country town. But when railway stations closed down, which happened in the nineties under the Goss government, you would lose the stationmaster, the assistant stationmaster and the porter. Then all of a sudden the track gang would also be removed. Then the truck driver who picked up the goods who serviced that region would be gone. Then the families of those railway employees—

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, that is right. Those children had attended a school, there was a shop and those communities at times had a local football team. As all the railway stations in these small country towns were removed, we started to see these small towns wiped out—Nelia, Nonda, Maxwellton and Torrens Creek. Torrens Creek had a football team as a result of Queensland Rail employees. Then we started to see the trucking yards picked up and the rail sold. So the landowners never had an area to unload their cattle onto the train to be transferred either to the meatworks or the saleyards. This in itself has been removed.

Likewise, on the Townsville to Mount Isa line there is no rail freight service. There is a massive minerals province in Western Queensland that is being serviced, and there is no freight service on that line. In reading about the budget funds and the challenges and returning it more or less to a public entity, I cannot see that this bill is about providing or returning those services back to rural and regional Queensland for public ownership. This is about supporting in some way the big corporates. When I see that the Mount Isa line is to be packaged and rolled into the ports and leased or possibly privatised, I wonder whether they asked those communities and those employees about their jobs, their livelihoods and the consequences of what will happen to the small rural communities on that line.

I am not a supporter of corporatisation. It is the first step to privatisation. I do not know what you call this when you lease something out to a port and then possibly package it for privatisation. I do not know what you call this, but this is not returning it to public ownership. This is not giving it back to the community. This is preparing it to be packaged and to be outsourced and to get rid of the employees. This is something they have fought. They have conditions where there are no forced redundancies and no forced relocations. These are conditions that these employees have fought for and voted for in good faith over these years. This is what is going to be removed under this bill and under this process that we have in front of us.

I can see no real benefits. If we could see that it was going to be returned to public ownership, if we could see that these services were going to provide a benefit for Queenslanders in the return of royalties from the rail freight services from Mount Isa to Townsville, if we could see that there will be benefits to these employees, this would be something worth supporting, but this is working back-to-front. I see the legislation in front of me. The minister is trying to set the perception that this legislation is based on good intentions, but what we are dealing with is completely contrary to what the bill is supposed to be about. It is sad. Before the member for Ipswich West was elected he was a passionate advocate—he would fight tooth and nail—for Queensland Rail employees.

Mr Symes interjected.

Mr KNUTH: Yes, I have noticed. This government has just sacked 20 employees in the member for Ipswich West’s electorate. And what has he said? ‘This is good. I back the LNP. Trust us. Stick with us and you will never go hungry again.’ He should be fighting tooth and nail for his employees, fighting for their job, fighting for these conditions. What is he doing? He is just rolling over.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Cunningham): Order! Member for Gregory! Order!

Mr KNUTH: It is a disappointment having to tell those railway employees from Townsville to Mount Isa that they do not have a job; it is going to be outsourced. But you did not ask them about their job, did you? Did you talk to them about their jobs, outsourcing and selling to the ports?

An honourable member: No!

Mr KNUTH: Absolutely!

Mr Johnson: You don’t know what you are talking about.
Mr KNUTH: Yes, I do know what I am talking about because this is exactly what it says. So the member for Gregory should go and talk to them.

I am hoping that the member for Ipswich West will take a stand for his electorate, take a stand for railway employees, take a stand and fight for railway people rather than dodging, weaving and hiding to the point of being invisible and, likewise, the member for Gregory. He used to walk up to the railway tracks and talk to the employees. Shame on you!

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks made by the member for Dalrymple offensive. Nobody in this House has fought harder than I have for railway workers and I ask him to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dalrymple, the member for Gregory finds your comment offensive and I ask you to withdraw.

Mr KNUTH: I do find it very offensive. I do take that back.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Dalrymple, you need to withdraw the comment that the member for Gregory—

Mr KNUTH: I withdraw the comment and I apologise to the member for Gregory. I do admit that he did his best while he was a minister in fighting for those rail employees, but it is a different system of government now. Now it is the Liberal National Party and it is about privatisation. It is about sacking employees. They have already sacked 14,000 workers and outsourced job after job. Yes, the member for Gregory was right: he did fight back in 1995. But this is—

(Time expired)

Mr SHORTEN (Algester—LNP) (2.42 pm): I rise today to speak to the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill and to support this government’s continuing efforts to make public transport in this state once again the transport of choice. The Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill will deliver to the people of Queensland four significant benefits in relation to the public transport needs of the state: firstly, the bill will restructure Queensland Rail to provide improved operation and management of the rail services it delivers over the more than 7,000 kilometres of the rail network; secondly, it will deliver a more efficient rail service; thirdly, it will provide an enhanced customer service for passengers; and, fourthly, it will create a clearer accountability framework for rail services.

The Queensland Rail network plays an integral part in keeping Queensland and Queenslanders moving both here in Brisbane and across many regional centres of this great state. Indeed, for many people living in more remote communities in Queensland’s western districts, the Inlander and Westlander services provide the only feasible and regular mode of public transport that are available to them. Then there are the tens of thousands of Queenslanders in Brisbane who use the QR service every day to get to and from their place of work. These people deserve a safe, efficient, reliable train service that not only provides them with the means of getting to work and back but also provides value for money when pitted against other alternatives of travel to work including bus, ferry and, of course, their own vehicle. All indications, however, show that this is currently not the case and it has not been the case for a very long time.

Statistics taken from Queensland Rail’s own annual reports show that patronage of the QR Network has been dropping like a rock for many years. Between 2006 and 2009 Queensland Rail’s annual passenger journeys rose steadily from 58.8 million to 66 million. From this point, however—coincidentally, around the same time as the former Labor government decided to sell off the profitable bits of QR and selling them to the highest bidder—passenger journeys fell further and faster than a skydiver with a concrete parachute.

In 2011-12 passenger journeys dropped by more than 20 per cent to just over 51.6 million and this was during a period when the population of Queensland was increasing by some 1,500 people each week. More than one in five people who caught the train regularly in 2009 had lost faith in the service’s operations and reliability, felt unsafe at a station or simply felt that it was now more economical for them to drive to work. This is putting an enormous amount of pressure on our road systems. I see it every day in my electorate as people grapple with the Mount Lindesay Highway congestion instead of training it to work. Clearly, the former Labor government had lost control of public transport, and what was their solution to falling patronage and lack of control? Increase the fares by 15 per cent.

This bill, when enacted, will provide Queensland Rail with the tools and mechanisms to work more closely with the government to ensure services that travellers need are delivered. It will provide greater and clearer lines of communication between the government and Queensland Rail and it will
bring a government asset back into the fold of the government where it can be operated to serve the needs of Queenslanders. In short, the enactment of this bill will give Queenslanders the comfort of knowing that their voice has been heard when they call for better public transport and will take more cars off the road and put more people on a train. I applaud the Newman government for taking meaningful steps in working towards this end.

What does the enactment of this bill mean for the just over 7,000 full-time employees and the $6.85 billion worth of rolling stock and other assets currently owned by QR? Employees who are employed by QR on the day of the transfer will become employees of the new authority and all their workplace conditions and work continuity will carry over. Their existing and accrued leave and access to it will be carried over. All the federal enterprise agreements will be carried over and become Queensland Industrial Relations Commission agreements. QR owned rolling stock will come across to the authority and contracts in place on the day of the transfer will remain in place, such as the hook-and-pull arrangement and other contracted operations on the Mount Isa line with other rolling stock operators. In short, government owned assets will move closer to the government and not closer to the red light special bargain box, as those opposite would have us believe.

As I mentioned at the top of this speech, the Queensland Rail network is an integral part of the infrastructure of Queensland. We as a government must do all we can to ensure this service is provided to the people of Queensland in the most efficient, professional and safe manner. The Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill is yet another example of the Newman government living up to its promises—on this occasion quite literally—of getting Queensland back on track. I commend it to the House.
I am very determined to get to the bottom of the severe issues along that great northern rail line. It is a degraded asset. It has been degraded for the last 20 or 30 years. Trains travelling along that line which should be running at 80 kilometres an hour, as per national standards, are running at 30 to 40 kilometres an hour. From the Queensland taxpayer’s point of view, I just do not see that fobbing this off and handing it over to private enterprise is necessarily the answer. This is a critical asset that needs to be very closely watched.

The endgame here is to provide an efficient rail service, not to have an affordable rail service. Infinitely more important is that this critical asset is run as efficiently as possible to service all of the different industries along the line, not just the mining industry. It may cost the taxpayer more to provide that service, but the emphasis must be on providing a good service. I do not believe that privatisation is the way to go. There are many examples of failure when the emphasis has been on making a dollar and not on providing a service. You can write in as many community service obligations as you like, but there will always be a propensity for private industry to focus on making a profit on their balance sheet rather than on providing a service to people or industry.

The failures in the market since the service was corporatised are now clear to everyone trying to run a business in that area. If you are not one of the big mining companies out there—if you are a junior miner or you have livestock or freight—it is very difficult to get onto that line now. I know of one mine in particular that employs 400 or 500 people. They are now trucking their ore to the coast along the road, which is already overburdened, for $150 a tonne when they used to be able to get it on the rail for $40 or $50 a tonne. But because the trains are travelling at only 30 or 40 kilometres an hour, not 80 kilometres an hour, the rail does not have the capacity. This mine is now very marginal and it should have access to rail.

People may ask why rail is not running at capacity. I venture to suggest that it has something to do with the demise of the fettlers and other workers who used to maintain the line to a high standard such that there were no slow-down zones, as there are now. Those people disappeared. It started under the Goss government and it is continuing under this government. People think it has to be all about efficiency and cost cutting, but that should never be the focus. The focus should be on providing an efficient rail line that is adequately serviced and provides utility to industry for them to get their produce to the port.

Just flogging things off to private industry that we can blame or hand responsibility over to is definitely not the way to go. It has proved to be a failure in the past. That intention in the bill is very relevant to our area. It is a very great threat to industry, particularly in my electorate but also across the state of Queensland. On that basis I have serious concerns with the legislation and will oppose the bill.

Mr WOODFORTH (Nudgee—LNP) (2.55 pm): I rise today to make a brief contribution in support of the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013. In keeping with the Newman government’s plan to offer better services for the people of Queensland, this bill achieves exactly that. The main purpose of this bill is to establish the Queensland Rail Transit Authority and to facilitate the restructure of its rail business to deliver significant benefits to the community including the improved operation and management of rail services, more efficient delivery of those rail services, enhanced customer service for passengers and a cleaner accountability framework for rail services.

Over the past year the Newman government has taken steps to drive down the pricing of fares for passengers and improve the performance of services and the accessibility of transport. While we have done a lot, we know that more is needed to deliver for the people of Queensland. Due to budgetary restrictions, we have to explore new ways to deliver enhanced services with greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

By implementing the measures contained in this bill, we as a government will also create the opportunity for more jobs to be created within the rail sector which will also help to improve the services offered to customers. Not only does the restructuring of Queensland Rail help improve services for customers; it also creates jobs. Given the government’s desire to improve front-line services, this is vitally important.

It is more appropriate for QR to be a statutory authority than a GOC. The profit-generating side of the business—QR National—was sold off by the previous Labor government, apparently to keep its AAA credit rating and to pay down debt. Neither of these aims was achieved. With the freight part of
the business privatised, Queensland Rail now receives 80 per cent of its revenue from the government. As a GOC, Queensland Rail is required to pay a dividend. In 2010-11 QR paid a dividend of $84 million. In 2011-12 QR paid a dividend of $102 million. Given that 80 per cent of Queensland Rail’s revenue comes from government, this is just money going around in circles. Queensland Rail should be focused on delivering improved services, not an artificial profit to government.

The ETU in its submission to the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee admitted that QR effectively operates as a community service. In other words, it is not a business but a government entity delivering services. The previous minister for transport, Rachel Nolan, complained about not being able to control Queensland Rail as a GOC. She said—

As minister I had a narrow power to give directions to the board, but by convention this power was very rarely exercised.

The article in which she was quoted also states—

Everyone believed that—
corporatised structure or not—

while government still owned the company, it was government that was accountable.

This bill will now give the responsible minister greater control of the day-to-day running of the business. As already stated, given the government’s desire to improve front-line services, this is vitally important. The introduction of this bill will pave the way for the constituents of Nudgee who have contacted me regarding fare pricing, service quality, platform accessibility and safety to have their issues rectified over time. As a government we are aware that these things are issues around the state, and that is why I wholeheartedly support this bill. I thank the Minister for Transport and Main Roads for introducing the bill. I am pleased to commend the bill to the House.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (2.58 pm): I rise to speak to the Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill and to ask, if I may, for some clarification from the minister. Other speakers have talked about the importance of rail in Queensland, and I do believe that the Australian Labor Party certainly is in a weakened position to argue the need for retention of ownership or government involvement in Queensland Rail given its actions in relation to coal and rail freight. As a government, it chose the most profitable part of Queensland Rail and sold it once and for all as far as income to the community is concerned. However, what is left is incredibly important to Queenslanders, particularly rural and remote Queensland where rail is sometimes one of the few opportunities for public transport in terms of passenger rail. It is in this area in particular that I wanted to ask some questions. The explanatory notes state under ‘Achievement of policy objectives’—

I am not sure what the community expectations relating to that comment are, but certainly in my electorate passenger rail—because, as I said, coal freight and bulk freight was sold by the Labor Party—is one of the few public transport options that is available to residents who live in the region to get to the southern area of the state for medical and other appointments and also the northern part of our region such as Rockhampton. Quite a number of people catch the train to go to medical appointments, to go to boarding school, to do business and the like. I know of one gentleman who lives at Mount Larcom who weekly catches the train, and that is one of the issues that I wanted to clarify with the minister. The passenger rail at the moment stops at Mount Larcom when there is a passenger or passengers to pick up. Under this restructure, is that likely to cease? I know that that is a parochial question, but for the people who catch the train from Mount Larcom there is no other public transport into Gladstone. If it is a young person or a person without a licence or a person with a disability, as one of the passengers is, they cannot get into Gladstone station to catch the train, but they can walk to the Mount Larcom station and catch the train. Are those sorts of services likely to disappear under this new streamlined commercial model, or will those sorts of instances be captured under the CSO model, the community service obligation model? The explanatory notes also go on to say—

Clause 89 of the Bill provides that, unless the Supreme Court determines the decisions is beyond jurisdiction, decisions under this Act are final and conclusive, cannot be challenged appealed against, reviewed, quashed, set aside or called into question in any other way under the Judicial Review Act 1991 or otherwise (whether by Supreme Court, another court, a tribunal or another entity); and is not subject to any writ or order of the Supreme Court, another Court, a tribunal or another entity on any ground.
I understand that that is in this bill to allow for a streamlined transition to the new structure, but it is an incredible invasion or undermining of fundamental legislative principles. I would ask whether the minister could see instances—other than perhaps union intervention where there may be an attempt to hold up the process vexatiously—where there are genuine concerns on the part of individual workers and what opportunity there will be for them to be able to influence and bring their concerns to government.

I would also appreciate an understanding of the extent of the community service obligation. The passenger rail service in the south-east corner is subsidised hugely by government. The rest of Queensland subsidises passenger rail in the south-east corner significantly. One of the ironies of the ALP selling off coal and rail freight is that any assistance income generated by those parts of the rail network that could contribute to the subsidisation of passenger rail in the south-east corner disappeared on the sale of those areas and, as I said, it places in the category of hypocrisy criticism of this government in terms of privatisation of any asset, although I would certainly oppose the privatisation of strategic assets. I would be interested to know the minister’s view on the extent of community service obligations that he sees will be captured by this new structure. Clause 54 talks about directions that the minister can give to the new board—to the directors—in relation to equity and, I am assuming, in relation to dividends. It may be in the bill—and I apologise if it is, but if it is I have not picked it up—but I would be interested to know what reporting obligations there will be on the minister in relation to any directions given to board members or to the authority. In a lot of legislation a direction from the minister is required to be tabled, and I would be interested in the minister’s comments in that regard.

I also want to put some issues on the record relating to transfer of entitlements. Since I have been in this place I have seen a number of departments and departmental functions that have been restructured, corporatised, privatised or sold and almost always there is a catch in the public statements that the conditions of workers in those areas will be protected during the transition phase, but after the transition phase that can be a different matter altogether. So I do not hold a great deal of confidence in the words that their conditions and their pay will be protected. I would be interested in the firmness of the minister’s view about those issues that have been hard fought and won in relation to the safe working conditions of QR workers and their entitlements. I understand there is frustration in such conditions as ‘no forced redundancies’ but also ‘no transfers’. That is a difficult one for any government to manage. In terms of entitlements for leave and for workplace health and safety—all of those—I am interested in how long they will be retained past the transition phase.

I am of two minds in relation to this bill. I certainly believe that the corporatisation of QR was the next step by the ALP to privatisation. This certainly appears to be a step back from the brink, and I support the minister in that. However, I will be most interested in his comments in relation to these matters prior to the vote.

Hon. SA EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (3.06 pm), in reply: As members have heard today, this bill is about creating appropriate mechanisms to improve affordability, reliability and frequency of rail services. The decision to create the Queensland Rail Transit Authority is an important step towards this. The member for South Brisbane made a number of claims so that we could all be clear what this bill is all about, but what she did not talk about was what was most interesting. She did not talk about on-time running. She did not talk about frequent services. She certainly did not talk about lower fares, and that is because the Labor Party has no credibility in this area. What did we see under Labor? Record low on-time running and 15 per cent fare increases year after year. One only needs to look at her selective quoting of a story from the Attorney-General about Melbourne’s trains. What did we see under Labor? 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Before I start discussing some of the comments from LNP members, I want to address a number of the issues the member for Gladstone raised in her thoughtful contribution at the end of the debate. She mentioned services. We are obliged and committed to services. We are trying to deliver services, and as a government we have already increased the number of weekly services. The member spoke about regional Queensland, and we are looking to do that. At the moment we are out there talking to local mayors about where they want taxpayers’ dollars to go.

As the member knows, at the moment across Queensland we subsidise regional air, rail and coach services. So we want to know where local areas want to see their dollars spent. I think that is sensible. That has not been done for a very long time. We want to see the results from some communities, because things change over time. We all know that travel patterns may have been going one way and then at some point they change. We are looking at that. We remain committed to regional services but I want to talk to the communities about that. The member mentioned consultation. Even under this bill there will still remain an obligation to consult. I do not know that I picked up everything the member said, but she mentioned entitlements. Under this bill, entitlements remain. In terms of superannuation and things like that, they transfer over.

I want to talk about the contribution from the member for Warrego. He showed a real and objective understanding of the intent of this bill. He was right when he said that it was about positioning Queensland Rail for the future, to build opportunities, to ensure efficiencies and better services. I thank the assistant minister for his comments about public expectations growing for fare affordability, better services and infrastructure. This bill is about value for money and improved passenger service delivery in a tight fiscal environment. If the government is going to continue to invest money, it needs to ensure that it is spent efficiently, delivering real value for money for all Queenslanders.

The member for Morayfield outlined some of the projects that are currently underway that will help QR deliver better services for Queensland. The member is a real advocate for public transport. I saw that when I joined him to meet some of the rail users in his electorate during the campaign. Being out there with the member, who was not at that time the member for Morayfield but who subsequently became the member for Morayfield, was one of the great moments of that campaign. Well done!

The member for Algester made important comments about affordability and the need to make public transport the first choice for commuters. I know that, like the member for Algester, all the other members understand the importance of the affordability of fares. There is no way that this government will go back to the bad old days under Labor of 15 per cent increases in fares every year. That was Labor’s plan. That is not our plan. We have already halved their planned fare increase for this year. We are keeping to our election promise of halving it next year, but we want to do more. I know that the member for Algester is fighting to make sure that we can do more and will not let us get back to those bad old days under Labor of 15 per cent increases in fares every year.

In conclusion, this bill does not pretend to outline all future policies on rail reform. This bill creates a platform to facilitate future reform: an authority, a workforce and procedures that are appropriately placed to deliver the government’s expectations efficiently and cost-effectively. This bill is an important step in realising the government’s commitment to improving the management of the rail network, ensuring better value for money for Queenslanders and improving services.

Division: Question put—That the bill be now read a second time.


NOES, 10—Byrne, Douglas, Katter, Knuth, Mulherin, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Trad. Tellers: Miller, Scott

Resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a second time.
Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 8, as read, agreed to.

Clause 9—

Mr EMERSON (3.22 pm): I move the following amendment and table the explanatory notes to my amendments—

1 Clause 9 (Functions of Authority)
Page 10, line 30, ‘railway stock’—
omit, insert—
rolling stock

Tabled paper: Queensland Rail Transit Authority Bill 2013, explanatory notes for Hon. Scott Emerson’s amendments [2528].

Mr EMERSON: The amendment to clause 9 corrects a minor error. The words ‘railway stock’ should read ‘rolling stock’.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 9, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 10 to 42, as read, agreed to.

Clause 43—

Mr EMERSON (3.24 pm): I move the following amendment—

2 Clause 43 (Deletion of commercially sensitive matters from annual report)
Page 25, after line 12—
insert—
Example of a matter that might be deleted—
pricing information given to the Authority in response to an unfinished tender process

The amendment to clause 43 inserts an example of a matter that may be deleted from the authority’s annual report because of commercial sensitivity. The amendment will provide context regarding when it is appropriate to delete information from the annual report.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 43, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 44 to 75, as read, agreed to.

Clause 76—

Mr EMERSON (3.25 pm): I move the following amendment—

3 Clause 76 (Applicable award)
Page 41, after line 18—
insert—
(3) Despite anything to the contrary in a federal enterprise agreement that under section 73 is taken to be a certified agreement, clause 8 of the Rail Industry Award 2010 as in force immediately before the transfer day applies to—
(a) the Authority; and
(b) employees to whom the certified agreement applies; and
(c) any relevant employee organisation registered under the IRA.

Editor’s note—
clause 8 (Consultation regarding major workplace change) of the Rail Industry Award 2010

(4) Clause 8 of the Rail Industry Award 2010 is taken to be a TCR provision for the IRA, section 691D.

Note—
The Rail Industry Award 2010 is taken to be a relevant industrial instrument for the IRA, section 691D. See section 69(1)(d).

Clause 76 clarifies the obligations on the new authority to consult with employees and employee representatives about any proposed or future organisational change. This clarification will ensure employees of the new authority will be treated in precisely the same way as nurses, teachers, prison officers and ambulance officers when it comes to organisational change in the workforce.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 76, as amended, agreed to.
Clauses 77 to 120, as read, agreed to.
Schedules 1 and 2, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Hon. SA EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (3.27 pm): I move—

That the bill, as amended, be now read a third time.

Question put—That the bill, as amended, be now read a third time.
Motion agreed to.
Bill read a third time.

Long Title

Hon. SA EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (3.27 pm): I move—

That the long title of the bill be agreed to.

Question put—That the long title of the bill be agreed to.
Motion agreed to.

QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (JUSTICES OF THE PEACE) AMENDMENT BILL

Resumed from 19 March (see p. 670)

Second Reading

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (3.27 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a second time.

As I mentioned in my introductory remarks, this bill fulfils a pre-election commitment by the Newman government to trial an expansion of the role of justices of the peace in our courts and tribunals. We appreciate the invaluable role that justices of the peace play in our justice system. These respected citizens volunteer their time and devote their energy to serving justice in Queensland and this initiative rewards those justices of the peace who want to contribute even further.

The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 establishes a six-month trial enabling two justices of the peace to constitute the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, QCAT, to hear and decide minor civil disputes with a value of $5,000 or less, excluding urgent residential tenancy matters. The bill also includes amendments to streamline the process for resignation from office for members, adjudicators and justices of the peace. Subject to the parliament’s passage of the bill, it is intended the trial will commence in early June and be conducted in Brisbane, Southport, Ipswich, Maroochydore and Townsville. An evaluation of the trial will assist future decision-making about whether the QCAT JP program should be extended, modified or ceased.

I take this opportunity to thank the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee for its careful consideration of the bill. I also thank the stakeholders who contributed to the committee process by providing their submissions: the Real Estate Institute of Queensland; the Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services Inc.; and, of course, the Queensland Law Society. I note the committee tabled its report on the bill on 24 April 2013. I now table a copy of the Queensland government’s response to that report.

Tabled paper: Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Report No. 28—Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Bill 2013, government response [2529].

In its report the committee made four recommendations about the bill. The committee’s first recommendation that the bill be passed is welcomed. Recommendation 2 provides that a program of regular continual professional development opportunities be provided to QCAT JPs. The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2009, the QCAT Act, already includes a number of safeguards in
relation to the proposed trial, including section 167. Section 167 provides that the president is to consider certain factors, including the nature, importance and complexity of the matter, in choosing the persons who are to constitute the tribunal for a particular matter. This will ensure that the justices of the peace who constitute the tribunal have, between them, sufficient knowledge and experience of the subject matter and issues.

In addition, as noted in the committee’s report, clause 7 of the bill, proposed new section 206J, allows the presiding QCAT justice of the peace to refer a question of law to the QCAT president. Further, clause 7 of the bill, proposed new section 206N, provides that if the tribunal constituted by two justices of the peace considers it would be more appropriate for the matter to be decided by the tribunal constituted by one, two or three members, or by an adjudicator then the presiding QCAT justice of the peace must refer the matter to the president.

As noted in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General advice to the committee on submissions made to the committee, the applicant justices of the peace have had to undergo comprehensive, compulsory five-day training delivered by experienced QCAT members, adjudicators and staff. I am advised that the training included the fundamental principles of respect for the law; fairness, encompassing natural justice and procedural fairness; as well as modules on the subject matter constituting QCAT’s minor civil disputes jurisdiction. The training materials included tribunal decisions relevant to the modules to illustrate practical application of the principles and all participants’ competency was assessed through a practical, performance based exercise. In addition, all participants were strongly encouraged to observe QCAT hearings following the completion of the training and before the trial commences. Legal support by an experienced QCAT member or adjudicator is also to be provided to the justice of the peace panels when they hear matters. As I mentioned above, a decision about the future of the trial will be made following the evaluation.

Included as part of the considerations for the future of the JP QCAT program will be the need for regular, continual professional development opportunities for the QCAT JPs. In recommendation 3, the committee recommended that the evaluation framework for the QCAT JP trial captures information on the skills and experience of the participating applicants, appropriately anonymised and sorted into broad categories such as years of age, gender, post-admission legal experience or other qualifications. As the committee has noted in its report, the evaluation framework is currently being finalised. The committee’s recommendation about the information to be captured will be considered as part of that process. I have been advised by QCAT that its evaluation database has been set up to capture the skills and experience of the JPs participating in the trial. The Department of Justice and Attorney-General has advised me that it is intended that the evaluation will include seeking feedback from QCAT clients, justices of the peace participating in the trial and other stakeholders.

Recommendation 4 of the committee’s report recommends the evaluation framework for the QCAT JP trial be made publicly available prior to the expiration of the trial and the results of the evaluation are tabled in the Legislative Assembly prior to any decision to continue the trial for an extended period. The government will make the evaluation framework publicly available prior to the expiration of the trial. Further, the government will also release the results of the evaluation at an appropriate time.

The bill recognises the important role justices of the peace have in our community and will offer an opportunity to justices of the peace to expand their role and, at the same time, reduce the burden on the court and tribunal system. The commencement of the justice of the peace QCAT trial in early June 2013 will fulfil the government’s commitment in the six-month action plan and is part of the government’s pledge to deliver a swift and fair justice system for all Queenslanders. I commend the bill to the House.

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (3.34 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. This bill expands on the broad policy objective that the LNP announced before the 2012 state election. At the outset, I place on record the enormous admiration I have for the volunteer JPs who serve with such dedication the people of Queensland and the justice system. In my own electorate of Inala, many JPs are called on at all hours of the day and night to witness documents, wills, enduring powers of attorney and warrants for police. Some of those matters may involve complex issues that the JP has to digest and think about before deciding whether or not the specific criteria have been fulfilled.
This proposal from the government appears to be quite a moving feast. Although the opposition will be supporting the bill, we do have some issues that we would like the Attorney to address. I will raise those issues during my speech and I would be more than happy if the Attorney could address the issues at the end of this debate.

In the lead-up to the last state election, in its policy document entitled *Delivering Swift and Fair Justice*, the LNP announced—

The LNP values our Justices of the Peace and will act to improve, develop and expand the role of Justices of the Peace in the delivery of justice in Queensland.

An LNP Government will revive and expand the role of the Justice of the Peace (Magistrate Court) for minor simple court matters.

We will invest $3.5 million to trial an extension of the Justice of the Peace (Magistrate Court) program for 6 months to assist in reducing the court backlogs ...

That election commitment was couched in rather general terms and did not give any real specifics. In August last year when the Attorney-General first announced the trial scheme, he described it this way—

It is envisaged that the pilot program will assist with the fair, quick, economic and informal dispute resolution services of QCAT.

On 12 August, the *Australian* newspaper reported on the announcement, stating—

Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie says the JPs will replace lawyers to help reduce the backlog of QCAT matters by dealing with minor civil disputes, even though they have only a few weeks' training.

This announcement met with some understandable concern from members of the legal profession, because it lacked any solid detail and people were left wondering exactly what it meant. As the *Courier-Mail* reported—

Legal professionals have labelled the JP proposal a "cut price" lawyer scheme and have expressed concern that JPs will not have the legal training to recognise rules of law and principles of evidence.

That article further states—

Queensland Law Society president John de Groot said: “The society would be supportive of initiatives to have more people with appropriate legal experience to deal with these matters.”

When asked for a comment on the proposal, I was not in a position to discuss the merits of the trial because, like everyone else, I did not know the details of how it would operate. Therefore, I acknowledged the potential of decisions to affect people’s lives and asked that consultation be held with the legal profession before any changes were made. I said that any extension of the decision-making roles of JPs should happen only after consultation with the judiciary and the legal profession. I stated—

Giving JPs greater decision-making powers on matters coming before tribunals … could put them in charge of decisions that drastically affect people’s lives or livelihoods and need to be discussed widely.

That is called consultation and is hardly controversial, one might think. I was wrong if I thought that. The following day, the Attorney-General issued a media statement, in which essentially he had a bit of a dig at me and my comments on the government’s JP-magistrates proposal. I know the Attorney-General likes to have little digs, so today I cannot fail to mention the trial of the boot camps. The first two people to be put in a boot camp escaped. I am quite sure that this trial will do a lot better than the trial of the boot camps. However, we should wait and see because anything can happen with this government.

Mr Bleijie: I fail to see the relevance, but I will respond accordingly.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I look forward to hearing the Attorney’s response on the escape of the only two people they had. People have asked me, ‘Were there 50 people in this boot camp?’ I said, ‘No, there was only two.’ They had only two people to look after and those two people escaped.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Cunningham): Order! Could I suggest that the Leader of the Opposition return to the matter of the bill, please.
Ms PALASZCZUK: Of course, but the Attorney-General does go off on tangents and I thought it was opportune at this time when we are talking about trials to mention that. I will return to the matters at hand.

The Attorney-General was not quite that specific in his pre-election commitment. What the policy document actually said was—

An LNP Government will revive and expand the role of the Justice of the Peace (Magistrate Court) for minor simple court matters.

There was no mention of QCAT. There was no mention of minor civil disputes just minor simple court matters. He then went on—

It would seem the Opposition Leader is again talking on matters she clearly knows nothing about ...

I would recommend that the Opposition Leader get her facts right before she publicly denigrates Queensland JPs by suggesting they are not up to a job in QCAT.

I would like to take this opportunity to correct the record. I did not say any such thing. I would never criticise JPs in Queensland. As I said from the outset, they do an extraordinarily good job. I did not say that they were not up to the job or any of the other things attributed to me by the Attorney-General. I merely called for something called consultation.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: They did not. I did write to you, Attorney-General, about holding a further JP seminar in my electorate. I am still waiting to hear your response on that.

Mr Bleijie: I am coming to it.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Are you coming to it? When is it? Have you written back to me?

Mr Bleijie: I assume so.

Ms PALASZCZUK: We look forward to you coming to Inala.

Mrs Miller: You’ll need a passport to come into Inala.

Mr Bleijie: I have been to Inala. Your community legal centre in the dongas—I have been there.

Ms PALASZCZUK: They do an excellent job there. I return to the topic at hand. I do look forward to the Attorney-General’s visit to Inala. I am quite sure the constituents will have a few other issues to raise with him.

Even my comment that decisions made in tribunals such as QCAT are ‘decisions that drastically affect people’s lives or livelihoods’ cannot be classed as controversial. In fact, when discussing what matters are excluded from this scheme, the explanatory notes to the bill explain—

Urgent residential tenancy applications are also excluded because most of these disputes seek the termination of a tenancy and the issue of a warrant of possession which is usually executed by police within two to three weeks of the decision. These decisions can have a significant detrimental and rapid impact upon the housing of the respondent.

So they would be decisions that drastically affect people’s lives. I do not think I would get any argument about that from members opposite. I would like to know whether the Attorney-General was denigrating the JPs of Queensland in the explanatory notes. The Attorney also announced at that stage—

The pilot program will utilise the skills of JP ... to come up with common sense solutions to minor disputes of less than $3,000 in QCAT.

In October, when the Attorney spoke at the annual state conference of the Queensland Justices Association, the monetary limit was still envisaged to be $3,000. He said—

The pilot program will utilise the skills of JP ... and JP (Qual) to come up with common sense solutions to minor civil disputes of less than $3,000 ...
The first real detail the Queensland public got of the proposed scheme was in November when the Attorney-General released a media statement that advised—

The pilot program will utilise the skills of JPs to come up with common sense solutions to minor disputes of less than $5,000 ...

So we have gone from $3,000 to $5,000. I would ask the Attorney-General to please explain, during his speech in reply, what caused him to make this change. Could he outline to the House what the original advice was that he received in relation to this aspect of the trial and what further advice prompted the change of heart? In that same release the Attorney went on to say—

The trial will be used to assess whether the use of JPs in QCAT helps to reduce backlogs by freeing up magistrates and QCAT adjudicators to deal with more complex matters.

To be eligible for the legal positions and preside over the panel, JPs must have been a lawyer with at least three years’ standing in Australia.

Applicants for the non-legal positions must have held an appointment for at least five years.

The announcement about the experience required of JPs to participate in the scheme was reassuring. In fact, this was what was contained in the draft bill that the stakeholders were consulted on.

Whilst I am on that subject, I would like to congratulate the Attorney on the level of consultation conducted in relation to this bill. For once the committee report does not need to contain notations as to the lack of adequate opportunity for consultation, truncated time periods and consultation on a framework rather than a draft bill. Stakeholders actually received a draft copy of the bill to consider. Under the heading ‘Consultation’ in the explanatory notes, it says—

Submissions were received from the QJA, the GCJA, three legally qualified justices of the peace, the REIQ, the QLS and the TUQ. Where possible, concerns related to the draft Bill have been addressed in the final Bill. These changes included increasing and equalising the sitting fee for justices of the peace appointed to QCAT.

In its submission to the committee on this bill, the Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services, or QAILS, made special note of the removal of the proposed provisions relating to experience between the draft and final bills. As they said—

QAILS understood the original proposal to have JPs constitute QCAT would require legally qualified JPs to have five years’ experience as a JP and three years’ post-admission experience (see s 32 of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 ... In our view, these protections would ensure that QCAT would continue to have experienced members with exposure to legal practice, statutory interpretation, procedural fairness and the rule of law.

The Queensland Law Society also holds similar concerns. As they submitted—

We are particularly concerned that the trial now removes the number of years of experience for a JP (legally qualified) and JP (qualified) to sit and determine minor civil disputes.

In our view this undermines the public’s confidence that the matter heard by persons with adequate experience and understanding of the law and Tribunal processes.

It is important to note that legal qualifications and the practice of law are, more times than not, at different ends of the spectrum, which is why it is critical that persons presiding in QCAT for these matters have sufficient legal experience.

Another concern expressed by the Law Society was that—

... appointing persons with no or very limited experience may result in inconsistent decision making and further cost and time expended by an increase in appeals.

The recommendation of the QLS is that only legally qualified and experienced JPs, with a minimum of three years experience, are to sit. Alternatively, they suggest the original proposal be adopted—that is, if two JPs are to sit, a minimum of three years and five years experience be reinstated for JP (legally qualified) and JP (Qualified) respectively.

I would ask if the Attorney-General could please explain in his speech in reply whether any of the submissions he received on the draft legislation suggested he remove this qualification. Having such a qualification cannot be seen to be a reflection on the hardworking JPs who are participating in the trial. In fact, the restriction was the Attorney-General’s own idea.
I am just concerned that the reason for the change of heart has not been adequately explained and wanted to ensure that there was a sound policy basis for the reversal of this decision. The only explanation given by the Attorney-General to date was in his media statement dated 19 March 2013. The release stated—

Attorney-General Jarrod Bleijie said based on feedback received during consultation, the original criteria had been amended to make more JPs eligible for the trial.

The provision for legally qualified JPs to have five years’ experience as a JP and three years’ post-admission experience has been removed.

As I have said before, the explanatory notes state that the submission on the draft bill were received from the QJA, the GCJA, three legally qualified justices of the peace et cetera. So could the Attorney please advise from which of these people he received feedback during consultation that caused him to change the criteria?

I wanted to make some brief comments on training. For all of the participants, taking on a quasi-judicial role will be an entirely new experience and may prove to be a little daunting. It is therefore necessary that full and adequate training be provided before they take up these positions to ensure they have the necessary knowledge, skill and confidence to perform the role.

The monetary limit will be $5,000. To most people that is a considerable sum of money. I certainly do not know many people in my electorate for whom $5,000 would be regarded as pocket change. It is important that decisions are accurate and consistent. People should not have to rely on appeal mechanisms to any great extent, although it is reassuring to know that they are there.

There appears to be some contradiction in different documents accompanying this legislation in relation to the complexity of the issue. With all due respect to the Attorney-General, the complexity of a legal issue relates to the subject matter of the dispute and the particular circumstances relating thereto, not the monetary value of the claim. A $2,500 small claim may involve more complex legal issues than a $25,000 contractual matter. This is reflected in the letter sent by the Department of Justice and Attorney-General dated 26 March 2013, which said—

... although the matters will have a low monetary limit, these disputes can involve legal issues of some complexity.

The letter also states—

- justices of the peace will hear and decide contested matters that are often accompanied by a high degree of conflict between the parties;
- justices of the peace will be required to make findings of fact and law, apply the relevant law, make enforceable decisions and give oral reasons for decisions at the time of the hearing;

These are not matters with which those participating JPs would have had much experience. Training in all of these matters would be crucial for the success of the trial.

With that in mind, I would just like to say in conclusion that the bill was originally intended to implement the LNP election commitment, a commitment that lacked sufficient detail at the time. However, that has evolved, and I do take on board that the Attorney has said today that there will be an evaluation of the trial and that those results will be made public. I just hope that there will be enough participation in the trial to make sure that we can see those statistics. As I said previously, I hope that this trial goes a lot better for the Attorney than the boot camp trial. With those few words, I commend the bill to the House.

Mr BERRY (Ipswich—LNP) (3.51 pm): I rise to speak on the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. My comments are concentrated on my addressing the objectives of the bill, the make-up of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal and the value of the amendments to the legal process and the institution of law in Queensland.

As a Queensland solicitor for 38 years, practising in Ipswich and Brisbane, and as a sole solicitor in general practice, I have been involved in many changes in the legal profession in this state. Most of these changes have probably occurred over the last 15 years or so. To name a few, they include globalisation, solicitors’ advertising, the establishment of QCAT, the Moynihan reforms and the rapid rise of the digital economy which is now filtering into our legal system. At that moment I will
pause and say that, in relation to QCAT, I note that the Leader of the Opposition said something to the effect that this is a cut-price legal system. Strangely enough, when QCAT was introduced I can remember the same words being used when I think the Attorney-General then raised it. As it turns out, it is not. It is a mainstay of our legal system. It is in fact a system which involves minimal expense and one which has been working effectively. In my respectful submission, this is just simply an extension of the evolution of the legal system in Queensland. With my experience in the legal profession, I base my argument in commending this bill on it being part of an evolving process.

When I became qualified in 1976, it was actually frowned upon for a solicitor to be a justice of the peace. Of course there were exceptions, such as articled clerks who before they became solicitors became justices of the peace because it was necessary for them to do so to be able to witness documents. Of course after their admission they simply kept their status. Over time solicitors received the legislative imprimatur to be able to sign and witness people’s signatures because it was the way of this evolutionary process that it was necessary for that to occur.

Justices of the peace have had many variations to their roles from being judicial officers in decades past to now being witnesses to official documents and on other occasions signing search warrants when called upon by members of the Queensland Police Service. Being a judicial justice of the peace is not new. In this vast state of ours—extending to the Northern Territory and South Australian borders and including Cape York and the islands surrounding Queensland—and in view of the fact that Queensland is so regionalised, it is clearly the case that we need a system which allows ordinary members to be able to take their matters to court.

The dual justice of the peace system has worked very well in past years, but this system in fact enhances the previous system and brings with it the notion of equality in that we now have one of the justices of the peace being a practising lawyer. I remember as far back as 1974 when I appeared before two justices of the peace in the Magistrates Court which was then held in Her Majesty’s Boggo Road prison. It happened to be an occasion where one justice of the peace was a lawyer and magistrate and he declared he would sit as a justice of the peace and had his attending clerk sit as the other justice of the peace. So it is a system which has permeated the legal profession for quite some time.

It has been said that they need years of experience such as three and five years, as has been mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition. I really cannot say that I agree with that for a couple of reasons. In the legal profession it is not really the years you have been practising that is important; it is what you have been practising in. For instance, to give an example, a law undergraduate who, during their studies, served as an associate to either a Supreme Court justice or a District Court judge but only recently qualifying could not be on the QCAT tribunal. It seems so strange—a person who had that experience. Yet a lawyer who had been doing conveyancing for, say, three years or five years would actually as a right qualify yet has no experience. It really is for the applicants to apply and for their qualities to be measured and for those chosen to have the necessary ingredients.

In some of the literature I have read—and I might say the literature came from England—England still deals with lay magistrates. What they look for in deciding whether a person is an appropriate justice of the peace and for that matter a lawyer justice of the peace are qualities such as being of good character and having skills of understanding and communication, social awareness, maturity and sound temperament, sound judgement, commitment and reliability, humility and, above all, the ability to listen. What I am saying is that years are not equal to experience.

It has been mentioned that it is important for there to be considered years of experience in order to be able to sit on claims of $5,000 or less. I might take that as two parts. The first part is the amount of $5,000. In the world of litigation today, you cannot have a car accident matter that involves under $5,000. There would be very few that would fit within that description. Whether it is good or bad, $5,000 is not a large sum within which to have a fight in legal terms.

The second part relates to the complexity of matters. Certainly I agree that you can have complex matters under $5,000. Just to name one, I can think of a jurisdictional issue where the $5,000 dispute might be with a trader outside the borders of Queensland. Of course that brings some complexities. There are some High Court decisions on that. But it has to be remembered that the president of the tribunal is able to determine the people involved in deciding that issue. That means that the president would decide upon a lawyer justice of the peace and a qualified justice of the peace being appropriate for that matter to be dealt with. The other issue is that, in circumstances where there might be some ambiguity, it is for the president to appoint the leading decision maker, but ordinarily it will be the lawyer, certainly after discussion.
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I remember in 2006 I had the opportunity of attending a Chinese court in Beijing. China works off the Germanic-Romanic law code and, as a result, in that court they had a lawyer justice with two lay senior persons. So that is a different system where it has been accepted that a lay person is a valued member of the tribunal, but the important point to remember is that it is all those matters I referred to before about having social awareness, the ability to listen and to have patience. Because most of the people who go to court are unqualified, do not know how the process works and want to be heard. They want to be listened to, and they realise that a decision has to be made. Justice is always in the eyes of the beholder, but we expect our judicial fact finders to listen, to consider the law and to make a decision.

The adoption of lay people is throughout the Western world, not only in England but also in other places. So it is not new for me to be standing here before you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and espousing the values of involving lay people. In fact, the involvement of lay people has a suggestion of equality and fairness in that we expect a judge in a criminal trial to determine matters of law and the jury of 10 good men and women true to decide issues of fact. How can we reject that here today? Of course we cannot. It is a matter that is now commonplace. It seems to me in a vibrant, modern, sophisticated adversarial system, as we have in Queensland, that it is most appropriate for these courts to be formed and for a limit of $5,000 at the very least to be used.

It is important for the lay justices of the peace to have all those worldly qualities that come sometimes with age and not necessarily by going to a training school. Of course those justices of the peace that have a keen interest in knowing how courts work will undertake training. I remember as a young solicitor there was no training as an advocate in court, but what one would do is go along to a court and sign up for any advocacy course. The interesting thing, though—and this is why I encourage young solicitors to be involved in the process—is that appearing as a judicial officer in a moot court or a training session makes you become a better advocate when you are required to listen to evidence knowing that you have to make a decision on it. It makes you more keenly aware of the issues involved. So I suggest that all future would-be candidates have a lot to gain from this and they will learn quickly because they will have many people come before them, all of whom have something to say.

Queensland is a diverse economy. We have wide borders and it is appropriate that we adopt this measure. Change is always constant. Though this bill prescribes a pilot scheme, to me it seems both appropriate and measured when our court resources are extended. It goes without saying this extension largely comes about by the loss of our AAA rating and having to repay $65-plus billion including the $100 million daily interest bill. Notwithstanding that, this seems to me to be a measured approach and one which will add value to our legal system.

In summary, it has been said in the past that QCAT was a cut-price legal system. Clearly, that is not the case. Clearly, it has withstood the test of time, as will these amendments to the act. They will be accepted by the public and they will bring about swift justice which they now cannot have. It goes without saying that while $5,000 may not be a large sum to some people—and I refer to the opposition leader’s comments—it is important that we have a decision made quickly and with expertise. I commend the bill to the House.

Hon. JA STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (Minister for Tourism, Major Events, Small Business and the Commonwealth Games) (4.05 pm): I rise to contribute to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 introduced by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, the honourable member for Kawana, on 19 March this year. As we have heard, this bill amends the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2009 and the Queensland Civil and Administrative Regulation 2009. As other honourable members have indicated, as has the Attorney, prior to the March 2012 election the LNP pledged to trial an expansion of the role of justices of the peace for minor civil disputes. This was reaffirmed in the Newman government’s six-month action plan for January to June of 2013. The bill before us fulfils that commitment and is a significant achievement towards reducing the court and tribunal backlog in the Queensland judicial system. I would like to say that I found the honourable member for Ipswich’s contribution most enlightening, with some interesting history woven through it, especially about the involvement of lay people.
The LNP government acknowledges the importance of JPs in our community who provide a
voluntary and substantial contribution. To this end, we are keen to provide JPs the opportunities to
improve, develop and expand their role in society, especially in a state as vast and decentralised as
Queensland. The positive outcomes of this bill are twofold. Not only does this demonstrate a
deserving recognition of the importance of JPs; it goes a long way to assisting the courts and
tribunals to clear their hefty backlogs.

The bill legislates the ability of a two-person JP panel, one of whom must be legally qualified—a
lawyer—to hear certain minor civil disputes in the Queensland Civil Administrative Tribunal, QCAT.
These minor civil disputes will be for the value of $5,000 or less and will include items very common
to many members in this House such as non-urgent residential tenancy disputes; tree and dividing
fence disputes—I have to say that is a very common occurrence in my electorate—minor debts;
consumer and trader disputes; claims about damage arising from motor vehicle accidents; and
repairs for defects in motor vehicles. Like me, I am sure that all honourable members are aware of the
frequency of these disputes and the anxiety they cause to constituents when they drag on for months,
if not years, without any resolution.

This trial is intended to run for six months from 3 June 2013 and will take place in Brisbane,
Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville. As the Attorney-General highlighted in his
introductory speech, based on 2011-12 applications it is estimated that 3,750 to 4,000 applications
will come within the parameters of the trial over that period. I am sure everyone would agree that this
is a very large number of cases that make up the minor, less complex matters only and allow QCAT
the time and capacity to hear more complex issues. This will also go a long way towards improving
clearance rates for minor civil disputes. This panel of two JPs will have one legally qualified JP who
will preside and decide on the questions of law arising and give reasoning for these decisions. Should
the two JPs disagree, the one presiding will decide the matter. This approach is consistent with the
QCAT Act. The JPs’ decision will be subject to appeal to the QCAT appeal tribunal, with leave.

The daily sitting fee payable to QCAT JPs will be $100 for both JPs. Originally it was proposed
that the fee would be $75 for legally qualified JPs and $37 for the other JP. Following extensive
consultation with the community this was increased to $100 for all JPs. The Department of Justice
and Attorney-General stated that the fee is intended to reflect the essentially voluntary nature of a JP.
I am very pleased to say that there has been a keen interest in this program, with the first round of
consultation attracting 35 legally qualified applicants and 107 non-legally qualified applicants as at
Friday, 15 March. As this new-to-Queensland initiative is a trial only, following the six-month period an
evaluation will occur and a decision on the program’s future, along with the format of the program if it
is to be continued, will be decided. I note that the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
report made four recommendations.

Notably, there are approximately 80,000 JPs and commissioners for declarations state-wide.
These respected citizens provide an invaluable service to the community and are in high demand,
with many giving up their valuable time on weekends as well as weekdays to assist the community.
Like many electorates across our great state, we frequently have people visiting our electorate office
seeking a JP and we are able to direct them to local shopping centres where JPs visit on a regular
basis—almost daily in the case of my local shopping centre—and there they are able to witness
important documents. There is also a steady stream of constituents that travels through the electorate
office wishing to become a JP and it is great to see them wanting to give back to their communities. It
is little wonder there are well over 500 JPs in my electorate of Currumbin.

I would also like to acknowledge those long-serving JPs—be it 10, 25 or 50 years—who have
freely given of their time to assist members in their community. I am always pleased when the
opportunity arises to present constituents with their certificates of service and be able to thank them
for their many years of dedicated efforts. In fact, this coming Friday I have a local constituent, Valerie
Aumann, coming into my office to celebrate 25 years as a JP. What a remarkable effort.

I understand that some critics have expressed concerns with provisions in this bill stating that it
takes away the power or the authority from the court system. However, the reverse is the case. By
allowing JPs to hear certain minor disputes, the courts are essentially given greater time and
resources to focus on the more serious matters that our courts must truly decide.
The introduction of this trial combined with changes to the way JPs are trained are part of the revitalisation of the JP branch in Queensland and will place a strong emphasis on working proactively with local JPs, assisting them in their roles and allowing them to continue to provide a service to our community in the most efficient way possible. Again I place on record my appreciation to our JPs for the invaluable role that they play and the contribution they make to our community as keepers of the peace, just as King Richard I, ‘Richard the Lion-Heart’, intended in the late 12th century.

May I congratulate the Attorney-General on this legislation, which is a common-sense, practical and cost-effective approach to dealing with the backlogs evident in our courts and tribunals whilst providing our JPs the opportunity to develop their role in our communities.

Mr PUCCI (Logan—LNP) (4.13 pm): I rise today to contribute to the debate in support of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. For centuries throughout the Commonwealth, justices of the peace have played a vital role in the administration of laws and regulations within our community. As a purely volunteer based organisation, justices of the peace form an intricate network within our legal system. Designed to greater assist the current model of dealing with matters before the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, this amendment bill will also continue our government’s commitment to improve the administration of the Queensland justice system as well as our election mandate to revitalise front-line services in our great state.

A duty in which I am sure all honourable members enjoy partaking is meeting with applicants and signing off on new justice of the peace applications from all sectors within our community. Justices of the peace provide invaluable services to civil agencies and the public. Esteemed members of our community whose integrity is beyond reproach, justices of the peace are often entrusted with personal information and confidential cases. This legislation seeks to reinforce that trust that has been bestowed in them. This amendment will also generate opportunities for justices of the peace to improve, develop and expand their roles within our community.

The Logan electorate is serviced by justices of the peace based in Browns Plains and Jimboomba. My electorate is serviced by a team of justices of the peace who volunteer their time in support of our community. Most notably, earlier this year I had the privilege of presenting Mr Keith Revell of Heritage Park with a certificate in recognition of his 25 years of service as an established justice of the peace in our community. Mr Revell’s commitment to serving as a justice of the peace sees him working in various other organisations such as Protect All Children Today where he incorporates his skills employed in his role of a justice of the peace.

This amendment bill will allow for selected justices of the peace to hear minor civil disputes with a value of less than $5,000 as well as urgent tenancy matters in the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Commencing in June 2013, this amendment bill will enact a six-month trial that will be deployed in areas throughout our great state. From Townsville to Southport and all regional centres in between, this trial will set out to reduce the bureaucratic bottleneck that currently exists. This expansion of the defined role of a justice of peace will see a reduction in the average time taken to finalise all minor civil dispute applications and further improve the clearance rate for all minor civil dispute applications in the trial sites.

The amendment will also reduce the costs of hearing minor civil disputes within the trial’s scope. This trial will allow the assessment of the operational feasibility of the split role, thus allowing current QCAT adjudicators, judicial registrars and magistrates to deal with more complex matters that are before the tribunal. The trial will commence with the appointment of justices of the peace to the tribunal by Her Excellency the Governor in consultation with her executive council. The only caveat stipulated in the amendment is that one of the parties appointed to the role must be a lawyer. A more efficient Civil and Administrative Tribunal will not only bring about much needed improvement in the administrative process but also boost confidence in our rental market and its subsidiary industry.

In late February, I met with a constituent of mine, Mrs Colleen Wyatt. Colleen, in her role as a property manager, met with me to voice her disappointment with the current QCAT process in relation to tenancy disputes. Mrs Wyatt outlined several factors that were not only adversely affecting their client but also discouraging property investment in my electorate as a result of the administrative process. In addition to their general frustration of having a matter before the tribunal which, as one can understand, would be quite stressful, further angst is generated by the slow process of dealing with matters that should be dealt with at a more rapid and efficient level.
Change to this process is needed and our government has a legislative amendment that does just that. Our government is identifying the areas that need to get back on track and is working with the community to deliver better services for all Queenslanders. The rhetorical question stands: how can we expect our property market and its associated industry to develop if means of administrative mediation are inundated with disputes and experience lengthy delays? With strong support from the Real Estate Institute, a streamlined and efficient administrative arbitration system will boost consumer confidence. It will generate confidence in the knowledge that an efficient system is in place to administer over cases when matters between property owners and tenants require external mediation. It will also provide a firm level of reassurance to owners that such judicial protocols are easily accessible when choosing to invest in our great state. With communities within my electorate of Logan set to grow by over 200,000 people over the next 20 years, property investment opportunities are set to burst through the roof.

This trial period will see our justices of the peace play a key role in support of that growth. I have full confidence that this trial, once completed, will not only be continued on a full-time basis but also expand to have a permanent presence in such areas as Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville. I am sure that with the success of this initiative such attention will come to the jewel of the south-east: Logan.

I would like to commend Her Majesty’s Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, the Hon. Jarrod Bleijie, along with his ministerial and departmental staff, whose hard work has come to fruition today. I would also like to acknowledge the effort of the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee and their parliamentary support team, whose timely deliberation of this bill will see this government pass yet another bill that will improve our great state. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (4.21 pm): I rise to speak to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill. At the outset I will refer to some statements made by the member for Ipswich. He said that he did not agree with the Leader of the Opposition when she questioned the removal of the original requirement for certain experience before JPs could participate in the trial. As the honourable member said, ‘Years are not equal to experience.’ That may well be true, but it is not uncommon for a specific period of experience to be prescribed before someone can take on a judicial role. Certainly before anyone can be appointed as a magistrate, a District Court judge or a Supreme Court judge they must be a lawyer of five years standing. Surely the member for Ipswich is not suggesting that we remove this requirement for people being appointed as judges or magistrates, because it seemed as though that was what he was mooting. He also appeared to speak very fondly—almost nostalgically—about what happens in England in relation to lay justices. It was almost like he was harking back to the days of lords and ladies such as Lord and Lady Lamington, who came here to Brisbane and brought their quaint ways and practices with them.

I was the registrar of the justices of the peace program in Queensland for many years following the breakthrough and innovative legislation supported in this House by former Attorney-General Dean Wells. Justices of the peace are very important in our community. There are tens of thousands of JPs right throughout the state. Training has been provided since the early 1990s for the various categories of JPs. There has been category training for commissioners for declarations and there has been training for justices of the peace (qualified). That training has been undertaken through TAFE colleges in Queensland as well as by departmental offices. There has also been training for justices of the peace (Magistrates Court) through the department of justice. I bet that not many members in this House would be aware that there has been training for justices of the peace (Magistrates Court).

In my view, justices of the peace should be trained for this role from the JP (Qualified) ranks and the JP (Magistrates Court) ranks. That is very important. There are quite a number of JPs (Magistrates Court) in Far North Queensland, there are some JPs (Magistrates Court) who are officers of courts in their own right and there are some JPs (Magistrates Court) who actually reside in the local Brisbane area. I would like to know the curriculum of the training. Who wrote it? Attorney, who wrote it?

Mr Bleijie: I'll tell you in my speech in reply.

Mrs MILLER: Good! I would really like to know who wrote it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): Order! Member for Bundamba, please refer your comments through the chair.
Mrs MILLER: Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would also like to know what the qualification will be. If this is such an important trial, and given that you have the qualifications of commissioner for declarations, often known as C.dec, JP (C.dec), JP (Qualified) and JP (Magistrates Court), I would like to suggest to the Attorney-General that we have a JP (QCAT) qualification.

I would also like to know whether there would be a statement of attainment, for example, for those people who go through the training. If you do the JP (Qualified) course in a TAFE college you get a statement of attainment. I would like to know whether there is an examination, so you actually have to pass an examination—

Mr Bleijie: I am going to write to every JP in your electorate about this speech—

Mrs MILLER: They know what I am saying. Good!

Mr Bleijie:—attacking every JP in your electorate.

Mrs MILLER: In relation to the Attorney-General’s cheap threat to me, all of the JPs (Qualified) in my electorate had to sit an examination before undertaking that role. Each and every one of them since the 1990s has had to know the manuals very well—that is manual 1, commissioner for declarations, and manual 2, JP (Qualified)—and has had to sit an exam. So I want to know whether the JPs (QCAT) will have to pass an examination. I also want to know whether the examination was open book—that is the same way it is for JPs (Qualified)—and whether there was an 80 per cent pass rate for any of the JPs who are to be appointed for the JP (QCAT) trial.

I would also like to know the criteria for those JPs who have been chosen for these trials. In other words, who conducted the interviews and what were the characteristics of the interviews? For example, was it a Public Service type interview whereby there are certain criteria and the applicants are ranked against them? I would like to encourage people to become JPs, because it is a very important role in the community.

We have to be very clear here. With this bill we will have two types of JPs. It is traditional for JPs in our community to provide their services on a voluntary basis. In other words, they receive absolutely no payment. With this bill there will be JPs in the community who get absolutely no payment at all and then JPs—they have no title; they are not JP (QCAT)—who will be paid $100. So there will now be two types of JPs. And there will also be different types of JPs. There are commissioners for declarations, JPs (Qualified), JPs (Magistrates Court) and JPs by virtue of office. And now we will have a new type of JP but they will not be called JPs (QCAT). That is because of the nonsense that this Attorney-General goes on with.

Mr Bleijie: Because they are JPs!

Mrs MILLER: If they are going to be JPs in QCAT, we may as well have JPs (QCAT). The Attorney-General should ask the JPs. They will want to be called JPs (QCAT) because it shows that they have the qualification to undertake that role.

In his speech in reply I would also like the Attorney-General to please explain what training has been provided, the components of the training, what time has been spent on each component, whether there was any examination, how many have been through the course and what was the evaluation to determine whether participants had been furnished with adequate tools, in terms of the training, to take part in the trial.

We must be mindful of the fact that JPs generally are volunteers. As I said, these JPs will be paid a sitting fee of $100. I understand that the government says this is a nominal fee. But what about the JPs (Magistrates Court)—those who sit in criminal trials in the Magistrates Court in the northern areas of the state and those in Aboriginal communities who often sit in these courts? Are they now entitled to $100 every time they sit in the court? The Attorney-General has set a precedent for every JP in the state.

The REIQ in its submission expressed its concern that JPs may not have the necessary skills and knowledge required to adjudicate the matters they are entitled to hear and determine in the bill. Here we have a situation where this government got rid of the Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service, which was a very cruel blow, and there are also questions being raised by the REIQ in its submission in relation to dispute resolution and procedural fairness principles. In relation to these aspects, the Attorney-General needs to give an assurance to this House that the cost of training will be met by the government and that adequate moneys are appropriated so that this training is done properly. It is very important to assure the community about that. No-one in this House could be more supportive of JPs than myself.
Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mrs MILLER: I have administered the program and I would like them—

(Time expired)

Miss BARTON (Broadwater—LNP) (4.30 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill, and I certainly hope that I do not excite the Attorney as much as the member for Bundamba clearly has.

Mr Bleijie: The difference is this member supports JPs in her constituency; the member for Bundamba doesn’t!

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): What is your point of order, member for Bundamba?

Mrs MILLER: My understanding is that that is at the end of the debate because the Attorney-General just spoke in relation to a comment made by the member.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mrs MILLER: No; she did not take the interjection.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bundamba, that is not a point of order. I ask the member for Broadwater to please continue.

Miss BARTON: Thank you very much, Mr Deputy Speaker. Before I was so rudely interrupted, I was actually going to take the Attorney’s interjection. As I was saying, it does give me great pleasure to rise to speak to this bill and, as the Attorney has rightly said, I do indeed support justices of the peace right across Queensland. I start my contribution to the debate on this bill by thanking my colleagues who join me in serving on the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee. We have worked incredibly hard over the past 12 months and I think that we have done some very good work, and the report as a result of the review of this bill is a continuation of that good work. Of course we would not be able to do that if it were not for the secretariat, so I place on record my thanks for its support. I also thank those who took the time to consult on the draft bill and of course those who took the time to make submissions on the bill. Before I turn to the substantive nature of the bill, I want to highlight and comment on one of the statements made by the honourable member for Logan. Unfortunately, my colleague said that he thought that Logan was the jewel of Queensland. I would like to point out to him in his absentia that the Gold Coast is the jewel of Queensland and that the seat of Broadwater is of course the jewel in the crown!

I turn now to the substantive nature of the bill. This bill honours an election commitment that we made to the people of Queensland, and that is something that this government continues to do time and time again. Unlike the opposition, we go out to the people of Queensland and we say that we are going to do something and we do it. On the contrary, the ALP seems to think that what you do is you say that you will not do something and then you go and do it. It is so very pleasing for me to see that we are continuing to support JPs in our community in the great work that they do. This bill will allow for two JPs to sit on the bench in QCAT matters when it is hearing minor civil disputes. As my colleagues have already outlined, one of those will be someone who is legally qualified so that when there are questions of law someone is able to make a determination and provide some advice. It is important to note that these people are hearing minor civil disputes. We are not asking them to hear disputes that are in excess of $5,000 in nature, and that is very important.

QCAT is incredibly bogged down. We are trying to not only make it easier for those who sit permanently on QCAT but also make it easier for those who take their claims to QCAT. One of the things that this government has been trying to do is cut red tape and make things go through the processes a lot quicker, and this particular trial will do just that. I am so pleased to see that this six-month trial includes Southport. It will also include Brisbane, Ipswich, Townsville and Maroochydore. Coming from the Gold Coast, I am acutely aware of how busy the legal fraternity is there and of course how busy the judiciary is there. Anything that we can do to ease the burden on those learned legal minds is a good thing, and this is going to be a great thing for the Southport registry. I said that this will save time for the adjudicators and for those who are having their matters heard, but importantly this will also save money for those who are seeking to have their claims heard.
As we all know, time is money. As I said during debate on the Commercial Arbitration Bill, anyone who studied law knows that you charge in six-minute increments, so anything that we can do to stop solicitors or legal minds charging in six-minute increments will be a very good thing and will save time and money for those who are having their matters heard.

The government is particularly committed to this trial. We have announced that there will be $1.6 million available over two years. I had the opportunity in the lead-up to the election to meet with JPs in my electorate of Broadwater with the now Attorney but then shadow Attorney-General when we sat down with justices of the peace and spoke to them about the contribution that they make to our society and the contribution that we think that they should be able to make. The feedback that we received has been overwhelmingly positive and the feedback that I have received since my election has been overwhelmingly positive as well. Justices of the peace do a fantastic job in our community. Their role is surpassed by none. They do a fantastic job helping those in our community. Indeed, I had the opportunity last year to acknowledge someone who had served more than 40 years as a justice of the peace. Bert Morris ‘OBE’—as he likes to call himself because he is ‘Over Bloomin’ Eighty’—has served the community for a very long time and it was a great pleasure to present on behalf of the Attorney-General and on behalf of the community a certificate acknowledging his 40 years of service. My own mother is indeed a JP—and for my own safety I would never share a lady’s age. My mother has served the community for many years as a JP and has made herself available to those who might need someone to witness documents.

One issue that I am particularly concerned about is the accessibility of JPs, and that is why I have made sure that members of my staff are training to become justices of the peace. I am paying for them to do that so that we can offer that service out of the electorate office to our community. One issue that was raised in the submissions and raised by the member for Bundamba is the sitting fee for those who might be sitting on QCAT as justices of the peace. The member for Bundamba was concerned that this would create two classes of justices of the peace. I do not think that it will do so, but it does not surprise me that Labor would try to claim that anything is indeed a class warfare. I also reject any notion that the sitting fees are too low. That was one of the concerns that was raised in the submissions that the committee received. The department briefed us—and I hold the same view—that justices of the peace are volunteers and their work is inherently volunteer in nature. It is only fair that we acknowledge that they are taking significant time out of their day to sit on QCAT and that they are taking significant time out of their own personal lives to adjudicate these matters, and we should compensate them sufficiently for that. However, going above and beyond what is basic and sufficient would be problematic because justices of the peace have had a long history of being volunteers in our community and we support them not for their own personal gain but because it is the right thing to do. It is particularly important that we acknowledge them.

This bill goes a long way to acknowledging the great work that justices of the peace do in our community and it goes a long way to our commitment to them and supporting them as they continue to make great contributions to our community. I have great respect for anyone who takes the time and energy and the effort to become a justice of the peace. Indeed, they have to go to lectures and classes and there is study involved and then once they become a JP they so willingly give of their time to help those in our community. Quite often in shopping centres around the community—there are two or three shopping centres in my electorate that offer this service—we see JPs freely giving three or four hours of their time to make themselves available to anyone who might need their services.

JPs do a fantastic job. I think it is only appropriate that we do anything that we can to recognise the contribution that they make to our community. This bill does that. I have no hesitation in commending this bill, because I think it is a great step forward towards alleviating the burden that many QCAT members feel and that those who are taking their complaints and their concerns to QCAT feel, because it is a very time-consuming process. Anything that we can do to streamline the process, to make it quicker and to make it cheaper is a good thing. This bill is honouring a commitment that we made to the people of Queensland, which I believe is a good thing. I commend the bill to the House.
to someone in my electorate who sadly I learned early this morning passed away yesterday and that is Mr Don Herrmann of Coolana. Don was a great man—a good old Liberal stalwart and a farmer. I always took great pleasure in dropping in to see Don and Ronda Herrmann to have a cup a tea and discuss what is going on around the place. It is people like them who keep me on track and certainly help me to represent the wider community. So rest in peace, Don, and to Rhonda and family, may God bless you at this very difficult time.

JPs work very hard to assist people in the community with all manner of issues, be they personal or business. In my electorate, JPs can be accessed very easily. They make themselves available, as I said, for all sorts of reasons in many public locations across my electorate, particularly at some of the shopping centres. Most notably, JPs are available at the Riverlink Shopping Centre at North Ipswich without the need for people to make an appointment. Usually, there is more than one JP on hand to deal with all manner of issues. They provide expert advice and service to people in the community, which gives them a little bit of assurance, whether that be in relation to a contract that they might be signing, or whatever. I have seen them take the time to go through to make sure that the person has signed everything appropriately and give them some advice. Just the other week I was at Riverlink one Thursday night with my family and as I was walking around I happened to see two JPs who were diligently going about their business of helping people in the community. One of them had a gap between clients and he happened to be a fellow who is a good local Lion and we had a bit of a chat. When he was talking to me he reflected on the sorts of things that happened and the types of guidance that JPs provide. Also, it was very interesting to note that sometimes JPs identify things that may not be quite appropriate. People may come to get things signed and they really are not providing a true and correct original. That is a very common practice. These people are very diligent and really put themselves forward to say, ‘Hang on, that’s not right.’ I admire them for that, because there are not very many people in our community who would put themselves out there in that manner to be challenged. Sometimes people will argue with them and I know that that sort of thing can be a little bit confronting at times. So JPs really do a good job.

The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 really recognises the professionalism of these JPs and their commitment to the wider community by enabling them to preside over certain matters brought before QCAT. In such situations, there will be two JPs presiding. We heard about this earlier this afternoon. One of those JPs will be a qualified lawyer. I believe that that will ensure that just and quality decisions are made and that there is an enhancement of the level of expertise that will be available in those matters. We have heard some discussion about sitting fees. The sitting fees for all presiding JPs will be increased and equal at $100 per day. I think that in itself sends an important message of the value that we place on these individuals. Can I say that none of them do it for the money. They are not interested in the money. If anything, the money is a token gesture.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Ruthenberg): Order! Member for Bundamba, if you wish to make a contribution, please return to your seat. Member Ipswich, please continue.

Mr CHOAT: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you. It is very interesting to note again this class war business that is just utter nonsense. For those people who are giving of their time, $100 is probably not going to cut it if they wanted to work it out and charge for their time, but it will help them with some of the on-costs that they incur with travelling. I think this is just a small way of saying, ‘Hey, we don’t want you to be out of pocket for those things,’ because these people are dedicated and they give of their time.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr CHOAT: I know a lot of people are very appreciative of this. So I do not think that we are going to see come to fruition any of the dire predictions that were made earlier by the member who cannot keep quiet in this place, because JPs respect one another. I am sure that they will share this work in a collegial way and have discussions. I think in some ways this change says, ‘Look, here’s something else you can strive for.’ Not everyone wants to go into the legal profession—I am certainly no legal person—but this is something that those people can do. I am happy to say that there will be a certain feeling among those JPs who go forward and act in this way. There will be a real sense of professional achievement for them, and rightly so. As mentioned earlier by my colleague the member for Ipswich, we already see similar arrangements overseas. The member mentioned the UK, but I am
sure that there are other jurisdictions in the world where this situation is the case. JPs are, for want of a better term, a resource that we should be—and very wisely—tapping into, because I believe that these people will bring credit to themselves, particularly in the way in which they are going to go about their business.

I was very pleased when the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice announced that the upcoming six-month trial of this initiative will take place in Ipswich in addition to four other areas. Everybody knows that those of us on the government side who represent the Ipswich area are very keen to see our community represented in such initiatives, because we have a real sense of our area moving ahead and really showing what the western corridor, as a lot of people like it call it, has to offer. I know definitely that the wider community in the Ipswich region and beyond, including Somerset, of course, will embrace these changes. I know that there are many excellent JPs who I see working every day who will seek to work in this capacity. They will really do it justice—and no pun intended, of course.

I look forward to the benefits to the community that will result from this change. Let us remember that this is another promise that the government is delivering on. Some of the benefits of this change will include the fact that we will see a real reduction in the time taken to reach resolution of minor civil disputes. Let us be honest and frank: when people have to go before any court, QCAT included, it can be a very stressful occasion for them. In many cases, particularly with QCAT, it may be the first exposure that people have to any part of the legal system. I think making the process efficient and effective will go a long way towards relieving some of that heartache and worry that people may experience.

Of course, there will be efficiencies—importantly, cost reductions—associated with the arrangements, meaning real savings for Queenslanders. We have been talking about that a lot, particularly during this sitting week. The change will free up QCAT adjudicators—judicial registrars and magistrates—to deal with the more complex and substantial matters that are brought before QCAT. I think that is where we really need those professionals to focus. I can see that there will be JPs who will get involved in this process and who may then say, ‘I think I’ll go and get a law degree. I think that I can really take myself forward with this.’ They will go on and work in the legal profession. So I think this is a great opportunity. It is almost like an entry-level opportunity, if you want to put it in VET speak.

More importantly, it will improve the justice system and relevant front-line services which, of course, was a very broad commitment of the government and one that I think we are delivering on very well. I cannot emphasise enough that a very important achievement of this bill is recognition for the vital and substantial voluntary contribution made by JPs in our communities. On Sunday in North Ipswich I had the privilege of attending the 100-year mass for St Joseph’s Primary School. I was sitting next to a lady who is an esteemed JP in Ipswich. I often see her at Riverlink and we have a bit of a catch up. She is the sort of person who will take advantage of this opportunity. She will represent the community very well. I believe she will make very sound decisions. Although I have not discussed it with her, she is the sort of JP I would like to see take hold of this and really go somewhere. I think we could do a lot worse than have people like her preside over QCAT matters.

This is a real opportunity to promote what JPs can achieve in the community. I am particularly hoping to see some of the ones I come across regularly in my role take advantage of it. I look forward to seeing who is appointed as a part of the trial and beyond that. I am very pleased at the opportunities the bill provides. I know that we will see some really good local community people who are JPs take up the challenge and get involved with these changes and the implementation of this bill. I take great pleasure in commending the bill to the House.
to allow judges the time to deal with more serious offences. Peace officers were held in high esteem by the kingdom and were normally the landed gentry. As the world changed and evolved over seven centuries so did the role of the JP which spread to the colonies as the British Empire expanded. Those appointments of JPs came from a broader range of people but were still respected citizens entrusted by the community to take on special responsibilities and they undertook a range of duties from witnessing the signing of documents to hearing certain types of court matters.

In recent years, with the onset of more complex legislation, the JP’s role has been taken over partly by the appointment of professionally qualified magistrates. Yet their importance in society did not diminish. Currently their duties include witnessing people signing legal documents, certifying copies of documents, issuing summonses and warrants, minor bench duties and attending police records of interview. They are an integral part of maintaining justice in our society. Prior to the 2012 election the LNP promised Queenslanders that we would be committed to delivering a swift and fair justice system. This would involve revamping the roles that justices of the peace play in our community. This pledge was reiterated in the Newman government’s six-month action plan, January to June 2013. This bill enables the conduct of a trial that will see the fruition of this commitment. It will enhance the role of JPs to allow them to hear minor civil disputes of less than $5,000 value, excluding urgent residential tenancy matters in QCAT. It is interesting to note that one of the objectives of this trial mirrors one of the reasons King Edward III introduced these peace officers those many years ago: to enable QCAT adjudicators, judicial registrars and magistrates to deal with more complex matters. By enabling JPs to hear minor civil disputes Queensland will see a reduction of backlogs in the justice system and an improvement in clearance rates.

I have been excited for the introduction of this trial ever since our precommitment pledge as I am very appreciative of the services the justices of the peace give to our community. Late last year I hosted a JP forum and morning tea in my electorate of Bulimba which the Attorney-General attended. It was a warm gathering of over 100 people who serve our community daily as justices of the peace. I was honoured to be able to give them the recognition they deserve despite the fact that they rarely seek it. You see, I come from a family where both my mother and father were JPs. In fact, my mother has just celebrated 25 years as a JP. She is still an active JP working at Victoria Point, Capalaba and has recently retired from Carindale.

**Miss Barton:** She must have been very young.

**Mr DILLAWAY:** I take that interjection, because I am very young. The Attorney-General addressed the audience, in which my mother was a member, and spoke of our government’s plan to run this trial to hear minor matters in QCAT. There was a great deal of excitement and interest in what this would entail and certainly an appreciation for the opportunities we were providing to improve, develop and expand their roles. The bill, if passed, enables the conduct of the trial over six months, commencing from June 2013 across Queensland at sites in Brisbane, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville with several objectives. We look forward to seeing an improvement in the clearance rate for all minor dispute applications, a reduction in costs of hearing minor civil disputes and enabling QCAT adjudicators, judicial registrars and magistrates to deal with more complex matters. This bill recognises the substantial voluntary contribution of JPs to our community. It provides opportunities to improve, develop and expand their role and ultimately contribute to government commitments to improve the administration of Queensland’s justice system and front-line justice services for Queenslanders.

In my time as a member of parliament I have already seen many cases that are tricky to solve because the stubborn nature of one or both parties prevents a simple resolution yet QCAT and further court proceedings are too time consuming and costly. The outcome of this trial, with its expected improvements in efficiency and effectiveness, would restore the community’s faith in our justice system and revatilise access to justice services. I am sure other honourable members can relate to the number of civil disputes that their officers receive, particularly regarding neighbourhood dividing fences and trees. I am all too familiar with advising constituents of the process of reaching a solution with their neighbour to the extent that I am becoming quite an expert in the tendency of particular tree species to arch a certain way. It is all well and good until neighbours do not agree to mediation and the next step is an application to QCAT. At this stage a party will say, ‘But that takes so long. It is too expensive. I just want some branches removed.’ I have to agree with them that for a simple, minor dispute the length that they have to go to to reach an outcome is disproportionate to the actual outcome. With the expectation to see improvement in clearance rates and reductions in costs of hearing minor civil disputes Queenslanders will have better access to justice and dispute resolution. Simple matters such as these should not require an extensive, exhaustive, complicated process.
Consultation on this bill occurred at the beginning of 2013 and was published on the Department of Justice and Attorney-General website. In response to issues raised in submissions made by stakeholders, a sunset clause was included in the bill to recognise that at this stage it is just a trial to see if the objectives would be and can be achieved. The bill also contains provision, however, that it may be extended for up to two years depending on the success of those objectives. The daily sitting fee for a JP was increased to $100. As many mentioned, initially it was zero. Some submissions called for a further increase in payment. However, the committee supported the government in its view that the fee should be reflective of the voluntary nature of the justice of the peace. The Newman government highly values the services of JPs and I have had many in my electorate express gratitude for the recognition certificates for 25, 40 or 50 years of service that the Attorney-General personally signed and, in many cases, handed over to my constituents.

As volunteers, they serve the best interests of our community and are advocates for justice. I believe they will bring great attributes to the additional roles in QCAT. As an active member in the community, often the JP is more in touch with the reality on the ground than some full-time magistrates. With minor civil matters, they are likely to apply what the law allows in a realistic and appropriate way. The Brits have had a similar system in place for a very long time and it has worked well for them.

The Newman government is driven to improve frontline services for Queenslanders and, under this umbrella, revitalise the justice of the peace branch. I am very excited by these changes and look forward to observing the outcome of this trial. I believe that JPs deliver an excellent service to the community. Providing them with this opportunity to extend their role will not only recognise their value but also further utilise it. Once again, I congratulate the Attorney-General on this bill and this initiative. I commend the bill to the House.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (5.00 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill and also to commend the minister for this move, which hopefully, particularly after the trial but also during the trial in the specified areas of Brisbane, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville, may speed up the resolution of minor matters that currently could take a period. I note that the centres that have been designated for the trials are fairly big centres. I wonder what consideration will be given to the implementation of similar procedures in smaller centres where the amount of throughput would be smaller but no less important to those people involved.

I join with other members in commending the justices of the peace and the commissioners for declarations who work tirelessly in our electorates. Two of my electorate officers are commissioners for declarations and they sign a lot of papers every week. The courthouse refers people to us to have documents signed. It used to be that people could go to the courthouses and have JPs or commissioners for declarations attend to their material, but apparently that system has fallen down at the Gladstone courthouse. That is disappointing, because most people know how to access the courthouse as it is usually a sentinel building. I hope that that service is reintroduced.

I commend the intention in the bill to expand the training for justices of the peace, particularly in relation to these new responsibilities. It is important that justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations are continuously updated in relation to new aspects of responsibility that they may be asked to achieve.

I note that the bill contains a provision for a criminal history check to be carried out on people who are to be considered for appointment as a QCAT justice of the peace. Whilst that is an invasion of privacy, it is critically important that people who are appointed to the position are beyond reproach, so that the exercise of justice not only has the appearance of fairness but also is fair and defendable. I note that there is an obligation on the minister to ensure that information that is acquired to make that assessment is destroyed as soon as practicable after the use of that information. The credibility of people acting in this role will not rest just on the fact that they are JPs; it will rest also on the fact that they have the sort of knowledge that is necessary for appointment to the QCAT role. People in the community may know those individuals well; they need to have confidence in those who take on that role of responsibility.

I note the broad range of consultation that has occurred in relation to this legislation. It includes a very broad cross-section of individuals and organisations from both sides of the equation: the judicial side and those areas that represent potential clients to this process. Certainly, any legislation will be stronger for having a broad consultative base and having the information that is garnered through that consultation used to inform the construction of the bill.
Certainly I hope that the trial is successful and that those matters that currently may take some
time to come before QCAT can be dealt with quickly. Like other speakers, I believe that to a lot of
people $5,000 is not a minor amount. It is quite a significant amount of money in terms of costs either
that have been waited for by the person making the claim or required of the person making the claim.
It is a significant amount of money for an ordinary worker and, certainly, it is important that those
matters be heard and finalised quickly.

I wish the Attorney-General success with the implementation of this legislation. Certainly, I wish
those justices of peace who successfully fill these new roles wisdom, patience and success in their
deliberations.

Mr KRAUSE (Beaudesert—LNP) (5.04 pm): I rise to speak in support of this fantastic initiative
that was introduced to the parliament by the Attorney-General. This initiative will mean that the
community can draw on a valuable pool of wisdom. JPs have accumulated knowledge and command
respect within the community and in the past that resource has not been tapped or appreciated
enough or, if it was appreciated in the past, over the years the role of JPs has been diminished. This
initiative was an election commitment and it is fantastic to see it being implemented by the
Attorney-General.

Where there are delays in resolving minor civil disputes at QCAT, it makes sense to enable
other forums to resolve those minor disputes. A monetary limit will be put on the disputes that can be
resolved by other parts of the community and JPs are the obvious custodians of those matters. There
are 800 justices of the peace in the Beaudesert electorate. Frankly, at first that number surprised me,
but in my electorate there are a lot of community minded people who, no doubt, would be willing to
serve as part of QCAT to resolve minor disputes. Just over a week ago, a training forum was held by
the registrar of justices of the peace at the RSL in Beaudesert and over 100 people attended. It was a
fantastic gathering. In the morning session, an update of the legislation and regulations relating to JPs
was presented. There were a lot of questions from the floor. Obviously, people are very keen to
expand their knowledge and to continue contributing to the community. Therefore, I know that this is a
fantastic initiative.

Let us see how the trial goes and then let us bring it to Beaudesert, because on sitting days our
courthouse is overflowing. Every Wednesday the magistrate has many matters to deal with, although
I acknowledge that most of them are not QCAT matters. However, we should look at expanding the
trial beyond the major centres, bringing the resolution of minor civil justice issues back to local areas.
Many small towns, such as Boonah in my electorate, do not have magistrates, which actually may
discourage people from seeking remedies for certain issues. If this trial goes well, we should look at
bringing it to regional and rural centres so that people can seek redress for small civil disputes in a
local setting.

While I am talking about Beaudesert, I am sure that the Attorney will recognise the great need
in the near future for a new courthouse at Beaudesert. On a Wednesday morning, people sit on the
steps outside the Beaudesert courthouse because they have nowhere else to wait. The facility has
outgrown its original intended use. On the matter of a new courthouse, perhaps the Attorney could
work in conjunction with the Minister for Police and Community Safety, because we also need new
watch-house and police facilities and that could be on the agenda in the near future, I am sure. We
have a lovely block of land that is owned by the government and could be well utilised for a
multipurpose facility: a courthouse, a police station and watch-house, and perhaps some other
government facilities as well. I mention to Minister McVeigh that I am sure that DAFF would
appreciate being included in a request for new facilities. However, I digress.

We have 800 justices of the peace in the Beaudesert electorate, some with a very long tenure.
I make particular mention of one I met last week. Bill McCarthy has been a justice of the peace for 41
years. Another person I met has been one for 35 years. We have given out numerous certificates of
long service. There are a lot of JPs who have served for a very long time and we need to recognise
their service, and this is a great way of doing it.

In closing, I refer to comments made earlier by the member for Bundamba. During the speech
given by the member for Ipswich West I heard the member for Bundamba complain that the justices of
the peace who will constitute these tribunals to hear minor civil disputes will not have a title. We
have the member for Bundamba complaining about people not having a title. I never thought we
would see the day when we would hear a member of the Australian Labor Party advocating for people
in this country to be given titles. I always thought they were the ones against titles and against
prévilege.
A government member: ‘Dame Jo-Ann’.

Mr KRAUSE: Maybe we will have ‘Dame Jo-Ann’. We will next have them support the introduction of QCs. We have already done that, but they were disparaging in their comments when we did that. Are we going to have them support the reintroduction of the knights of Australia—the imperial honours? Will we see ‘Sir Jarrod Bleijie’, Attorney-General of Queensland, KCMG—King Calls Me God—or perhaps ‘Sir Campbell Newman’, Premier of Queensland, GCMG—God Calls Me God. I cannot believe we have the member for Bundamba complaining about such a minor issue as JPs not having a title when we are implementing a great initiative that will see JPs give back to the community.

I have thought of a title for the member for Bundamba. Given the fact that she had a 20 per cent swing against her at the last election, I think we need to call her ‘Lady Luck of Bundamba’. She only just got the numbers last time and she is not going to get them again, if not in the election perhaps in the ALP preselection. ‘Lady Luck of Bundamba’, thanks for the contribution, but no thanks. This is a great initiative. I congratulate the Attorney-General for bringing it to the House. I know the JPs in my electorate will very much support it.

Mr MOLHOEK (Southport—LNP) (5.12 pm): I rise in support of the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill. I commend the Attorney-General and his team for their work on this bill. This is a sensible piece of legislation—a great framework for the realistic reduction of the costs and time involved in hearing minor civil dispute applications.

This bill also fulfils yet another LNP commitment. That is recognising the voluntary contributions made by our justices of the peace and expanding their role, should they wish to do so, while reducing the burden on our courts and the tribunal system. Currently in Southport minor civil disputes are heard by QCAT adjudicators and there is a considerable wait time involved as the adjudicators struggle to meet the demands for hearings. This bill will see a six-month trial initiated at Southport, allowing two justices of the peace, one legally qualified, to constitute the tribunal. The JPs will hear and decide minor civil disputes with a value of less than $5,000 and non-urgent residential tenancy matters.

This will have a considerable impact on the Southport courthouse and the number of minor civil dispute hearings scheduled. This bill recognises the valuable contributions by JPs and facilitates the expansion of their role, significantly increasing the capacity of QCAT. At the conclusion of the six-month trial, the results will be evaluated and decisions made about whether the program should be continued.

I join the Attorney-General and my colleagues in recognising the fantastic contribution of JPs across our state. We have over 80,000 registered JPs and commissioners for declarations in Queensland. These are 80,000 honourable community members volunteering their time to contribute to the Queensland justice system. I am told that in my electorate there are just over 1,000 people who volunteer to contribute their time as JPs.

I particularly want to acknowledge the wonderful work of these volunteers around my electorate. Every week in shopping centres and community centres around the electorate of Southport you will find dedicated teams of JPs making themselves available. There are JPs at places like Arundel Plaza, Australia Fair, Southport Park and Ashmore City Shopping Centre all hours of the day and all days of the week, allowing the community access to their services when it is most convenient to them. It is a great service that these people provide.

I am also amazed at the number of nomination forms I have been asked to sign for constituents of my electorate volunteering to be JPs or commissioners for declarations. It is encouraging to see the level of interest out there in the community. It is encouraging to see that people are wanting to step up and take responsibility and provide this important community service. So I commend them for that and thank each and every one of them.

Speaking of some of these volunteers, I would particularly like to thank Laurie Stokes, a wonderful community member from Arundel who has given up so much of her time at so many levels of community service. Particularly, she makes her time available every Thursday morning at my office. She pops in every Thursday for three or four hours. She makes herself available for people from the Chirn Park area, indeed from right across the electorate of Southport. Some people feel it is important to have a set time or appointment to come and meet with a JP.

Laurie is typical of so many JPs. She is courteous and professional in all her work. Even when she might have a queue of people waiting impatiently for her she deals with them courteously and treats each and every one of them with respect. When she leaves my office she heads to the
Southport courthouse to continue providing the same service there as a volunteer JP. Laurie, like so many others, plays a valuable role in the justice system and in our community. I am very grateful for her ongoing support and help.

The Attorney-General has already explained to the House how this bill also meets the government’s pre-election commitment to revitalise the JP branch. I support his comments about the proactive role that the JP branch is now playing with JPs in electorates around Queensland. With the help of the JP branch and the Department of Justice and Attorney-General we have just started to put plans in place for a JP workshop and refresher course for JPs in my electorate. This will be the first of these courses run for some time. We will be running it in August which is the first available date for such a workshop. I am told by my office that we are expecting between 200 and 250 people to come along to this workshop. I am delighted that that will be happening.

JP trainers are out in the community across Queensland every week working with and engaging with JPs and commissioners for declarations. I acknowledge the ongoing role and the great contribution that these trainers provide, not just to the electorate of Southport but right across Queensland. The outsourcing of training to registered organisations is another great step in revitalisation of the JP branch. This is already helping alleviate the wait times for JP training courses and allows the JP branch to focus on the appointment of and ongoing engagement with JPs and commissioners for declarations.

This is an excellent piece of legislation from the government. It introduces some well-needed changes and additions to our justice system. I have great pleasure in commending this bill to the House.

Mr WATTS (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.18 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution on the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. I would like to thank the Attorney-General for bringing this bill forward. This is another way that we will simplify things and make the lives of Queenslanders easier.

Unfortunately, in today's world disputes arise between individuals. As those disputes arise there needs to be a sensible mechanism for dealing with those disputes. They have found themselves getting caught up in a legal system that requires long waits and has become choked up with so many applications. To come up with a system that will deal with the simpler and less complicated matters in a quick and efficient way is very useful.

It is always important for matters to be satisfactorily resolved, but I think it is also important that the resolution of those matters is done in a timely way. I think having two JPs—one legally qualified and being able to sit on a QCAT tribunal—will be able to facilitate matters being heard quickly and efficiently. I think the Attorney-General has done a good job in bringing this innovation forward.

I thank the committee and the secretariat as always who do a lot of work in preparing the report. We had several submissions on the bill. Some of those submissions were quite complimentary of the concept. I wish to read briefly part of the REIQ's submission. They were strongly supportive of the bill. They state—

We anticipate that the proposed amendments would considerably reduce these time delays provided that a sufficient number of JPs are appointed and jurisdictional limitations are reasonable ...

I think the Attorney-General has done a good job in making sure that we have both enough people for this trial to go forward and the relevant jurisdictional ability.

In Toowoomba, and Toowoomba North in particular, we have a considerable number of JPs. One of my office staff is often signing and witnessing documents and is a fully qualified JP. At the shopping centre immediately over the road from the office on several occasions throughout the week there are JPs providing a very valuable community service. So I would certainly like to thank all of the JPs in Toowoomba for all the time, energy and effort they put in to ensuring that the community has this very valuable service available to it.

In particular, I recall last year that I had the great pleasure of presenting to Floris Wilson a certificate for her 50 years of service. It was interesting to talk to Floris, after 50 years of being a justice of the peace, about different things that she had done. She had seen many changes made to the role of justice of the peace. Certainly when she began in her role 50 years ago—51 years ago now—the world was quite a different place. It was unusual for a lady, particularly a young married lady, to be a justice of the peace. So I had great pleasure in talking to her and catching up with her and hearing about some of her experiences.
But what was most interesting was how the role of justice of the peace had evolved and changed over time in Queensland. I think the Attorney-General should be congratulated on bringing this further evolution forward and making sure that justices of the peace are able to have opportunities to expand their knowledge, not only opportunities to be able to represent their community and provide a very valuable service but also opportunities for themselves to learn. Certainly I think there will be some young university students as well as maybe some older members of the community who will take up these opportunities.

I might just express a small disappointment that the trial is not available in Toowoomba. The trial will be in Brisbane, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville—all good and worthy locations. As Toowoomba is a regional centre I would have liked to have seen the trial there. I would encourage the government, upon taking the learnings from this trial and implementing a more permanent program, to give Toowoomba that opportunity.

I think the amount of $5,000 is a very sensible amount. Whilst it is very significant, you would not expect people to begin legal proceedings if it were not a significant amount of money. However, I think it also has a sensible cap on it such that if it became a more complicated matter and a more difficult matter the judiciary would then take over hearing the matter. I think the $5,000 limit is a sensible suggestion. Certainly I think this goes a long way to continuing the great tradition of citizens participating in the provision of justice in our community. It is certainly something that has happened for many, many years. It was spoken about earlier how justices of the peace began under King Richard and then were further institutionalised in the 14th century under King Charles. The member for Bundamba joked and laughed about these traditions. Yet here we stand in this great place where we get to make legislation to ensure that people can conduct their lives in a sensible and just manner. Every day in this place we bring legislation forward using a very traditional methodology, a tried and proven methodology. So for the member for Bundamba to be critical of a system simply because it has grown out of the Westminster system is disappointing to hear.

The Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 has been well put together and will certainly serve the people of regional Queensland well when the trial has been completed. In some of the small towns in Western Queensland and certainly in places west of the Great Dividing Range, one of the questions we need to ask is: is it too much trouble to go and pursue your legal rights? Is it too difficult? How easy is justice to access? I think sometimes people who live in centres such as Toowoomba, but certainly who live in centres such as Brisbane, might forget how difficult it is to actually get everything together and make an appearance at a tribunal. Ensuring that we have a mechanism to be able to hold these tribunals in regional and more remote locations I think will be very worthy. Having a system where we can do that effectively and efficiently will serve Queensland well. I look forward to the Attorney-General taking the learnings from this trial and implementing them in regional Queensland.

I was interested to know the sorts of disputes that will be heard. Matters involving minor debts, obviously, will come up from time to time. People deserve a place to be able to have their quarrels heard in a timely and effective manner, as I mentioned earlier. Tree disputes will be another. Toowoomba is a beautiful place with great tree avenues everywhere. Lots of people plant trees. My neighbour has certainly planted a very large leopard gum in front of my view, and I look forward to watching it grow! Whilst it is not on the dividing fence, it is certainly a cause, as my view disappears, of some discomfort for me. But certainly if your neighbour has a tree that is leaning over the fence, you need a suitable place to take that dispute. We do not want people spending lots of money and travelling big distances to deal with these disputes. Having an opportunity to have those disputes heard in a sensible, practical forum such as before two JPs—one legally qualified and one either gaining experience or potentially using their experience—and to have those disputes heard in a sensible time frame is very, very important and something that the Attorney-General should be proud of bringing into this place.

In conclusion, I would like to make sure that all of the JPs in Toowoomba North know that their services are valued by all of the members in this House but in particular by the member for Toowoomba North, myself. I would also like to make sure that Floris, who has spent many years serving the community, is thanked again. I certainly thank the Attorney-General for providing the certificate and for the opportunity to present that to her, because people who volunteer in our community deserve to be recognised. I think the program we have of justices of the peace recognises that, and I think it is fantastic that we now have a further opportunity to have them use their skills for the betterment of the local community. I commend the bill to the House.

Debate, on motion of Mrs Frecklington, adjourned.
Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House:

• notes reports that 55 state schools are on the Newman government’s hit list to be sold and asks the minister to table the schools impacted throughout Queensland;
• notes that the Newman government has not received a mandate to sell schools or school ovals; and
• censures the Newman government for breaking its promise to Queenslanders by failing to gain a mandate from the people to sell schools.

Today this LNP government has brought down a blatantly obvious, ideological blueprint for privatisation and asset sales in this state. What was one of the first announcements before the Costello report was delivered in this House? That was, of course, about our state schools—the safe haven, home and critical place in the formative years for our children and our teenagers.

We know that the greed of this government knows no bounds. It is perhaps surpassed only by its heartlessness and its determination to treat Queenslanders in the most despicable way possible. It has utter disregard for the havoc that it wreaks. It has arrogant disregard for the pure and simple brutality it has already visited upon some 14,000 workers, upon countless charities and community groups and upon the community it has conned and continues to con each and every day. Now they have turned their sights on our children.

We know that the Newman government has drawn up a secret hit list of some 55 schools it is determined to close down. They just have not gotten around to telling the teachers and the students at those schools yet. In all likelihood they will not tell them until the ‘for sale’ signs go up because they certainly have no intention of consulting, but I will touch more on that matter in a moment.

We know that they are determined to carry out this plan just as they are determined to then erect the ‘for sale’ signs. They cannot cope with the fact that, although some of these schools have small enrolments, many of them are also located on prime real estate. They have dollar signs in their eyes and at the same time the rest of the country is focused on nurturing our schools and our children, not selling them out.

Where are these schools? For the benefit of those mums and dads, teachers and kids who are tonight worrying that their schools are about to be sold off, we can tell them what we know from the newspaper reports. We know that the targeted schools include 14 in Far North Queensland, 10 in North Queensland, eight on the north coast, eight in the Darling Downs and south-west, two in the south-east, seven in the metropolitan area and six in Central Queensland. They intend to sell these assets to pay for their education policies.

I have obtained a list of the enrolment data for schools throughout Queensland. The list of schools where there are 100 students or fewer numbers some 370 in total. Essentially, if this government goes down the path of this secret hit list of schools and sells them off, it means one in seven of the schools on this list will be sold. I am talking about schools in members’ electorates including schools such as Keppel, Conondale, Eidsvold, Toowoomba South, Collinsville, Harrisville, Marburg, Rathdowney, Fortitude Valley, Quilpie, Julia Creek, Broadwater, Maryvale, Springbrook, Mutdapilly. Release the secret list. Members opposite have the opportunity tonight to put at rest and at ease all of these schools on this list and their communities and be upfront with the people of Queensland and say which of the secret schools are on their hit list. Name them!

Mr Seeney: You can’t even do it with a straight face.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Yes, I can. If the Deputy Premier wants to participate in this debate I would welcome him to stand up and try to defend his government’s legacy. It will be written about for years to come. Members opposite care nothing about education. The only reform this government has announced which has any credibility is moving year 7 to high school, a former Labor government announcement. That is their legacy. They will not sign up to Gonski. I have the flu, but I am more than happy to shout over 74 people. They do not want to hear it because every one of them would have a school on this list.

Mr Symes: Not in Wynnum.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Yes, you would. This brings me to the education minister.

Mr Symes interjected.

Ms Trad interjected.
Madam SPEAKER: The member for Lytton and the member for South Brisbane will cease their debate across the chamber. I am listening to the debate and I do note there are interjections that the Leader of the Opposition is responding to and there are others that she is not. If the noise gets too high in regard to those whose interjections are not being taken, I will start warning members. But I also note that there are those interjections that are being accepted, and that is the distinction.

Ms PALASZCZUK: This brings me now to the education minister. When the education minister was an opposition member he spoke on a matter of public interest on 11 November 2008. He stated—

We believe that all schools play a vital role in the education of the next generation of Queenslanders. We do not believe bigger is better. On the contrary, the bigger the school, the bigger the risk that students will not get the personal attention they need to succeed at school and, as a result, they will get left behind. The LNP is committed to keeping the school gates open and providing the support and resources our schools need to thrive. That is exactly what the education minister said. They were his words.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: Here we go, I am so nervous! I will stand up to each and every one of them any day of this week. They should keep it coming, because they will get it back fairly and squarely.

The then opposition leader then came out to my electorate and he was quoted as saying—I love quoting him—

We don’t believe bigger schools are better ...

If elected, LNP will make sure schools remain open and are maintained.

They were his words.

Government members interjected.

Ms PALASZCZUK: I want to end by mentioning the Fortitude Valley school. I would encourage the Premier and the education minister to go to the Fortitude Valley school and have a chat with the people there because I know that they are very, very concerned about the future of their school. It is a small school, but it is one of Brisbane’s oldest schools. It traditionally has a small enrolment of children—this year it is about 55—but it is more than a school; it is a close-knit community. Many of its graduates have gone on to achieve extremely high results in their further education and the school has become a community hub. This is what schools are in our communities.

Tonight, all of the families with children who attend schools with enrolments of fewer than 100 are concerned. Why are you hiding your secret schools list from the public?

Mr Langbroek: What about Inala West and Richlands?

Ms PALASZCZUK: I am more than happy to talk about Inala because that was part of State Schools of Tomorrow, about which there was consultation. I am on the public record about that. The money from those closures went directly into those neighbouring schools.

Mr Langbroek: What do you think we’re doing?

Ms PALASZCZUK: We do not know what you are doing because everything is secret with this government. The minister should release his secret schools list tonight. It took 61 days for the government to release the Costello report. How many days is it going to take this Minister for Education to release his secret schools hit list? Tonight I challenge the education minister to stop hiding and stop being secretive. He should release the list and let everybody know what schools he wants to close down and sell off.

Mr BYRNE (Rockhampton—ALP) (5.41 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion. It has become increasingly clear in the past few weeks that this government does not have a plan for education. We have seen the Premier and the education minister playing some form of comical charade of ‘good cop, bad cop’ with the federal government over school funding reforms. It appears
that the education minister has been playing the bad cop, a role for which he is not particularly suited. But the Premier seems to be a bit confused about his role. One moment he is a bad cop with a snarl; the next minute he is all sweetness and light, pledging to keep an open mind when he jets off to Canberra.

Ms Trad: A soft touch, even.

Mr BYRNE: A very soft touch—a teddy bear. But it has become increasingly clear as the days have rolled on that this government has absolutely no intention of actually working with the federal government in a constructive manner to improve education for Queensland’s children. At one stage the Premier even accused the Prime Minister of playing university politics. It is more than a little bit rich for the Premier to accuse anyone of playing university politics when he is undisputedly the most accomplished practitioner of the conniving, unedifying games that are university politics.

A government member: Who wrote this, Bill?

Mr BYRNE: I did. The Premier has shown himself to be incapable of putting aside partisan differences to engage constructively on education, unlike the Premier of New South Wales, Barry O’Farrell—

Ms Trad: Good on ya, Bazza!

Mr BYRNE: Good on you, Barry. He has put the wellbeing of schoolchildren in New South Wales first by making a deal with the federal government. If the Premier continues to play his games, families across Queensland will blame him and his government when they miss out on the $8.3 billion of extra funding that the federal government is willing to put into education in Queensland.

It takes Labor to develop and deliver real plans to improve education. It took Labor to bring prep to Queensland. After lengthy planning, in 2008 Queensland students started a preparatory year of schooling for the first time. New South Wales students have been benefiting from that extra year for decades. It took Labor to develop a plan to move year 7 into high school with the Flying Start initiative. The Minister for Education is piggybacking on that Labor initiative. It has taken federal Labor to create a detailed plan to reform the unfunded, inequitable and biased school funding system that the Howard government left behind. It has always been Labor that improves school systems. Conservatives are either playing catch-up or do not tend to care too much at all. Tony Abbott is refusing to accept the need for drastic funding reform to improve Australia’s education schemes.

The Newman government has precisely three ideas for education systems, and they are all characterised by a lack of imagination, a lack of detail and a lack of consultation. There are no surprises there. First is Great Teachers = Great Results, the most useless attempt at distraction from the Gonski reforms since the Victorian government attempted the same thing. It does not deliver the same funding increases, it does not direct resources to students—you would not want to do that!—and it does punish teachers. Then there is the thought bubble of Saturday detentions. These would require teacher supervision, but not one cent has been made available to pay teachers for that extra work.

This government has already increased the numbers of students per teacher in 75 per cent of Queensland schools in one year in power. The Costello report goes further and recommends not including class size requirements in teachers’ enterprise bargaining agreements, a recommendation that naturally this government has jumped on. Make no mistake: this means that class sizes around the state will increase as the years drag on under this callous and isolated government.

Then there is the cruellest cut of all: to sell off the schools and put money in the bank. This is a plan to savage local communities in order to make a quick buck without any consideration of the long-term consequences.

If you want a government that will take education seriously, you want to vote Labor. If you vote for the tories, all you will get is poorer results, fewer schools and larger class sizes.

Hon. JH LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Minister for Education, Training and Employment) (5.46 pm): I move—

That all words after ‘House’ be deleted and the following words inserted:

• notes that the Leader of the Opposition endorsed the closure of schools in her electorate to reinvigorate other schools during the last parliament;
notes that the Bligh government left behind a $297 million maintenance black hole and the Newman government has committed $300 million to rectifying this problem; and

- endorses the Newman government’s considered approach to infrastructure management through the establishment of the Queensland Schools Planning Commission.

What we have just seen is one of the most disgraceful displays of an opposition leader trying to create fear amongst all school communities in Queensland by deliberately misrepresenting the information about thresholds and the things we consider when looking at schools. Let us look at the briefing note that has been the subject of so much discussion over the past couple of days—a briefing note that was presented to me in August last year. It is not government policy. The point I have been making around the state over the past couple of days is that just because the department says, ‘This is what we recommend,’ does not mean that we accept it as government policy—unlike those opposite.

What did those opposite do? They closed 89 schools in the time they were in government. That is an average of seven a year. Yet here they are creating straw man arguments, creating fear amongst communities throughout Queensland that we are going to be closing their schools.

I made it very clear yesterday that the number of schools closed will not be 55; it will be a lot fewer than that. The important thing is that we have to ensure we plan appropriately and consult with principals, regional directors and P&Cs. The extreme language we heard from the opposition leader does not help anyone. Talk about con jobs. The Leader of the Opposition said that it was like a Grimm’s fairytale. It is the worst type of language. It is irresponsible for someone in her position to be carrying on in such a way.

Let us look at the level of hypocrisy of those opposite. Those of us who had to sit through the Bligh government may recall a little program called State Schools of Tomorrow. I know that those opposite spend most of their time on their iPads so they can google that. When they do they will find an array of documents, including a little fact sheet that I will table in a moment. I have here the fact sheet for the Inala-Durack Project, which was part of State Schools of Tomorrow. For this part of the project the then Labor government, in which the Leader of the Opposition was the member for Inala, closed—wait for it, members—Inala West State School and Richlands State School to renew Durack, Inala, Richlands East and Serviceton South state schools along with the Western Suburbs Special School and Glenala State High School. I want to read from the fact sheet for Labor’s State Schools of Tomorrow which answers some of the questions as to why schools are closing. It states—

**Why are some schools closing?**

Both Inala West and Richlands state schools are located on small sites—about half the typical size of a new primary school, have low enrolment numbers which are not projected to increase to a significant degree and are very close to other local primary schools which are considered to be more sustainable.

It continues—

**What will happen to the funds from the sale of the schools?**

Anticipated returns from the sale of Inala West and Richlands state school sites have been included in the project budget. That is back into local schools. That is exactly what we are proposing to do. It goes on—

**What makes one school more ‘sustainable’ than another?**

- The size of the school’s enrolment ...
- The school’s enrolments are in decline or there is only limited growth expected in the future
- There are other, more viable state schools nearby
- The Community Reference Group ... agreed that the school is ... the least sustainable in the cluster

**Will there be any job loss as a result of this initiative?**

No.

These are the same things that we are saying about our plan, and let us look at a press release that the member for Inala put out on 8 October 2010. It states—

... State Member for Inala Annastacia Palaszczuk officially opened the facilities which have benefitted from $11 million in refurbishments.

It continues—

... Annastacia Palaszczuk said parents know they can count on state schools like Durack to offer their children a flying start to learning and life.
So she endorsed closing Inala West and Richlands, which is exactly what we are talking about doing in terms of planning. We are looking at our asset base. With 1,241 schools, it is prudent to look at our asset base. Former minister Geoff Wilson refused to do it because it was too hard and then of course the punitive Leader of the Opposition, Cameron Dick—the prince in waiting—did not reinvestigate it when he became the minister. He is going to have to get a bit more intestinal fortitude if he wants to be the Leader of the Opposition from outside this House. The bottom line is that we need 100 new schools in Queensland. We need to refurbish existing schools and plan for new schools over the next 10 years. We need to do it because it is the right thing for the whole of the state. The longer we leave it, the bigger the problem will become.

(Time expired)

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, you indicated you were tabling documents. Did you table those documents?

Mr LANGBROEK: I am happy to table them.

Tabled paper: State Schools of Tomorrow: Tomorrow’s Schools —providing for a smarter future —Fact Sheet: Inala-Durack Project [2530].

Tabled paper: Queensland government ministerial media release, dated 8 October 2010, titled ‘$11 million refurbishment to celebrate Durack State School’s 50th Anniversary’ [2531].

Mr LATTER (Waterford—LNP) (5.51 pm): I rise to second the amendment moved by the Minister for Education, Training and Employment, Minister Langbroek. Despite the voracious misdirections we have come to expect from the opposition, this government is about providing the best possible education outcomes for what is, and always will be, our most important asset—our children, our youth and our future. There are those in this House and beyond who would have you believe otherwise. Those same people would like you to believe that this is about selling the farm. Forgive me if I am not taken in by the crocodile tears of those opposite. Frankly, the feigned righteous indignation makes me sick. There were 89 schools closed—approximately seven schools a year—under the former Beattie-Bligh government and yet the then government and now opposition would have us believe that closing schools is unthinkable. I put to members that there were reasons those schools were closed and the opposition knows all too well that there are reasons that the department has made recommendations for the closure of those schools in question, the difference of course being that this time that recommendation is being properly considered and those affected communities will be properly consulted.

The position presented by the opposition is nothing more than opportunistic politics and is a blatant hypocrisy. The minister has made it clear that any cost savings achieved will go straight back into education. This government is committed to providing the best possible education for our children, including the provision of state-of-the-art facilities and world-class programs. This government has committed to the reinvestment of $300 million to meet the cumulative maintenance backlog across Queensland schools, and we all know how that came to be! Of immeasurable value is the initiative that affords an opportunity for the schools, cooperatively through their P&Cs, to source far more cost-effective measures to deliver the outcomes their schools require and—heaven forbid—support their own community.

Contrary to what those opposite would have us believe, this initiative has not killed QBuild. In fact, through contestability QBuild is in fact achieving efficiencies of between 16 per cent to 18 per cent. This is the sort of consideration and flexibility that has remained elusive under the previous government. If I may, I should also commend the minister for his proposed Great Teachers = Great Results program which would see a significantly increased contribution by the state government by investing in our teachers. It is about affording an opportunity for progression by those who have the drive, the willingness and the desire through the passion of their own profession to further their own education for the betterment of our children’s future. The opposition’s big secret—and I have mentioned this previously—that it does not want anyone to know is that it is this government that is committed to better education outcomes through considered reform.

Mrs MILLER (Bundamba—ALP) (5.55 pm): Queensland government scheme to close unviable schools could see the sell-off completed in less than a year was the theme of the headlines in the Courier-Mail that I woke up to yesterday. This is selling of government assets gone mad under this government, and what an about-face! I cannot believe the difference that a move from one side of the chamber to the other can make in policy. Do members remember this quote? In the estimates committee on 14 July 2010 I accused this government of making small schools an endangered species in this state. The quote states—

Those schools are vitally important to the fabric of small communities around Queensland, their teachers and the ability for families to be able to keep their children at home and attend a local school.
I do not expect the newbies and the oncers to have been tuned into parliament at that time, but who said it? It was Dr Flegg, the member for Moggill. That was Dr Flegg, the then opposition spokesperson for education, in a private member’s statement in October 2010. I also refer to comments made by Minister Langbroek in response to the estimates committee report in 2008 as the new education skills and arts spokesman for the LNP. This is what he said—

I note that whilst at the estimates committee hearings the school closures at Blackstone and Dinmore were flagged, they were announced just a couple of days ago under the State Schools of Tomorrow program ... The LNP has expressed concern about these closures.

Oh, yes, you expressed concern! And what do you do? You come in here and announce 55 schools to be flogged off. How disgraceful!

In relation to Blackstone and Dinmore state schools, I had stand-up, knock-down blues with then minister for education Rob Welford and I want to tell you that the schools were closed but the assets were not closed. Dinmore State School and Blackstone State School were kept for community use. They were kept. The assets were not sold off. Blackstone State School was used by the Ipswich Historical Society and by the Ipswich Genealogical Society and used by the Bundamba subsection of the Naval Association. After the flood it was also used by the Salvation Army at Bundamba and it held its church services and also its teenage services at Blackstone State School. At Dinmore State School the Tofa Samoa and Samoa Advisory Council were able to lease the facilities—all the buildings and the grounds. But what has this LNP government done? What happened was your disgraced—absolutely disgraced—candidate in Bundamba went door-knocking around Blackstone telling them that he was going to make sure the Blackstone State School was reopened. But what happened? One of the first things that the minister did was get the ‘for sale’ signs up at Blackstone State School and Dinmore State School. And what did you do? You have sold them off! How disgraceful of you! They were used as community assets, as community centres, at Blackstone and Dinmore and you flogged them off from under the local community. The whole lot of you are just absolutely disgraceful!

Mr LANGBROEK: I rise to a point of order. Madam Speaker, can I ask for a ruling on standing order 244(7) about referring to another member by their title or electoral district, please.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: Stop saying ‘you’.

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat. The issue here is probably more that the member was not addressing her comments through the chair. I am not quite sure if I want that comment attributed to me, so I ask that you refer to people by their appropriate titles and address your comments in the correct tense through the chair.

Mrs MILLER: As I look across the chamber here I would love to know which of the government members are going to go to the Minister for Education and stand up for their local communities. So I would like to know if the member for Nudgee will go and stand up for Boondall State School. Will he go in and fight for his own community? The member for Brisbane Central is the one who is always missing in action. He is never around when his community is relying on him. Member for Brisbane Central, are you going to go and talk to the Minister for Education? Are you going to talk to the Minister for Education?

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Bundamba, I ask you to refer your comments through the chair.

Mrs MILLER: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to know, through the chair, whether or not the member for Brisbane Central is going to have a meeting with the Minister for Education about the closure of the Fortitude Valley State School, because I tell you what, I reckon he does not have the ticker. I reckon the member for Brisbane Central just does not have the ticker and neither has the member for Nudgee or any one of the tories in this place.

Mr BENNETT (Burnett—LNP) (6.01 pm): I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the minister’s amendment and to debate the strong reforms that the LNP government has implemented to improve education in this great state. As a member of the Education and Innovation Committee, which is working on many reforms, I can say that it is evident that education is central to the economy and prosperity of Queensland. It creates opportunities for every student. These reforms and legislation prove that we are committed to supporting schools and improving outcomes, which include providing state-of-the-art facilities and excellent programs.
This debate is in relation to concern raised about rationalising some school sites, which is common practice after a structured community consultation process. This has occurred regularly. During the terms of the Beattie and Bligh governments, those governments closed 89 schools. That is about seven schools a year. There is a need for the Department of Education, Training and Employment to monitor what makes one school more sustainable than another and then to make recommendations. Some of the factors taken into account in deciding which schools to close might include the size of the school’s enrolment, which limits the diversity of the curriculum and the opportunities for students, if the school’s enrolments are in decline, or if there is only limited growth expected in the future. That can happen for many reasons, including the movement of the workforce, development in the area, or the changing dynamic of the school’s enrolments. Each year the department will consider the viability of schools in accordance with the established thresholds.

In terms of maintaining school buildings, it is noted that the Bligh government left a $297 million maintenance backlog for this government and that we committed $300 million to rectify the problem. The previous government left some of our schools in a poor and sometimes dangerous condition. This is what happens when you waste money, when you cannot control the budget and when you cannot prioritise your spending. This government inherited Queensland’s school infrastructure in a state of disrepair. The parents and children of Queensland deserve better. Last year, the Treasurer announced $200 million to address that maintenance backlog and, of course, recently a further $100 million was announced, making a total of $300 million. Schools can go direct to the market to get that maintenance work done. However, I am happy that all but two schools in my electorate decided to stay with the services provided by QBuild.

This is money that the schools do not have to give back. It can go back into their schools for other school improvements. This is significant, as I witnessed firsthand the waste and the ‘use it or lose it’ mentality driven by the previous government that our schools adopted. Schools that use QBuild are winning. Under the government’s new processes and reforms, QBuild is working hard to provide better value for money and we are seeing efficiencies. I have no doubt that the reforms in the procurement sections have helped remove the burden of overzealous bureaucrats who all but destroyed this 150-year-old institution.

A key concept of QBuild’s operations is the management of risk on behalf of client agencies. This management of risk is undertaken through QBuild on behalf of the Queensland government across a range of functions, including service maintenance, contract management, environmental compliance, procurement management, safety management and a number of other building related works, including legislative requirements. The service maintenance of specific equipment and systems is mandatory by legislation. QBuild manage this risk on behalf of most government departments by identifying what equipment requires servicing, preparing technical specifications and calling bulk tenders. This ensures value for money and reliability. We welcome the contestability model that has been rolled out over the last year. QBuild has qualified staff to provide technical advice to both client departments and contractors. Mandatory reporting is also important for local governments with their plumbing services and for QFRS community safety.

It is with some concern that we are debating the issue of school sites when the previous government had no structured asset maintenance program. We saw predictions and allocations based on electoral boundaries. That is why I endorse the Newman government’s considered approach to infrastructure management through the establishment of the Queensland Schools Planning Commission. The commission streamlines and coordinates the process for the planning, establishment and expansion of government and non-government schools across Queensland. It analyses the current infrastructure planning systems for schools and provides recommendations on how to increase their efficiency and help cut red tape. These are real reforms that the LNP has put in place. The appointment of Mr Bob Quinn, a former Queensland education minister and teacher, as the chair of the commission is a great initiative. The government will provide $4 million over the next three years to fund the commission’s operations. This is about putting schools where they need to be to provide outcomes for our children.

It is important that the Queensland education system supports small schools and one-teacher schools, schools in remote areas, multicultural schools and Queensland’s 57,000 teachers to ensure that we deliver high standards in education. In closing, I support the minister’s amendment and support this government’s reforms in education.

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (6.05 pm): It says a lot about this government that it does not see schools for their value to a community, it does not see schools for their role in educating children, it does not see schools as an investment in the future of Queensland. It says a lot about a government when it looks at a school and sees only the land underneath it. It tells you everything you need to
know about this government when it looks at schools and sees dollar signs. Of course, governments need to manage schools appropriately to ensure that they meet changing demographics and demand. Some schools close as others open. That is proper planning. But it is abundantly clear that this government is not concerning itself with appropriate education planning. The plan to sell off as many as 55 schools is in direct response to the Costello Commission of Audit, recommendation No. 89. It is not part of a plan to appropriately manage the state school sector, to identify future needs and demographic changes.

During the last term of the previous government, I was outspoken against my own government and demanded that it rethink the mothballing policy to ensure that the process was equitable and provided a degree of certainty for the school communities concerned. I threw my support behind local schools, firstly, Bartle Frere State School and then Bellenden Ker State School, to successfully lobby for those schools not to be closed. Schools like those are the centre of a community and their worth should be measured in more than just numbers on a piece of paper. I understand that it is not possible to have small schools everywhere in Queensland. It would not be workable from a resource or operational point of view for the government. But I was concerned that decisions were based on numbers and resources alone and there was a great deal of confusion as to why some schools were on the list one year and not the next.

But under this government, the issue is less about school viability and more about how much it can get for any particular school. I think this government is taking the axe to schools as an excuse to prop up its bottom line. The Newman government must identify the 14 schools in Far North Queensland on its list of closures. Those schools should be told today if they are going to close their doors. Nothing is more sacred to a local community than its school. It plays an essential role in the community. The school is more than just a school; it is a true community hub.

I spoke earlier about appropriate planning. The previous government appropriately managed education needs by building the new Innisfail State College and afterwards made the decision to sell off the unused old site of Innisfail State High School. As the local member, I worked closely with the department of education to make sure that the transition to the new college was managed appropriately. I worked with the local community and set aside part of the old Innisfail State High School land as an environmental reserve. But that sort of proper planning will not happen under the current government. It will be flogging off the land to the highest bidder. That land will go to LNP developer mates and the community will not see any benefit.

In Far North Queensland, we have not seen any plans from this government to build new schools. The previous government had a fully funded plan for a new special school in Cairns. It would be under construction right now, ready to take students in 2014. However, this government has dragged its feet and at the moment just a planning study is underway and that is only because it was embarrassed into announcing it. Thanks to this government the people of Cairns will be waiting a lot longer to have a dedicated special school for children with a disability. This issue is a concern, because this school was a fully funded election commitment from existing resources. It was all about having $32 million set aside within the existing budget. What happened to that? In contrast, this government has made unfunded election commitments and it is now regarding state schools as a cash cow to cover for its own mistakes. This government has sucked demand out of the Queensland economy by cutting too hard too fast. It has made its own mistakes by firing public servants, cutting grant funding and cutting the wildly successful Skilling Queenslanders for Work program.

I heard the Treasurer talking on radio about the fact that, when it comes to public servants, they are not running an employment program. They are not running an employment program; they are running an unemployment program. They are axing people left, right and centre. That is in stark contrast to what the previous government was about, which was about job creation. These decisions have sucked the life out of the Queensland economy which was the second fastest growing state in the country—

**Government members** interjected.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Order!

**Mr PITT:** They are very sensitive, Madam Speaker. Obviously the last two days have actually played on their mind in a big way. These decisions have sucked the life out of the Queensland economy which was the second fastest growing state in the country when this government took office and is now languishing in the economic doldrums brought about by the decisions of this Treasurer, this Premier and this government. The children of Queensland and their families should not be forced
to pay for the mistakes of the Newman government. They should not have their schools sold from under them. If schools are going to be on the table then nothing is sacred under the Newman government.

Mr BOOTHMAN (Albert—LNP) (6.10 pm): I rise in support of the amendment of the Minister for Education, John-Paul Langbroek. Queensland schools have long suffered under the failed, tired former state Labor government that lacked the initiative to spend money where it was actually needed. This Newman government is about achieving real results for education outcomes for young minds.

During the Beattie-Bligh era of government 89 schools were closed, which is about seven schools per year. Instead of talking about the typical Labor scaremongering campaign, let me talk about real results in the schools in Albert. I have to go back about 12 months, straight after the election campaign, when I first received tours around the schools in the electorate of Albert. All the principals in my electorate, and I am sure this is the case across all of Queensland, have an enormous degree of pride in their schools. To a principal a school is a home, it is a part of who they are and what they are trying to achieve. Principal after principal expressed their dismay at the condition of classrooms and other school buildings which had been forgotten by the previous Labor government. Principals take great pride in showing prospective parents their schools. The word of the day is embarrassment. The embarrassed principals found it difficult to show their schools which were so run down due to the previous Labor government.

I will give two examples of truly wonderful schools which fall into this category. The first is a school that had a massive maintenance backlog. This school had paint peeling off the walls, the classroom doors were rotten to the core and the classrooms themselves desperately needed attention. This school was Pimpama State School. This school was in direct competition with a brand spanking new school within a few kilometres. It made it extremely difficult for this principal to stand there and say, ‘Bring your kids to my school because my school is the best.’ Unfortunately, when he had to show parents around his school he was embarrassed because of the paint peeling off the walls. Not anymore. This school has been reborn with the tender love and care of the principal, the staff, the P&C and $160,000 from the Advancing our Schools Maintenance Fund.

Gaven State School is another example of a great school with a proactive principal, caring staff and a vocal P&C. This school was also forgotten and had a massive maintenance backlog. The internal roof of one of the school’s toilet blocks had collapsed. This forced the closure of the toilet block. This government’s Advancing our Schools Maintenance Fund has given them the necessary funds to fix up the toilet roof and put it back into service. This money has also been used to repaint the whole school, giving it a new lease of life.

This government is about real outcomes, it is about allocating $300 million to help address the maintenance backlog in schools. As my colleague the member for Thuringowa stated, this maintenance backlog money is a river of gold to schools, P&Cs and the community. This government is getting on with the job of better educational outcomes. We are boosting prep; 150 prep classes will have a full-time teacher aide allocated; $26 million will be allocated over four years for literacy and numeracy; $4 million will be allocated over four years to better prepare children for the transition to school—the list goes on. This is about getting on with the job. Delivering real results for Queensland students is about great teachers, great results, and no more layers of bureaucracy and administration that the opposition dwells on.

In closing, I would like to say that at the last election the electorate did not take the Labor Party seriously and with this type of obtuse scaremongering I can see why.

Ms TRAD (South Brisbane—ALP) (6.15 pm): It really is indicative of how seriously those opposite take education that they would send in the F team to argue the case here tonight. I rise to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Today it ends. Today ends 61 days of secrecy so those opposite can finalise their remedial reading lessons of the full audit report undertaken by Liberal Party mate Peter Costello. What did we see when the report came out? Precisely what we expected—asset sales, outsourcing, franchising, contestability and, plain and simple, privatisation. Let us particularly concern ourselves with recommendation 89 of the report. This recommendation goes to the issue being debated here tonight of school asset sales. Can I point out that we have heard from those opposite the absolute untruth that Labor closed 89 schools. Let us tell the full story here tonight: Labor built 76 schools, two of which this mob opened this year.

Government members interjected.
Madam SPEAKER: Order! Member for South Brisbane, I will just ask you to take your seat. I appreciate that this is a debate that has been hotly entered into across the chamber, but the noise from in front of me is too great and I am having difficulty hearing the speaker. The member for South Brisbane is not taking interjections at this point. I call the member for South Brisbane.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Labor built 76 schools and that is the difference between Labor—

Mr Hart interjected.

Madam SPEAKER: I am now going to warn the member for Burleigh under standing order 253A.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The difference between Labor and the LNP is that we worked with communities to build better schools. What did those opposite do? They commissioned an audit by their Liberal Party mate to actually detail asset sales, and schools are being sold. That is the difference. How malicious and underhanded can this government get? Public schools are education assets and they are also important community infrastructure. It is nonsensical to sell off schools and force students into other schools which may not be equipped for a significant increase in population. Due to urban development, metropolitan schools have limited space. The government will have to provide increased facilities at existing schools to accommodate an increase in the school population by either building on precious green space or buying adjoining properties where possible to expand. It does not make sense and it amounts to a false economy. The government says that unviable schools will most likely go. Queenslanders have learned that when this government talks about unviable services the community probably considers them much needed services. This was certainly the case with the South-East Queensland bus review. What this government considered unviable were, in fact, important public transport services that many Queenslanders relied upon.

Let us turn to the school communities themselves. How do those opposite think that the school communities right across Queensland deemed unviable by this minister will feel about being part of this government’s public school fire sale? What will happen to the tireless work that P&Cs right across Queensland have undertaken to improve their school facilities and grounds and what will happen to the funds voluntarily raised by hardworking parents? Will this LNP government rip more money out of education and incorporate the P&C’s hard earned money into consolidated revenue? All of these questions need to be answered and should have been answered so that parents, teachers and, most importantly, students right across Queensland do not go home from school today worrying whether their school is on the chopping block.

We are seeing ever-changing demographics in the inner-city area with massive redevelopments occurring right across our city, particularly in the RNA showgrounds. Over coming years, that area will see an increase in the number of families with school aged children, but local primary schools, such as the Fortitude Valley State School, are on the hit list to be sold. Where is the member for Brisbane Central? He is nowhere to be seen! He is not standing up for his community, as per usual. He is silent, as usual.

This is just another example of this government’s singular ability to undertake forward planning and thinking of only one thing, and that is the bottom line. Once again, this government is acting without a mandate. It has completely lost touch with the community and is riding roughshod over Queenslanders, wanting to sell vital public infrastructure to make a quick buck. The best way to create opportunity in our society is through a good education and it is Labor governments that invest in education. Labor has done that; we have the track record. We have built 76 schools in this state—

Madam SPEAKER: Order, members! The noise is too much, again. I warn you that your interjections are not being received and it is becoming difficult to hear the speaker clearly.

Ms TRAD: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Labor knows this and Labor has always known it. That is why we built 76 schools, including four in the electorate of the previous speaker. Labor introduced prep. Labor created Flying Start for year 7 and the learning and earning programs. Labor built 240 new kindergartens and the list goes on, including Gonski, which this government is running away from.

(Time expired)

Mrs MENKENS (Burdekin—LNP) (6.21 pm): The mistruths that have been peddled across this chamber all evening by those on the other side are absolutely disgraceful. I say, once and for all, that this government has not named 55 schools to close. I listened to the previous members. The
comments and arguments of the member for Bundamba, in particular, are so far from reality and are flavoured with so much derision and extracurricular rubbish that it is extremely difficult to sort out what is the truth, what is total supposition and what is plain vitriol. However, it is a privilege for me to rise to support the minister’s amendment and to confirm this government’s commitment towards bringing Queensland education to world-class standards.

We have heard a huge diatribe of rubbish from those on the other side of the House. Where did they stand on closing schools? Are they lilywhite when it comes to keeping open schools that have the support of the community and students? No way! As the local member, I fought hard and long with the good constituents of Majors Creek to keep open their small rural school that had received—and I ask members on the other side to listen to this—$217,000 in grants over the previous two years. Indeed, it had just received a $47,000 grant to install solar panels. And they closed the school! They poured all that money into the school and then they closed it.

A government member interjected.

Mrs MENKENS: No. Did the Labor government listen to the arguments of those parents? Did it consider all the money that had just been invested in that school? Absolutely not! That school was mothballed. That is an interesting term, because while it does not say ‘closure’, of course, it means closure and the school was later sold. That was just one school and there are many more. In this debate members opposite have shown a level of hypocrisy that does them no credit.

Let us take a further look at the maintenance backlog that the minister has outlined—that is, the $297 million maintenance black hole that the Newman government has committed $300 million to to rectify. It was simply unforgiveable that the Beattie and Bligh governments could waste so much money on all sorts of impossible schemes, yet not even do the basic housekeeping within our schools. It was absolutely frustrating for those dedicated teachers and principals who were trying to deliver quality education with paint peeling, dilapidated bathrooms and paths and goodness knows what else, while the previous government simply wasted money like water elsewhere. The government of the day wasted money trying to make itself look good while hiding from delivering the basic necessities.

In my electorate of Burdekin there are 28 state primary and secondary schools, which represents over 6,000 students. What a maintenance backlog was on those schools! The Newman government has allocated $2.3 million to those 28 schools in my electorate. That $2.3 million is just for basic repairs that had not been done previously. That is a huge investment from the department for education in just one electorate. It is just one part of the $300 million allocated to fix a maintenance backlog right across the state. At the same time, the government is giving principals the freedom to get the best value for money. It was frustrating for principals and P&Cs that for so long they were locked into nanny-state regulations, which ensured money allocated would go only half as far as it should, much of it being wasted on red-tape regulations. This afternoon we have listened to a lot of rubbish from the other side of this chamber when their government—

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Burdekin, I ask for the clock to be paused. Members, I would ask you to please keep the noise down and respect the fact that another member has the call.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We have listened to a lot of rubbish from members on the other side of the chamber. Six of them were part of a government that could not even deal with its basic housekeeping. Those members should hang their heads in shame, not be trumpeting such nonsense about preconceived ideas of what this government is going to do. They have no idea. At the very least they should get their facts right and not rely on media articles.

However, I welcome this opportunity to talk in the time I have left about the great things that Minister Langbroek has proposed for education in Queensland. Great Teachers = Great Results is a ground-breaking plan to improve teacher quality and give young Queenslanders the best possible start in life. That plan will invest $535 million of additional funding into Queensland schools over the first four years, commencing in 2015. This government is focused on supporting our wonderful teachers who I say, without fear or favour, are amongst the hardest working public servants.

(Time expired)

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Time for the debate on the motion has expired. The question is that the motion be agreed to, since which it has been proposed that the question be amended by omitting all words after ‘House’ and inserting the words contained in the amendment. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to. Those of that opinion say aye, those against—I think the ayes have it.
Amendment agreed to.

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

In division—

Madam SPEAKER: Order! I will not ask for the bars to be closed. I made an error in respect of the first question which was that the amendment be agreed to without clearly calling no. I did not call no to give the opportunity for those who wished to potentially disagree with that to call for a division. What I am intending to do is to put the first question again and subsequently we will take it from there. The question now is that the motion be agreed to, since which it has been proposed that the question be amended by omitting all words after ‘House’ and inserting the words contained in the amendment. Ring the bells for one minute.

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


NOES, 11—Byrne, Cunningham, Douglas, Hopper, Judge, Knuth, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Trad. Tellers: Miller, Scott

Resolved in the affirmative.

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


NOES, 11—Byrne, Cunningham, Douglas, Hopper, Judge, Knuth, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Trad. Tellers: Miller, Scott

Resolved in the affirmative.

Motion, as agreed—

This House:

• notes that the Leader of the Opposition endorsed the closure of schools in her electorate to reinvigorate other schools during the last parliament;
• notes that the Bligh government left behind a $297 million maintenance black hole and the Newman government has committed $300 million to rectifying this problem; and
• endorses the Newman government’s considered approach to infrastructure management through the establishment of the Queensland Schools Planning Commission.

Sitting suspended from 6.40 pm to 7.40 pm.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS (TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF INDUSTRIAL ORGANISATIONS) AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (7.40 pm): I present a bill for an act to amend the Industrial Relations Act 1999, the Public Service Act 2008 and the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 for particular purposes. I table the bill and the explanatory notes. I nominate the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee to consider the bill.

Tabled paper: Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2013 [2532].
Tabled paper: Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2013, explanatory notes [2533].

The objective of the bill is to provide for amendments to the Industrial Relations Act 1999 to improve the accountability and transparency of industrial organisations registered in the state industrial relations system; to promote freedom of association; to align right-of-entry requirements with the Commonwealth Fair Work Act 2009; and to improve the arrangements for the recovery of overpaid wages. The bill also amends the Public Service Act 2008 and the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003.
Contrary to what has been referenced in recent media articles, this bill does not ban public servants from having union logos or stickers on their desks. I want to make it clear that this government acts in the interests of the wider community to guard against corruption and the misuse of trust and position. We stand for accountability, and the bill I am introducing this evening is in the interest of accountability and transparency of industrial organisations and their elected officials. I acknowledge that there will be a variety of views about the bill and I encourage those who have something to say to use the committee process to air those particular views. This government will always be open to the views of the community and will consider any suggestions that will give Queenslanders better outcomes.

I turn to the accountability and transparency of industrial organisations registered in the state industrial relations system. Industrial organisations occupy a unique and privileged position in the industrial relations system. The officials of industrial organisations are elected by members of the organisations who deserve to have confidence in the stewardship and financial management of their organisation and its leadership. Concerns about the governance and financial accountability of industrial organisations have increasingly become a focus of community concern, the most notorious of these being the investigation into the Health Services Union, the HSU, which identified over 100 breaches of the organisation’s own rules and federal laws. The investigation raised concerns about alleged financial mismanagement; improper use of funds; improper use of position to gain personal advantage; and failure to exercise powers, discharge duties in good faith and in the best interests of the organisation. After a three-year investigation the matter is finally before the courts. But the story does not end there.

Victoria Police are currently investigating allegations of corruption by the Australian Workers Union which hark back to the 1990s. It is alleged that the AWU set up a ‘slush fund’ using funds siphoned from construction companies. In Queensland questions have arisen about the financial management practices within the Queensland Retail Traders and Shopkeepers Association, QRTSA, over the sale of assets, use of funds and awarding of contracts to family members. The Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Queensland Police Service are investigating these matters, and proceedings have also commenced in the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission to overturn some of the decisions made by past management committee members.

In New South Wales it remains to be seen what the fallout will be for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the CFMEU, from the Independent Commission Against Corruption, ICAC, probe into the granting of mining licences to entities. As part of its investigation, ICAC is trying to determine if a former CFMEU official benefited financially as a result of a close association with a former NSW Labor government minister who held great sway over the issuance of mining licences. While the outcomes of these matters are yet to be determined, the fact that these affairs stem back some years demonstrates the need for greater scrutiny and transparency so that allegations of corruption and fraud can be dealt with head-on and expediently.

These examples of maladministration demonstrate the scope of the problem and, unlike other governments, this government will not sit idly by while members’ funds are squandered and dishonesty goes unpunished. The best disinfectant is sunlight. The sad fact is that reliance on self-regulation by industrial organisations has been woefully inadequate and that the standards of conduct of officials of industrial organisations have fallen well below those expected by our communities. This bill assures members of industrial organisations that this government is committed to protecting their rights and interests by applying these new laws to all industrial organisations—both unions and employer groups. Through greater accountability and transparency, elected officials of industrial organisations registered in Queensland will be required to meet the same standards of accountability and transparency demanded of elected public officials and local government officials in Queensland.

I now turn to the details of the bill. Industrial organisations will be required to make public disclosures by maintaining up-to-date and publicly available disclosure registers. Four registers will provide information on the following: firstly, the remuneration of the organisation’s 10 highest paid officials and employees—the register of remuneration will be updated twice yearly; secondly, the material personal interests declarations of elected officials and their relatives—while the declarations of elected officials will be publicly available, those of the relatives of elected officials will be filed with the Industrial Registrar and will not be made publicly available; thirdly, all gifts and benefits over $500 received and given by officials and employees; and, finally, ballots for expenditure on political objects of $10,000 or greater. Expenditure on public advertising and related political activities as well as funding to a third party to campaign on behalf of the industrial organisation will require members to be
balloted to approve expenditure greater than $10,000. Balloting will occur through the Electoral Commission Queensland at the expense of the organisation. The bill requires the disclosures of the registers to be from 1 July 2012 and to be publicly available by 30 July 2013. Further, the bill requires industrial organisations to identify political affiliations in all political advertising material.

In addition to the existing obligations for audited financial reports to be filed annually with the Industrial Registrar, the bill requires industrial organisations to also file the following: a statement detailing all expenditure directed to political objects; and a statement detailing all procurement and contract related expenditures greater than $5,000. The annual returns must be certified by a registered company auditor that the organisation complies with the following requirements: that the industrial organisation has developed and implemented policies to ensure good governance around credit card issuance and usage; gifts and benefits received and given; and policies to assist decision making around procurement, leasing and contracting arrangements. The annual returns filed with the Industrial Registrar will be made publicly available on the organisation’s website. If the organisation does not have a website, arrangements will be made to publish on the QIRC website.

I am acutely aware of the burden red tape places upon business. This government has a proud record of achievement when it comes to removing unnecessary red tape. While the bill does impose additional red tape—reporting obligations—these are considered reasonable for ensuring transparency and accountability of industrial organisations. Employer associations that are corporations will not lose their exemption for meeting the audit and accounting obligations under the IR Act to ensure that there will be no double-up with the requirements of the corporations law. In keeping with good governance, the bill requires officers with financial duties to undertake governance and financial accountability training every two years.

The bill strengthens the complaints and investigation process. The bill provides that complaints to the Industrial Registrar will be directed to the director-general of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General, who may refer to the department’s industrial inspectorate for investigation. In addition, the bill ensures the Industrial Registrar may share information with relevant law enforcement authorities if criminal behaviour is detected in an industrial organisation. The bill provides that the Attorney-General may also direct the director-general to investigate industrial organisations. If the organisation is found to be dysfunctional the director-general may appoint an interim administrator.

The bill provides a realistic deterrent against dishonesty or acting against the best interest of the organisations by making the penalty up to $340,000 and/or five years imprisonment. This bill requires the best effort to be applied to meet disclosure requirements for interest and expenditure that has occurred during the financial year 2012-13. While there are penalties for failing to provide the disclosures, the bill takes into account what is reasonable to be supplied before any penalty would be considered.

In addition to improving industrial organisations’ accountability, the bill also introduces a number of other changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999. The first of these is aimed at supporting an employee’s right to choose whether or not to join a union. As an employer, the Queensland government is obliged to operate in an efficient and effective manner. Under the current arrangements there are industrial instruments in place which require the government to help the union recruit members by actively encouraging membership and providing Queensland government resources for this purpose.

Freedom of association gives individuals the right to choose to join or not join a union. The Queensland government recognises this right and the bill will give effect to this right by making changes that ensure that provisions in industrial instruments or policies and procedures have no effect where they facilitate and encourage membership of trade unions. In particular, provisions in industrial instruments which require an employer to make available its facilities including payroll deduction facilities for membership fees, resources or premises and provisions which require an employer to provide to a union information about employees or access to its employees will be deemed to have no effect.

The bill also introduces more stringent procedural requirements on unions in relation to exercising right of entry to an employer’s premise. The bill amends existing right-of-entry provisions to ensure that they are consistent with requirements contained in the Fair Work Act 2009—the Commonwealth act. This includes additional requirements on unions around provision of entry notices, 24 hours notice in writing prior to entry as well as content of entry notices.
The bill will also allow better facilitation for Queensland Health’s recovery of overpaid monies from employees, including on termination of employment. These changes will ensure a sound legislative foundation for the planned introduction of automated repayments in 2013 and will also enable the recovery of overpayments upon termination of employment. The changes are aimed at providing clarity regarding the maximum amount that can be deducted from an employee’s pay for recovery of an overpayment and supports recovery of outstanding overpayment amounts from an employee’s termination pay. This will provide greater certainty for both the employer and the employee and will ensure that overpayments will be able to be recovered from termination pay.

The bill removes the requirement for an employee’s consent for deductions from wages to always be in writing. Where the employee’s consent for a deduction is not written, before making the deduction the employer must give the employee written acknowledgement of the consent. The bill also expands the meaning of ‘contracting’ to clarify that a contracting provision includes the terms and conditions upon which contracting out, or in, of services is to occur.

The bill also amends the Public Service Act 2008 to appoint the vice-president of the QIRC as the appeals officer with responsibility for issuing practice directions to guide appeals processes under the legislation. This change will facilitate the expeditious handling of matters and consistency in decision making in relation to public sector appeals within the QIRC.

In addition to changes to the Industrial Relations Act 1999, the bill amends the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 to clarify the definition of ‘worker’ to assist employers identify who must be included in their workers compensation policy. The bill amends the Workers’ Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 to align with the PAYG—pay as you go—test applied under Australian Tax Office laws to determine whether a person is a worker for workers compensation purposes.

Confusion with the current definition of ‘worker’ represents one of the most common areas of complaint made to government members in respect of the operation of the workers compensation scheme. In fact, this issue has been raised in no less than 17 individual public submissions to the parliamentary Finance and Administration Committee inquiry. While the committee is currently undertaking a review of the scheme, it is not due to report its findings to the parliament until 23 May 2013. This time frame does not enable the government to consider its response to the recommendations in time to impact premium renewals for the 2013-14 period, thereby preventing any reduction in affected employers’ premiums being implemented before the 2014-15 financial year. Implementation of the change from an interim date would require employers to calculate and lodge two separate wages declarations for the one financial year, increasing both cost and red tape. The government in responding to the legitimate concerns of business decided to act immediately on this issue.

Further, following the extension of the reporting date of the parliamentary committee inquiry from 28 February 2013 to 23 May 2013, the Chairman of WorkCover, Mr Glenn Ferguson, wrote to me to ask that the government urgently clarify this issue outside of the current review and in time for the commencement of the next premium period. For the benefit of all honourable members, I have written to the chair of the Finance and Administration Committee, the member for Coomera, to outline our position on this issue and the need for urgent legislative amendment that will clarify this issue for workers, employers and WorkCover.

Examples of persons who will no longer be covered for workers compensation as a result of the change to the definition are those who supply and operate their own plant, such as earthmoving equipment or trucks as part of their contract. Further, individuals providing substantial materials, such as carpenters providing the timber or plasterers providing the necessary plasterboard to complete the work, will no longer be defined as ‘workers’. Many of these individuals currently already have 24-hour sickness and accident insurance, and the change will provide clarity for them and reduce costs to the employers with whom they contract.

In conclusion, may I reiterate the comments I made earlier in this House that this bill is aimed at providing accountability, integrity and transparency for all industrial organisations in Queensland. As I also said, the bill amends the right-of-entry provisions whereby we are copping, essentially, federal Labor Party law, which requires 24 hours notice of union accessibility to the employer’s work site. Thirdly and most importantly, particularly for the Minister for Health, it deems not effective the encouragement clauses in relevant instruments.
In conclusion, the Queensland government and its great Public Service are about delivering a front-line first-class service to the people of Queensland. Governments are not elected to build a union membership base and unions should not use public servants to build their own membership base. On that note, I commend the bill to the House.

First Reading

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (7.59 pm): I move—
That the bill be now read a first time.

Mr PITT: I rise to a point of order. We have heard the Attorney-General talk about the fact that this is subject to the review of the Finance and Administration Committee regarding the definition of ‘worker’. The concern is that the Attorney-General is pre-empting the decision of that committee by putting this legislation through the House, albeit that legislation might come back to the Finance and Administration Committee. Ultimately, he is showing nothing but contempt for the Finance and Administration Committee’s findings. He asked for the review and now he is going ahead of it. I ask for your guidance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Manager of Opposition Business, that is not a valid point of order. The question is—
That the bill be now read a first time.

Division: Question put—That the bill be now read a first time.


NOES, 10—B yrne, Douglas, Judge, Knuth, Mulherin, Palaszczuk, Pitt, Trad. Tellers: Miller, Scott

Resolved in the affirmative.

Bill read a first time.

Referral to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! In accordance with standing order 131, the bill is now referred to the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee.

Portfolio Committee, Reporting Date

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (8.14 pm), by leave, without notice: I move—
That under the provisions of standing order 136 the Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee report to the House on the Industrial Relations (Transparency and Accountability of Industrial Organisations) and Other Acts Amendment Bill by 30 May 2013.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.
Motion agreed to.

QUEENSLAND CIVIL AND ADMINISTRATIVE TRIBUNAL (JUSTICES OF THE PEACE) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 1292, on motion of Mr Bleijie—

That the bill be now read a second time.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON (Nanango—LNP) (8.14 pm): I rise to support the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. I want to thank the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for bringing this bill before the House, as this bill honours one of the Newman government’s election commitments to trial an expansion of the role of justices of
the peace for minor civil disputes. Our aim is to reduce court and tribunal backlogs. Becoming a justice of the peace is an honourable role which is taken with pride and enthusiasm within the community. JPs are the quiet achievers volunteering their time to ensure the cogs of our system keep turning. Amongst other things, justices of the peace witness our important documents, certify copies of documents, issue summonses and warrants, undertake minor breach duties and can attend at police records of interviews. They are integral in the administration of justice within Queensland.

Mr Rickuss: And have been for a long time.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer; they have been for a very long time. JPs do not take their duty lightly. They take on their roles knowing that they have a vital and responsible role to play in the community and are, at times, dealing with matters of crucial importance to people’s lives. I want to mention a JP from the Nanango electorate of some note—Mr Nelson Dimond, whom I recently had the honour of presenting a 50-year certificate for his services.

Government members interjected.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: It is absolutely definitely deserved. This certificate was for his services to the South Burnett community within his role as a JP. Mr Dimond is an excellent example of the pride and professionalism with which people take this role. It was a privilege to present him with this certificate and understand more about how this role has developed over 50 years and the many people that he has served with over those 50 years.

This bill will extend the role of a JP to allow them to contribute, if they wish to do so, to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, QCAT. The bill allows for a six-month trial whereby two justices of the peace—one who must be a lawyer—constitute QCAT and hear minor civil disputes with a value of $5,000 or less and for non-urgent residential tenancy matters. The bill also allows for a $100 daily sitting fee. This is a really important point to note in this legislation given that JPs are volunteers. Volunteers are the backbone of our communities. All over Queensland these amazing volunteers are doing all of this hard work for absolutely nothing—people like Mr Dimond, who has worked for 50 years as a JP not requesting a cent for the work that he does and the support that he gives the community and the wonderful people of the South Burnett. Returning to the bill at hand, this trial will start in June 2013 and will be held in Brisbane, Ipswich, Southport, Maroochydore and Townsville. As other speakers in the House today have said, we very much look forward to the success of this trial because areas such as those served by the Nanango, Kingaroy and Toogoolawah courthouses would really appreciate having this service working out of their courts to try to clear the backlog. I also note that Toowoomba has been mooted today as being a wonderful area for this service.

I congratulate the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice for being able to have that service if the trials are successful, which I believe they will. It is an excellent idea to hold this trial and then analyse and evaluate the findings to help our government and the community make an informed decision about whether this program should be extended, modified or ceased. I am very hopeful that this trial will be very successful.

It is important to note that this bill brings back some common sense into the workings of government. It reduces the burden on our courts. It reduces the burden on QCAT. It is just such common sense.

Mr Rickuss: The LNP in action.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take that interjection from the member for Lockyer. It is the LNP in action. We are looking to reduce red tape, we are looking to reduce the regulatory burden on all of these departments and all of these hardworking people in our communities.

I would also like to note that there was extensive consultation by the committee. I thank the members of the committee and the chair, Mr Ian Berry, for their hard work in examining this bill. It is wonderful to see that the consultation was extensive and that both the committee’s work and the consultation resulted in the decision that this bill should be brought before the House as soon as possible.

I have already noted the importance of volunteers. In the time remaining to me I want to talk about the wonderful work that the JPs are doing within the Nanango electorate and the hard work that the JP branch is doing in bringing JP services to the regions. These wonderful areas—

Mr Seeney interjected.
Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Absolutely, across the South Burnett and the Somerset. We have been fortunate enough to work with the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and his department to set up and utilise the JP branch.

Mr Cox: There is a lot of work there.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take that interjection. A lot of work is being done. We have been able to set up these workshops by utilising the JP branch across the South Burnett. I encourage all members of this House to contact the JP branch and utilise this amazing service, particularly if they represent regional areas, because this LNP government is able to take this service out to the regions and provide extra training for JPs. I congratulate the Attorney-General for bringing this service to the regions, because I know that the justices of the peace in my electorate are very thankful for all the support that they are now getting from the Newman LNP government. I would like to commend this bill to the House.

Mr RUTHENBERG (Kallangur—LNP) (8.23 pm): It truly is a pleasure to stand in this place to speak in support of the Attorney-General’s bill this evening. On 17 March 2012 the LNP released a policy. I remind members that that was prior to the election. Part of that policy reads as follows—

An LNP Government will support and expand the role of Justices of the Peace within the justice system and give victims of crime a voice through our plan to revitalise front line justice services.

We took that policy to the election and the people of Queensland said, ‘Tick. Great idea.’ And here it is. I note also that this policy was in the Newman government’s action plan for January to June 2013. I remind members of the House that we have an action plan and our ministers and the Premier are going about implementing that action plan. This is not by mistake, or by accident, or by whim, or by reaction; this is deliberate. It is a plan, it is well thought out, it is well conceived, it is transparent and it is occurring. Yet again, the LNP government is delivering on its policy promises for the people of Queensland. We took this policy to the election and let the people decide.

It needs to be stressed that this initiative is a trial. We do not believe that we are the fount of all knowledge. We are trialling many innovative ideas. We are trying to iron out the kinks before we determine whether they should be rolled out on a broader scale. We are trying to see if they work and to make sure that we have efficiencies right—

Mr Cox interjected.

Mr RUTHENBERG: I will take that interjection—the efficiencies are right and that this initiative works well in our community and it is not an impediment, but an improvement. Yet again, that is another hallmark of this government. I congratulate the Premier and his colleagues on utilising this methodology.

There are about 800 JPs in my electorate. I know that two of them have completed the five-day course. I am also aware that one of them has spent considerable time now observing and participating—a bit like an apprentice does. I know that that fellow made a submission to the Attorney-General in regard to the $100. I will tell members a little bit about what he said in that submission. The 100 bucks is not about getting a wage. That guy travels from my electorate into town. If he takes a train, it is going to cost him. If he takes a bus, it is going to cost him. If he drives his own car it is going to cost him in fuel, it is going to cost him in parking fees and then he has to have lunch and dinner and, depending on how long they sit, he might even have to have breakfast. At the end of the day the 100 bucks is really about making sure that his out-of-pocket expenses are taken care of without the administrative overheads or hang-ups that are involved in submitting receipts and things like that. This is not about paying JPs; this is about reimbursing them for their expenses. I think this is a common-sense way of ensuring that JPs are not out of pocket and do not have to go through the headaches and heartaches of claiming expenses and providing receipts. I think that is a very common-sense approach and stays true to the concept of volunteering a service. I want to add that this fellow has retired from the workforce, but he has not retired from the community. He wants to participate in the community and contribute to it. You cannot expect a retired person on a pension to have to pay out-of-pocket expenses. I think this is a practical, common-sense approach so that JPs’ out-of-pocket expenses are taken care of in a timely fashion. A trial will be conducted. It will commence in June. I congratulate the Attorney-General on that.

I want to talk a little bit about JP services in my electorate and some of the people who serve as JPs. I have been able to open up three extra services. There is now the service at the Narangba Library, at the Kallangur Library and I have also been able to institute JP services for two days a week in my office. That way people can come in and know that there is going to be a JP there. Even when...
that person is not there, my staff provide JP services for the community. This is a service that is quite important to people. The member for Nanango talked about JP training day. I can tell members that I have held one of those training days. Over 150 people attended. It was a fantastic day. People enjoyed it.

In closing, I want to mention a particular person, Don Connolly. When the Attorney-General came out to my electorate we were able to present Don with his 50-year service certificate. I know Don. I spoke about Don in my maiden speech and what a fantastic gentleman, what a great contributor to my community, he is. I have nothing but admiration for him. His life has been about service to his community. To be able to recognise 50 years of service as a JP—and even today he is active as a JP—is a fantastic way to say thank you to a gentleman such as Don. I wholeheartedly congratulate the Attorney-General and his staff for this bill. I say thank you for the initiative. I strongly support this bill.

Mr SORENSEN (Hervey Bay—LNP) (8.30 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill. In the House tonight members have spoken about people with 50 years of service as a JP. In Hervey Bay we always do it a bit better—even in our cooking we do it better, with Dan and Steph beating the Kawana couple the other night. Hervey Bay just does it a little bit better. Barbara Lynch who lives in Hervey Bay has done over 60 years of service as a JP. I would like to know whether she is one of the longest serving JPs in Queensland. She has served for well over 60 years. She still goes to the court every week to make sure that people get the services of a JP.

The JPs in my area are very knowledgeable. One gentleman in Hervey Bay would know more about relocatable home parks legislation than anybody else. I think he knows more about that than lawyers do because he has studied and studied it. He knows all the cases and the decisions of the courts. What he knows is amazing. If he was to sit on a tribunal he would certainly know everything about relocatable home parks and rental accommodation. I commend the Attorney-General and thank him for coming to Hervey Bay and presenting certificates to people who have given years of service.

Mr Johnson: He’s been to your electorate. He’s never been to mine.

Mr SORENSEN: Hasn’t he? He’s a great bloke. He comes to mine every now and again and has a look. The amount of $5,000 might not mean a lot to many people, but to pensioners and people on low incomes it is a lot of money. Many people cannot afford to go to lawyers. It does not take too long to rack up $5,000 when you go through the legal system. It is great to have a common-sense approach towards decisions on amounts less than $5,000. This is a trial that I hope works and makes a difference to a lot of people. Many people who come to me with small claims like this do not get too much help from anybody. I thank all the volunteer JPs. Nearly every week there are around two or three people wanting to become JPs. Many drop out after a few years. They want to become JPs for all different types of reasons. I want to make sure that we encourage more people in the future to become JPs because there are always those who drop out. It is important to make sure that they are out in the community all the time.

Once again I thank the members of the committee for the effort they have put in. Sometimes it is not easy to make the decisions that you have to. I thank the Attorney-General for bringing this legislation to the House. It will make a difference to a lot of people on low incomes, especially those in my area who are on pensions, to get the justice that they deserve.

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (8.33 pm), in reply: I thank all honourable members for their contributions to the debate on the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013. The government’s current six-month action plan pledges to commence the justice of the peace pilot program in the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal as part of its commitment to a swift and fair justice system. The delivery of swift and fair justice will help restore faith and trust in Queensland’s justice system. The justice of the peace program in QCAT will contribute to revitalising front-line services in Queensland. The bill allows a six-month trial for two justices of the peace to constitute the tribunal to hear and determine minor civil matters of a value of $5,000 or less but excluding urgent residential tenancy disputes. Limiting the trial to minor civil matters with a $5,000 threshold focuses the trial on the more minor, less complex matters, which allows QCAT’s adjudicators and other judicial registrars and magistrates to deal with more complex and urgent matters.

Expanding the role of justices of the peace by allowing their voluntary participation in the trial recognises the importance of JPs in the community and is part of the government’s commitment to revitalise the wonderful asset we have in our JPs. The bill provides that the types of matters justices
of the peace may hear will be non-urgent residential tenancy disputes, minor debts, claims for
damage arising from motor vehicle accidents and repairs for defects in motor vehicles, trader and
consumer disputes, and tree and dividing fence disputes provided the monetary value of these
matters is not more than $5,000. It is estimated that between 3,750 and 4,000 applications will
potentially come within the parameters of the trial over the six-month period in the trial locations
based on the number of applications made during 2011-12.

As I mentioned earlier, two justices of the peace will constitute the tribunal, one of whom must
be legally qualified. The legally qualified justice of the peace will preside at the hearing, decide on
questions of law and will, when the two justices disagree, make the ultimate decision. This is
consistent with the approach taken in the QCAT Act where more than one member constitutes the
tribunal. In line with the government's pledge, the trial will commence in early June 2013 and the sites
chosen for the trial are Brisbane, Southport, Ipswich, Maroochydore and Townsville. The trial will be
evaluated and the findings of the evaluation will inform decision making about the future of the justice
of the peace QCAT program. The bill also amends the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal
Regulation 2009 to prescribe the daily sitting fee of $100 for each justice of the peace sitting in QCAT.

I will now more broadly address some of the details that other members contributed to the
debate. I will start by acknowledging all our wonderful JPs and commissioners for declarations in our
communities. I want to acknowledge and thank them on behalf of the Queensland government for all
the wonderful work they do, particularly JPs in our community program. I thank the Justices of the
Peace Branch. Part of this revitalisation of JP services in Queensland is a revitalisation of the JP
Branch. We no longer participate in the official training programs. We have given that to the
registered training organisations like the QJA that are based with members who are justices of the peace.
I am a JP (Qualified). I was made a JP (Qualified) when I was 18 years old. I know the
system. I know what it is like being a JP. I did not work, like the member for Bundamba, in the
bureaucracy of JPs. I was a JP so I understand the system. I understand the training. I went to TAFE
and did my course, which I think was a one-week course. I did the test and passed and here I am
12 years later as a JP (Qualified). The member for Bundamba can stand in here and talk about when she
was in the bureaucracy of JPs and so forth; I can talk as a JP, not as a bureaucrat in the JP system,
but as a proper JP.

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: I will get to the member for Bundamba in a few short minutes, I can assure
members of that, and to her horrible, terrible contribution tonight. I can assure the member for
Bundamba that I will be writing to the 637 JPs in her electorate about her woeful contribution to this
debate tonight and her total disregard and negligent attitude that she has towards JPs in her
community.

Mrs Miller: Good!

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection. ‘Good,’ she says. She flies it in their face. She attacks the
JPs in her contribution tonight. I say I am going to write to them and show them her contribution and
she says, ‘Good! Do it!’ The arrogance of the member for Bundamba, or as I referred to her earlier in
the debate ‘the baroness from Bundamba’ when we were talking about titles! The member for
Bundamba was going on about titles. Let us not get distracted. I will get back to the member for
Bundamba’s contribution in a few short minutes. I want to thank all our wonderful JPs in our
communities right across our electorates for the wonderful work they do in delivering swift and fair
justice across this state.

Can I also remind honourable members that the history of our JPs is an unbelievable history
that goes back hundreds and hundreds of years. Members may be interested to know the historical
origin of our modern-day justices of the peace. The JP system is thought to have originated in
England under King Richard I who, as members may know, was also known as ‘Richard the Lion-
Heart’. They were known as keepers of the peace or keepers of the king’s peace. The term ‘justices
of the peace’ is thought to have derived from the 14th century under an act of parliament that referred
to the good and lawful men to be appointed to guard the peace. When I travel to electorates right
around Queensland and I talk to constituents, often I give the historical context of how modern-day
JPs originated. The JP branch of my department has just travelled to Far North Queensland to
conduct great additional training and development. Eight hundred JPs from across the far-north area
attended. I thank those members for participating. Often it is the case that I ask JPs where the ancient
JP title came from and I am always surprised that not many people know.
I remind honourable members that this year we celebrate the diamond jubilee of the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Members may not know it but tonight, just across the road at the Dutch club, the Dutch community is celebrating the abdication of Queen Beatrix in favour of her son, Willem-Alexander. In about 2½ hours, he will take the throne from his mother. When we are talking about JPs and ‘Richard the Lion-Heart’, I am reminded of our great monarch Queen Elizabeth II, who is celebrating the diamond jubilee of her coronation this year and who celebrated her diamond jubilee last year, and the abdication of Queen Beatrix in favour of her son, King Willem-Alexander. I congratulate the Dutch community on the celebratory function that was held earlier this evening. I wish them all the best tonight. At 11 o’clock tonight at the Dutch club they will be watching the proceedings on the big screen. No doubt, all the members of the opposition will be there, watching the royal procession and the coronation of the new king of the Netherlands. Obviously, I am biased as I have a Dutch background and I wish the Dutch community all the best. However, my allegiance will always rest with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen of Australia.

Having dealt with the historical context of this matter, I come back to the bill and the debate before the House. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her contribution tonight. Although she had a go at me at some stages throughout the debate, I think she recognises the importance of this bill and, in jest, made some comments. We had a bit of fun with it. I think the Leader of the Opposition would be horrified that, in a debate on a bill that the opposition supports and that talks about JPs in our community, the member for Bundamba essentially led a charge against the bill. Despite the fact that the opposition supports the bill, the member for Bundamba made derogatory comments with respect to JPs in our community, and particularly in her community. We on this side of the House and, I suspect, the Leader of the Opposition support JPs. The Leader of the Opposition said she had enormous—

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order. I find the Attorney-General’s comments offensive and I ask that he withdraw them.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Attorney-General, I ask that you withdraw the comments.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw. Unlike the member for Bundamba, the Leader of the Opposition said she had enormous admiration for JPs in our community and I support that comment. The Leader of the Opposition talked about the role of JPs, who are called on to witness documents, wills and warrants for police. She said that some have complex issues to think about before they can decide specific criteria. She said that the opposition supports the bill, which is nice. She talked about our election commitment, which was a clear commitment to reinvigorate and revitalise our JP program in Queensland. That is all about speaking to JPs, liaising and communicating with JPs. We did that by informing government. We have spoken to JPs. I go to as many community JP functions as I can. We have handed out hundreds of long service certificates.

The Leader of the Opposition said that she wrote to me requesting that she be granted the opportunity to do a JP workshop in her electorate and wondered why I had not replied. It was a very good question from the Leader of the Opposition. I am happy to advise that, funnily enough, a copy of a letter dated today has arrived. I will table a copy of that letter and I also note that a copy has been delivered to her office. That letter states—

I would be delighted to support such an event. As part of the Newman Government’s election commitments, I have requested that the Justices of the Peace Branch focus on compliance and support for all Justices of the Peace and Commissioners for Declarations. The Justices of the Peace Branch of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General has provided professional development workshops in a number of electorates in the past, and could conduct a workshop as part of the event. I have requested that the Registrar and Manager of the Justices of the Peace Branch liaise directly with your electorate office staff to make the necessary arrangements to facilitate the event. Further, I would be very happy to attend and speak at the event and present Long Service Awards to any of your constituents who may be eligible to receive them. Once again, thank you for requesting this important event in your electorate.

I table a copy of that letter for the Leader of the Opposition.

Tabled paper: Letter, undated, from the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Hon. Jarrod Bleijie, to the Leader of the Opposition, Ms Annastacia Palaszczuk MP, relating to justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations training event in the Inala electorate [2534].

I will deal with a few of the issues raised by the Leader of the Opposition, who quoted a couple of newspaper articles claiming that JPs will replace lawyers. They will not. Believe it or not, member for Bundamba, the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal already has members who are nonlawyers and who decide important matters for the state of Queensland. Not all members of QCAT are legally qualified. To those people who have argued that the world will come crashing down because—God forbid—we will have common-sense, respectable and intelligent people from the
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community deciding matters under $5,000. I say: it already happens. QCAT, which is a lean mean justice machine, does deal with some matters where the adjudicators have to be lawyers. However, there are also ordinary members who are not required to be lawyers. In QCAT already there are nonlawyers deciding matters. Guess who set that up? The Labor Party! The Labor Party set up QCAT, with my support. If the issue is raised, as it has been in the debate, that we have nonlawyers deciding these matters, I say that QCAT was set up that way by the Labor Party. I am continuing this process so that, instead of just having nonlawyers, we will have JPs who participate in the justice system in Queensland and do a mighty fine job.

We consulted quite widely on this. Yes, I accept the issue raised by the Leader of the Opposition with respect to some of the amendments in terms of training. When we sent out the original draft bill for consultation, we talked to the likes of the Queensland Justices Association, the Gold Coast justices of the peace association and other groups in Queensland. We tinkered with the edges as we received feedback. That was the whole point of the consultation. Soon it was discovered that plenty of non-legally qualified people wanted to apply for the position of JP. However, there was a threshold of about five years practice as a lawyer before one could do JP training, which was not catching a lot of people, so we relaxed it. However, the point is that a legally qualified person and a JP of some experience will sit on these matters and, of course, the legally qualified person will be the presiding officer in the matter. If there is a tie in the verdict, obviously that person will make the call.

As I said to the Leader of the Opposition, I am more than happy to attend at Inala and I look forward to it. I have been there a couple of times already. I went to the South West Brisbane Community Legal Centre. I saw the dongas that the community centre is in and it is a terrible state of affairs. I am working with them to try to get some more funding, because they had been underfunded by the Labor Party for many years. I am a fundamental believer in community legal centres and we are about encouraging them. We have given $750,000 more to the Women’s Legal Service. The South West Brisbane Community Legal Centre does a fantastic job. Just as I visited that centre, I am more than happy to visit the electorate of Inala and talk to JPs about our positive plans for change. The member for Bundamba interjected before saying that this has all been done and that former attorneys have done this in the past.

Mrs Miller: They have.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection and say to the member for Bundamba, ‘No, you’re wrong.’ This government is doing what the Labor Party did not do for JPs. We are actually encouraging and supporting JPs. We have outsourced the training provided by the JP branch to JPs, believe it or not.

Mrs Miller: You shouldn’t have.

Mr BLEIJIE: I take the interjection from the member for Bundamba who says, ‘We shouldn’t have outsourced the training.’ We have outsourced it to JP organisations. If anyone can deliver to JPs I would suspect it would be the Queensland Justices Association.

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Bundamba, what is your point of order?

Mrs MILLER: My point of order is that the JP branch has excellent training officers and they have done an excellent job for many years—since 1990.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! That is not a point of order, member for Bundamba. Please resume your seat!

Mr BLEIJIE: So stuck in the past is the member for Bundamba. While talking about the member for Bundamba, let me deal with another issue she raised. She was going on about why we do not set up another category of JP (QCAT). Under the legislation there is not technically a JP (QCAT) but they are defined as JP (QCAT). Do members know why we do not have a category like that? I ask the member for Bundamba whether she would like to know why we do not have a category for that? The reason is that the JPs asked not to have one. In a letter dated 17 January 2013—

Mrs Miller interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: She says ‘rubbish’. I will table a copy of the one page I have here.

Tabled paper: Extract from letter, dated 17 January 2013, from Queensland Justices Association to Jo Linde, Principal Legal Officer, Department of Justice and Attorney-General, relating to the draft Queensland Civil and Administrative (Justices of the Peace) Amendment Bill 2013 [2535].
I will quote from it for the member for Bundamba. A letter to the principal legal officer, strategic policy, Department of Justice and Attorney-General on 17 January 2013 states—

The duties of the Justice of the Peace (QCAT) can be assigned to a current Justice of the Peace (Qualified) or Justice of the Peace (Magistrates Court). We do not believe another level of honorary Justice is warranted.

The difference between the Labor Party and this side is that we listen to people who do this every day. We have JPs—

Mrs Miller: Who’s it from?

Mr BLEIJIE: It is from the Queensland Justices Association. It is from the body that represents the JPs in this state.

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bundamba, what is your point of order?

Mrs MILLER: The Queensland Justices Association does not represent every JP in this state.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bundamba, that is not a valid point of order. Please resume your seat!

Mr BLEIJIE: Not only does she attack the 637 JPs in Bundamba, she now attacks the associations representing JPs in Queensland. I also mentioned the Gold Coast justices association. There are many organisations representing JPs in Queensland. There are some JPs who are not members of particular organisations.

But I tell you what: if I am going to get advice from anyone on JP reform in Queensland, I am going to go to an association, not the member for Bundamba, who had an opportunity during her 20 years in government in this state to do all this. But it gets better. Let me tell honourable members what she did not do in government for the 20 years—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Attorney-General, please refrain from referring to members opposite as ‘you’ and refer to them using their parliamentary title.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Let me tell honourable members what the member for Bundamba did not do in the last 20 years. What have I done? This government has re-established the JP advisory council. I am getting direct advice from JPs who are on the ground in our community doing all this work. That is about to commence. We have re-established the JP advisory council. We have expanded the JPs in the Community program. I believe we are giving them all new T-shirts that are being prepared.

We have introduced a formal mentoring program. New JPs coming in can be mentored by senior JPs who have been doing it for a lot longer. We will shortly introduce compulsory training prior to the appointment of all the categories. At the moment people can do a course or not do a course and do a test. We will be introducing compulsory training so all our JPs start on a level footing.

We will be removing the JP (C.dec) category. We will be declassifying it. The Labor Party created all these categories. We have 80,000 JPs out there on JP (Qualified), JP, C.dec, JP (C.dec)—it is a complete mess. We are going to fix that. We are going to review the code of conduct. This government has done that, not the member for Bundamba and not the Labor Party for 20 years in government. If the member for Bundamba wants to say, ‘We’ve done it all,’ I can tell her that they have not. We are on the ball. We are listening to JPs in our community. We have the utmost respect for JPs in our community.

I will deal with the issue raised by the Leader of the Opposition with respect to the limit changing from $3,000 to $5,000 after the initial consultation. That was as a result of discussions I had directly with the president of QCAT. We had a few meetings in that respect. We thought JPs would be able to handle this. This is about instilling a common-sense purpose in our justice system in Queensland. For matters under $5,000 Queenslanders will be able to go into QCAT and they will have two common-sense people—not judges, not judicial officers—from our community dispensing justice according to the law. I think this is exciting.

We had about 131 applications for non-legally qualified JPs for the six-month trial at five sites. JPs everywhere I go are excited by these opportunities. They are excited by the fact that we are revitalising the JP branch. Because those in our JP branch are not doing the training, they are getting out to more and more JPs, talking to them about issues and updating them on different things. Rather than doing the initial training we have them doing the ongoing professional training in our communities. As I have said, in the last couple of weeks they have been to Far North Queensland,
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where they saw 800 JPs. The feedback on the ground is that JPs are loving it. The registered training organisations, the RTOs, are doing the initial training and organisations and the JP branch are running the additional training and the JPs are loving it.

The member for Ipswich talked about there being nothing new here. We also have the JPs (Magistrates Court), who operate in a different jurisdiction—not the QCAT environment. This has been happening. It is legislated and it is happening. I thank the Minister for Tourism for her support, particularly of JPs on the Gold Coast, and for her contribution to the debate tonight.

Now I will talk about the member for Bundamba. I am preparing myself for a lot of points of order about offending comments. The member for Bundamba was talking about training. She said that we will have people who have gone through one week's training dispensing justice and it should be the case that the longer you have served in something the better you are. This member has been here for 15 years and I do not see her getting any better. I see a downward trend from the member for Bundamba. I can say that it is not about the amount of time you spend in a profession because if we apply that threshold—

Mrs MILLER: I rise to a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bundamba, what is your point of order?

Mrs MILLER: The Hansard proof will determine that the minister is now misleading the House. He is verballing me and I am offended and I ask that he withdraw his statement.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Bundamba, that is not a point of order.

Mr BLEIJIE: ‘Verballing’—coming from the member for Bundamba, coming from you.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I find his comments offensive.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Are you making a point of order or are you asking for statements to be withdrawn?

Mrs MILLER: Yes, I am. I am making a point of order in the sense that the minister is misleading the House in his so-called comments of what I have said. I am offended and I ask him to withdraw the comments.

Mr BLEIJIE: I am offended by your presence in this place.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Krause): Order! Member for Bundamba, there is no point of order. If you find a matter personally offensive, that is a different matter.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I find the matter personally offensive and I ask that you request the minister to withdraw it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Attorney-General, please withdraw.

Mr BLEIJIE: I withdraw, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can I say to honourable members that my point has just clearly been made. The member has been here for 15 years and does not understand the standing orders of this place, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mrs MILLER: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege suddenly arising. I understand that it was the member for Ipswich who actually made the comments that the Attorney-General is talking about and I ask that you rule on it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Bundamba, there is no matter of privilege. Member for Bundamba, you have made several frivolous points of order today. You have been warned previously under standing order 253A. I now ask that you withdraw from the chamber for one hour.

Whereupon the honourable member for Bundamba withdrew from the chamber at 9 00 pm.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I call the Attorney-General.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I welcome the member for Rockhampton in leading the opposition’s charge on this debate. Knowing the member for Rockhampton as I do I can say that now we might get some civility in this place. But I have not quite finished with the member for Bundamba and her woeful contribution to this debate tonight. As I said, she has 637 JPs in the electorate of Bundamba. Just before the member for Bundamba left the chamber she said that it was the member for Ipswich. Let the record show that the member for Bundamba was criticising the training program, the week-long training program. She was questioning who trained these individuals. I wrote down all her issues. She asked who wrote it and what the qualifications will be. She was attacking JPs—I cannot read my own writing for the next one but that is okay—and she was basically writing off every JP in her electorate. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, I was addressing the comments that the member for Bundamba made with respect to JPs. As I said, I would submit to the House that the member for Bundamba essentially does not trust JPs to carry out their functions in this trial.
Ms Trad: That’s not what she said.

Mr BLEIJIE: The member for South Brisbane has now come to the defence of the member for Bundamba. If anyone can be trusted to deliver this sort of justice in Queensland, it is JPs. I have an immense amount of respect for the JPs in Queensland because they are upstanding individuals and community members, and I think—I know—they will fulfil their roles.

There are appeal mechanisms available. If there is such a time when someone requires an appeal, they will essentially go through the same appeal mechanisms they do in QCAT, to the appeals tribunal. They can seek leave to do that. There are some protections there. I am hoping and hopeful that this trial will be a great success, because if this trial is a success and we can roll this out to other regions right across Queensland, if we can assist QCAT by rolling this out to deal with minor civil disputes under $5,000, I think we will have a better justice system for all. We will have people from our communities participating in our justice system, and I think that will be great.

I thank the member for Broadwater for her contribution. She talked about when I visited her electorate and I met her mum, who she said is a JP. That was then followed by the member for Bulimba, who also said that I went to his electorate and I met his mum, who is a JP as well. There is a common theme here: all these members are introducing me to their mothers. I do not know which other mothers I have met. I thank the member for Bulimba’s mother, who is a JP I understand, and the member for Broadwater. I love going to these community JP programs. I encourage all members, if they have not already, to contact the JP branch and we must go out to their electorates to do this JP training because the JPs really love it.

The member for Beaudesert, the great Deputy Speaker in the chair at the moment, talked about class warfare and titles. It is strange, coming from the Labor Party, that they would be requesting more titles. I agree. That is why I said the ‘baroness from Bundamba’ does not quite suit. But she came in here advocating for more titles—completely against Labor Party philosophy that everyone is equal. We understand that people should be rewarded for their individual efforts. JPs should be rewarded for their efforts. If the member for Bundamba thinks that a reward of $100 a day is a great reward and that the JPs are doing this because they can pay the mortgage off with 100 bucks a day, then I think the member for Bundamba is living in fantasy world. Well, I figured that out a while ago, but it was reinforced tonight.

I thank all honourable members for their contributions. I thank the member for Gladstone for her contribution tonight as well. She asked what consideration has been given to the implementation of similar procedures in smaller centres. As I said, I am hoping that these trials will be a great success and then what we want to do is roll them out right across Queensland. I look forward to going to Gladstone in the next couple of weeks, as I understand. Today, member for Gladstone, I signed JP certificates of appreciation to all your community members and I look forward to presenting those at a morning tea or afternoon tea with you.

Mrs Cunningham: They do a good job.

Mr BLEIJIE: They do. I take the interjection from the member for Gladstone, and I am looking forward to handing out those certificates of appreciation when I travel to her electorate in the next couple of weeks. I also thank the member for Southport, whose electorate the trial will be located in, for his contribution tonight and for wanting to see people step up and provide this vital community service.

I will finish by talking about the member for Hervey Bay, who I cannot see in the chamber—there he is. The member for Hervey Bay said I was not listening but he is not listening to me now. The member for Hervey Bay talked about the winners of My Kitchen Rules. I know my daughters were watching. It was one night that we let them stay up late because Elle lives at Minyama in my electorate, just around the corner from my office. Of course the member for Hervey Bay’s constituents won the night, but I congratulate Jake and Elle for a thorough effort they put into My Kitchen Rules. They did the Kawana electorate proud. Despite coming second to the member for Hervey Bay’s constituents, there are no hard feelings, member for Hervey Bay. But I do congratulate my constituents, particularly Elle, for getting through to the final. I commend the bill to the House.

(Time expired)
Question put—That the bill be now read a second time.
Motion agreed to.
Bill read a second time.
Consideration in Detail

Clauses 1 to 6, as read, agreed to.

Clause 7—

Mr BYRNE (9.07 pm): Clause 7 inserts a new chapter 4. In proposed section 206C, the definition of ‘excluded minor civil dispute’ refers generally to various claims of more than $5,000. The Attorney-General has not adequately explained the reason why he decided to increase this limit from the original proposed amount of $3,000. In August last year and again in October when the Attorney spoke about the trial, he mentioned $3,000. By November it was $5,000. But no explanation was ever given for this change. The Attorney probably just hoped that no-one would notice. I am asking the Attorney: did anyone suggest an increase during the consultation or was the decision made arbitrarily?

In relation to proposed section 206O ‘Appointment’ and subsection (6), again the Attorney-General has not adequately explained why he removed the experience qualifications that were contained in the original draft. The Attorney said that the change was as a result of feedback received during the consultation but has failed to say from whom he received that feedback. The department told the committee that it was to encourage greater JP participation in the trial. So I ask the Attorney: which is it and what feedback was received during that consultation and from whom?

I turn to proposed section 206R(2). This section refers to payment of a prescribed sitting fee for a QCAT justice of the peace. The member for Bundamba raised during her speech the anomaly that this creates between QCAT JPs and JPs (Magistrates Court). If JPs (Magistrates Court) are sitting on criminal matters in the Magistrates Court and are not being paid, how can they reconcile the payment of QCAT JPs in QCAT? It creates two different classes of JPs sitting in courts.

Mr BLEIJIE: If the member for Rockhampton had listened for the last four minutes of the debate in this House he would have all the answers he requires. I suggest he wakes up early in the morning and reads Hansard.

Clause 7, as read, agreed to.

Clauses 8 to 12, as read, agreed to.

Third Reading

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.10 pm): I move—

That the bill be now read a third time.

Question put—that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Long Title

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.10 pm): I move—

That the long title of the bill be agreed to.

Question put—that the long title of the bill be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. JP BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (Acting Leader of the House) (9.11 pm): I move—

That the House do now adjourn.

HMAS Sydney

Mr BYRNE (Rockhampton—ALP) (9.11 pm): On Monday, 22 April I was honoured to unveil a naval plaque and pay tribute to three Central Queensland sailors lost on the HMAS Sydney during World War II. The three sailors who lost their lives were Thomas Glackin, Ernest Frisch and Ernest Edwards. I also unveiled a second plaque honouring those who served in the Far East Strategic Reserve that deployed over many years as part of confrontations in Malaya, Malaysia, Borneo and Singapore. I would like to thank Max Mullinger, President of the Naval Association Capricornia, and
Ray Parsons, secretary of the association, for the opportunity and privilege of being involved. Family members of all the *Sydney* sailors were present and the raw emotions, after the many decades that have passed, were self-evident.

Today, some Australians are perhaps unaware of the significance of the sinking of the *Sydney*. Winston Churchill once said that the low point for him in the Second World War was the capture of Tobruk by the Germans. For Australians, there are a number of events that were felt as a similar significant blow to morale. The loss of the HMAS *Sydney* was one of those.

The HMAS *Sydney* was a Leander class light cruiser. She displaced 7,270 tonnes standard with a top speed of 32.5 knots and an armament of eight 6-inch guns in twin turrets. The HMAS *Sydney* was lost in action against the German raider *Kormoran* on 19 November 1941. The *Sydney* had an impressive record of war service up to that point and was quite literally the pride of the Australian Navy. In total, 645 sailors and officers lost their lives in what remains Australia’s worst naval disaster. There were no Australian survivors. The German raider was also a unique vessel. Appearing to be a merchantman, *Kormoran* was, in fact, a heavily armed auxiliary cruiser. Of the raider’s complement of 397, 317 were rescued.

I cannot emphasise the emotional effect of this loss on Australians at that time. We should remember that Japan had not entered the war at that stage. The loss of the *Sydney* was accompanied by substantial questions over many years. The controversy continued for many years and eventually prompted in 1997 an official parliamentary joint committee investigation. The controversy has continued, even after the location of the *Sydney* in 2008.

The unveiling of the plaques in Rockhampton’s Botanic Gardens commemorating those lost Central Queensland sailors marks another poignant moment in the lives of the families of those lost sailors and prompted a moment of reflection for the broader community. During the ceremony I contemplated the loss of 645 sailors in a contemporary context. Today such a loss of life would be unimaginable. Lest we forget.

**Queensland Plan**

Hon. TL MANDER (Everton—LNP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works) (9.14 pm): Tonight I rise in the House to speak about the Queensland Plan and how my electorate of Everton is planning to be involved in that plan. I would like to congratulate the Premier on having the vision to look beyond the normal three-year election cycle to develop a 30-year vision for this state. I think it is a great thing to have a leader who is thinking that far ahead, and I congratulate the Premier on that. I am looking forward to implementing this plan in my electorate.

In two weeks time we are all going to Mackay. Each member has the opportunity to select three people from their electorate to accompany them. I have had great pleasure in going about that process and making sure I have a diverse range of views represented in Mackay. The Mackay summit has two major goals and they are: to identify the series of questions that we need to ask to guide conversations across Queensland and also to discuss what engagement activities might work best in our local community to help facilitate and record these conversations and, ultimately, answer the questions.

I have a number of worthy people to select from in my electorate but I have settled with three people who, as I said, represent a range of views across the electorate. Mr Roger McIntosh is a physiotherapist in the electorate of Everton. He is obviously a small business owner and is also the president of the local Mitchelton soccer club, which has 900 members. Roger will be a fantastic delegate. Angela Soultis is a mum who is actively involved in her school. She is the president of the Albany Hills State School P&C and has children at the Albany Creek State High School as well. She will also be great. Amy Stevenson is a young lady who has just finished her university studies. She was recently discussing government policies with me in my electorate office. I thought, ‘This is the type of person we need to represent the views of Everton.’

I am looking forward to those three people going to Mackay with me. I then intend to form a steering committee of 20 to 30 people from across the electorate who will be representative of the council, community groups, service clubs, P&Cs, sporting clubs, churches and youth groups. I am looking forward to that group coming together to work out how we are going to implement some of these polices and strategies in the electorate. Then I am going to conduct a survey of the electorate to ensure we get the views of the people right across the great electorate of Everton. I am looking forward to seeing the results of that survey and having some tangible outcomes.

*(Time expired)*
Coomera Electorate

Mr CRANDON (Coomera—LNP) (9.17 pm): I rise to talk about so many things that are happening in my community of Coomera, from Eagleby in the north all the way to Helensvale in the south. The first item that I would like to mention is the opportunity that I had to sell badges for Anzac Day with the North Gold Coast RSL at the Westfield shopping centre. I have to say that sales are growing each and every year. I am sure that members right around the state would have noticed that more and more people are taking an interest in Anzac Day and that more and more young people in particular are coming along to Anzac Day parades and so forth. Also, so many of them are now holding a function in their own school. The Coomera Rivers State School, which is the newest state primary school in my electorate, did an absolutely amazing job with their parade last week. Every class presented a wreath to commemorate the day. Numerous students spoke and took part in the program. The whole thing was virtually run by the students at Coomera Rivers State School.

The event at Helensvale State High School is always solemn. It is just amazing to see something like 800 students in the audience making not a sound. You do not often see that, but when commemorating Anzac Day the students sit or stand there silently. There is not a sound to be heard whilst the proceedings are ongoing.

I also enjoyed some time at Palm Lake Resort at Eagleby—a fantastic lifestyle resort. They had their ‘stand easy’ service in the grounds. That memorial was also very well represented by people from right around the community.

Of course, the dawn and morning services at North Gold Coast RSL are very solemn and growing each year. The now-famous Ormeau-Pimpama morning service has been going for 94 years. I congratulate Bevan Love, who organises that particular parade. He has not been doing it for 94 years but he has been around for a long time. His dad before him, Roy Love, was also there doing exactly the same thing as Bevan.

All members who have driven down the coast would know the digger on the stand at the Pimpama church.

(Time expired)

Education Reform

Mrs SCOTT (Woodridge—ALP) (9.21 pm): Extra funding in schools; flexibility to invest where the funds will make the greatest impact; greater engagement of students, parents and community; improvement in attendance records; reduced behavioural issues and exclusions; and improved academic and VET results, thus greater postschool opportunities. This is what we want to see in our schools, and tonight I want to tell the minister that this is a reality in our Woodridge schools thanks to the national partnership program. You could say that these four years have been a successful trial for what would be possible for every school in Queensland should the Premier and the minister give their support and sign on to the Gonski reforms.

A brief snapshot of my three state high schools reveals stunning results from the innovative programs. Woodridge High, under the leadership of John Norfolk and his dedicated staff, has seen attendance improvements of 12 per cent; enrolment growth of 20 per cent; school based apprenticeships and traineeships quadrupled to 99 in 2012; improved behaviour, with the halving of suspensions; a third of OP students with direct entry to university for 2013; and many community partnership programs including engagement with parents and carers.

Mabel Park High similarly, with highly professional staff led by principal Mike O’Connor, has turned into a positive all aspects of school attendance, behaviour and performance through strategic employment of specialist teachers, quality professional development of staff and the creation of a culture of high performance, professionalism and consistent practice. Some statistics are: 100 per cent QCE/QCIA attainment, up from 46 per cent four years ago; 80 per cent OP1 to 15; 91 per cent attendance; high staff morale of 94 per cent; and reduced behavioural and disciplinary incidents.

I now turn to Kingston College, where Fran Barker has, along with her fantastic staff, made similar improvements to all aspects of school life. As with our other schools, it is the ability to provide additional human resources that has made the real difference, with two deans of students for attendance and behaviour, two attendance officers and a full-time numeracy teacher aide.
My message to the Premier and the Minister for Education is simple. When the national partnership program has proved the success of additional funding and the federal government is offering a deal of increased state-wide funding for every school, we simply cannot and should not deny our students this opportunity. For our national partnership schools it would be criminal to allow the gains that have been made to now slip away, which would inevitably happen.

(Time expired)

Lytton Electorate, Anzac Day

Mr SYMES (Lytton—LNP) (9.24 pm): There are not many days that represent mateship and patriotism as well as Anzac Day. The Lytton electorate has strong ties to military service on numerous battles and peacekeeping campaigns. Last Thursday I had the honour and pleasure to attend five major Anzac services across the electorate as both the local member and someone paying their respects to family members who served in the Korean and Vietnam wars. It was refreshing to see bigger crowds than last year at all services paying their respects to soldiers who served their nation to make sure we kept the democratic freedoms we take for granted or to protect nations from conflict.

As the youngest MP in this House I found it refreshing to see lots of children and young adults attending these services. The Manly-Lota RSL community service exemplified this and what it means to be a community as we saw many schoolchildren from Wynnum High, Manly State School and Manly West State School, just to name a few, marching down Ernest Street to Richard Russell Park with various ex-service groups that are part of the Lytton electorate.

To give an example to members in the House of the increase in crowd numbers, the Bayside National Servicemen’s Association normally has 50 to 100 people attend their service. This year president Neil Frier believes there were over 400 in attendance. I tend to believe him, but I think his numbers were very conservative.

The Wynnum RSL community service and luncheon saw another great turnout by locals, with local sporting clubs such as the Wynnum Vikings AFL and Wynnum Manly Seagulls in attendance. On behalf of the Wynnum RSL, Manly-Lota RSL, Bayside National Servicemen’s Association, Brisbane East National Servicemen’s Association and the Queensland Malay and Borneo Veterans Association of which I am a financial or an honorary member, I express my gratitude to every local resident who woke up early to attend one of the five services held in the Lytton electorate.

Broadwater Electorate

Miss BARTON (Broadwater—LNP) (9.26 pm): It gives me great pleasure to rise this evening to talk about the great things we have achieved in the Broadwater electorate over the past 12 months.

Government members interjected.

Miss BARTON: Thank you very much, colleagues, for your ringing endorsement. Just before the election the Premier came down to the great electorate of Broadwater and announced that a Newman government would commit $30 million to the Gold Coast Waterways Authority. One of the things I had been fighting for over many years as a senior member of the Broadwater state electorate council—and indeed as chair of the state electorate council before I was endorsed as candidate and subsequently elected as member—was dredging of the Broadwater. It is one of the biggest issues that has faced the electorate of Broadwater for many, many years. The previous Labor government and the Gold Coast City Council were simply not doing enough.

One of the things the Treasurer committed to in the last budget was $15 million over four years specifically for deepening of the Broadwater. This is something that is so desperately needed in my electorate and it is something that people have been calling for for years. I am so pleased that I as the member for Broadwater have been able to deliver for my community and I have been able to honour a commitment that I made to them.

Before the election I also committed to removing the T2 lanes that were running through Labrador. This is something about which I have spoken in the House before. For those who do not remember, the previous Labor government thought it would be a good idea to make the left-hand lane of a major arterial road a T2 lane for four kilometres. Gosh, how smart! Thankfully the transport minister was smart enough to respond to my many, many, many persistent requests for the removal of the T2 lanes. As my own personal Christmas gift to the electorate I was able to say that those T2
lanes were binned by Barton, that they were victims of Verity. I now very proudly have mounted on
my wall, with the permission of the minister’s office, one of the T2 signs that were removed from
Frank Street through Labrador.

Mrs Frecklington: ‘Binned by Barton’?

Miss BARTON: ‘Binned by Barton’, member for Nanango. It is a great line. I was also able
most recently, during the Easter school holidays, to see—finally—that flashing lights were installed at
Coombabah State School. This school is bordered by a major arterial road. The previous member
promised the lights, but the previous member failed to deliver. The previous government failed to
deliver, but I was able to lobby the transport minister and I was able to see the lights delivered. I am
so very proud that when those students returned to school after their Easter holidays the flashing
lights had been installed. The president of the P&C gave me a hug when I recently saw her because
she was just so happy that those students are now safe and that they do not have to worry about cars
that are speeding past a school that is hidden by trees on a major road.

Gladstone Electorate, Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme

Mrs CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (9.29 pm): For quite some time there have been
concerns expressed in this chamber and elsewhere about the ability for people in Gladstone to get to
Rockhampton, where many of the hospital services have been centralised. As a result of community
consultations, the GLNG combined with Gladstone Rotary clubs funded, at least for a short time, a bus to
transport people to Rockhampton if they have no other means of transportation. This bus leaves the
Gladstone Senior Citizens Centre at 7 am and arrives at the Rockhampton Mater at 8.30, the
Rockhampton Base Hospital at 8.45 and Hillcrest Hospital at nine o’clock. They are picked up again
at the Mater at 10.15, the Base at 10.30 and Hillcrest at 10.45 to arrive back in Gladstone at 12 noon.
The bus then leaves Gladstone at 12.30 and arrives at the Rockhampton Mater at 2 pm, the
Rockhampton Base at 2.15 and Hillcrest at 2.30 and then picks up at 4.15 from the Mater, 4.30 from
the Rockhampton Base and 4.45 from Hillcrest, arriving back in Gladstone at 6 pm. That service is
good. For people who live at Boyne-Tannum or Calliope, they cannot get into town for the seven
o’clock bus because they cannot make the connections, so many people who are able to make that
seven o’clock connection have to stay in Rockhampton until 6 pm. That is good for those people that
that suits. It is excellent. There is no criticism of that bus. However, under PTSS administrative staff at
the Gladstone Hospital have followed directions from Queensland Health that say that only those
people who have a medical certificate from the doctor that they must take a vehicle are eligible for
PTSS, otherwise they have to catch the bus or they do not get paid anything.

So a bus that has been put on to cover a gap is now being used to penalise people who would
have, in the past and now, wanted to use vehicles that are available to them. So this remedial action
of the provision of a bus out of the goodness of the GLNG and Rotary—and it is a good bus and it is
wonderful and it is well accepted—means that those people who have vehicle transport are now
disadvantaged because they must use the bus and they must stay in Rockhampton if they miss the
connection from 7 am till 6 pm. There needs to be some common sense implemented if people go up
in a vehicle, because that would be more comfortable for the elderly. If they have access to a vehicle,
they should be eligible for the PTSS. For those who have to use the bus, it is all well and good; it
provides a wonderful service. We should not artificially disadvantage people because of a bus made
available by the generosity of others but used by Queensland Health against people to disadvantage
them.

Ferny Grove Electorate, Volunteers

Mr SHUTTLEWORTH (Ferny Grove—LNP) (9.32 pm): This evening I rise in the House to
speak of the wonderful efforts of the volunteers in the Ferny Grove electorate. As members may be
aware, National Volunteer Week commences on 13 May and goes through until 19 May and a very
important event is being undertaken in Ferny Grove. On the morning of 14 May the Minister for
Communities, the Hon. Tracy Davis, is hosting a morning tea in my electorate with a number of
groups in attendance. There will be attendance from both businesses and local organisations that
would benefit from the fine efforts of our volunteers. The idea of the morning tea is essentially to
promote within the business community of our electorate the importance of allowing employees to
undertake volunteerism throughout the community which enhances the social fabric and builds a very
strong community. There are a number of organisations which we will be actively promoting this
activity through. To name just a few from my fantastic electorate, there is the SES and the Rural Fire
Service; the Samford Riding for the Disabled; the Arana Hills PCYC, which undertakes a number of
magnificent programs, not least of which is Basketball After Dark, and we raised money in the Time 4 Kids program a weekend or two ago; the Girl Guides and scouting associations; local school P&Cs and out-of-school-hours care; our Lions clubs; GVK Bunya and Samford; and Rotary clubs. There are also a number of environmental groups such as MEPA, which operates in Mount Nebo and Mount Glorious undertaking weed eradication; Kedron Brook environmental group; and of course Men of the Trees, which I have spoken about in the House previously.

This evening I have heard a number of my fellow members talk about the fine efforts of volunteerism undertaken by our many JPs and commissioners for declarations, of which there are about 140 throughout the Ferny Grove electorate. This evening I cannot speak on volunteerism without also raising a very fine organisation which is actually is in the Premier’s electorate, Picabeen Community Association. It provides outstanding support to youth and undertakes University of the Third Age programs throughout a wide-reaching area. There was a fine quote by Albert Schweitzer some time ago which states—

I don’t know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know; the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve.

I conclude this evening by again thanking the volunteers throughout the Ferny Grove electorate.

**Gaven Electorate**

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—Ind) (9.35 pm): If members want to see the impact of a massive manufactured downturn in the communities beyond the city centre of Brisbane, then they should look no further than my electorate of Gaven. Today most of my electorate and the postcode of 4211 have recorded the highest number of bankruptcies in Queensland—one in 356 people for the general population. Only Mount Druitt in New South Wales rated higher, with a bankruptcy rate of one in 349 people and a 40 per cent unemployment rate. This data was released by the Insolvency and Trustee Service Australia. This area is one of the most beautiful places in the country, possibly the world. In Queensland bankruptcies rose by two per cent when nationally the numbers fell one per cent across the nation. We are in a state engineered recession outside the city centre here in Queensland. The combined effects of massive Public Service cuts, rising costs of living and a diversion of scarce resources back to Brisbane has led to a near destruction of the economy of the Gold Coast. More alarmingly for residents still on the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast City Council has in the last year run up a bill and borrowings of $730 million in one year only and projects to add another $220 million to that next year and so on for each year to follow. No amount of rate increases will ever cover this. There is a serious possibility that it could default. At the present point in time there is a 13 per cent delinquency rate in rates and rising, and there is little to show for it.

The Gold Coast is getting a new Southport pool. There is a pool there already but it is getting one built for the Commonwealth Games, but there is little else to show other than this Full Stop program that the council has engineered. Businesses have few customers and the workforce has been dreadfully casualised. There is a 300 per cent downturn in application of housing finance across the state, but it is three times that on the Gold Coast. Home insurance rates have near doubled for those living near the water, and it is proposed that over the next two years insurance agencies will double them again. At the same time the federal government is proposing tax increases on everything, including superannuants, and there are many self-funded superannuants on the Gold Coast. The public feel they are under attack by the combined forces of a rapacious state so-called conservative government and a decrepit failed federal Labor government. It is no wonder these people are looking for alternatives. The Gold Coast is suffering a general downturn deeper than we have ever seen before and many of our young people are leaving. The impact of FIFO has actually had a major effect on families. I would urge everyone to consider having holidays on the Gold Coast annually, at least for the next couple of years, to save a great city.

*(Time expired)*

**Great Barrier Reef**

Mr TROUT (Barron River—LNP) (9.38 pm): Cairns is the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef. It does not bear thinking about where it would be without it. This precious World Heritage listed resource, right on our doorstep, accounts for 15 per cent of the world’s coral area coverage and contributes billions of dollars to the entire Queensland economy. Despite stringent regulation and management measures in place, we are wisely informed that over the past 27 years the Great Barrier Reef has lost a massive 50 per cent of coral cover.
Coral provides food and shelter for a vast and diverse range of marine and plant life. The plants releasing oxygen and other organic materials as waste products provide animals with the ability to produce their own food. We are now in an unimaginable situation of potentially having the Great Barrier Reef placed on the UNESCO World Heritage endangered list as a result of negative international publicity and the decrease in picturesque coral, which is already having a negative impact on tourism and the local economy and Australia’s image.

To lose such an important tourism attraction and the unique natural area would have a significant effect on an incalculable number of businesses and also the economic sustainability of the region as a prime tourism destination. The situation is dire and we can no longer rely on passive efforts to sustain this natural asset. The government, tourism operators and scientists are looking for answers and new strategies.

Australia is the only country with reefs that does not have a restoration program. The government has spent and is spending millions on monitoring coral decline and reducing some of the major causes, but nothing is being spent on repairing the damage already done. The smart management of any national asset, natural or man made, requires a committed process of monitoring and maintenance. To think that we can leave out the maintenance and just monitor the Great Barrier Reef is absurd. The revegetation of degraded river banks such as the Barron River is being conducted to improve run-off to the reef. It is time to translate restoration activities below the waterline and continue this great work by reseeding degraded reef areas.

We finally have a solution. Sustainable Reefs is a company that is based in Cairns. Its function is the active restoration of coral. Its proposal to restore our Great Barrier Reef consists of three key components: the mapping of reef restoration pilot sites for restoration, building a world-class coral aquaculture facility and climate change adaption research. Target restoration sites are those that have had a major impact from human use, permanent tourism reef-diving sites and Green Island off Cairns. The reef restoration component consists of culturing key species in a state-of-the-art proprietary facility and then replanting them on degraded reefs carefully selected for restoration. That will involve building a world-class proprietary coral culturing facility to accelerate the growth rates of mother coral colonies. Fragments will then be removed from the colonies, similar to taking a cutting from a tree. The shore based coral aquaculture facility will be multipurpose and serve—

(Time expired)

Question put—That the House do now adjourn.

Motion agreed to.

The House adjourned at 9.42 pm.

ATTENDANCE