

**ROAD TRAFFIC AMENDMENT BILL 2003**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from 11 November 2003.

**HON ALAN CADBY** (North Metropolitan) [9.01 pm]: I am the first speaker for the coalition on the Road Traffic Amendment Bill 2003. This Bill seeks to amend the Road Traffic Act 1974 to give the Government the flexibility to sell the right to display optional numberplates through leasing or by other arrangement. This legislation will provide people with the opportunity to lease private plates, particularly at the top end of the market. People who would not otherwise be able to purchase private plates will be able to use this option to personalise their motoring or to use their vehicle to promote a small business, a recreational activity, a personal belief or the like. In general, the coalition supports the Bill. The leasing of optional specialised plates has the potential to generate significant additional revenue for the Government. According to the briefing that we were given, the Government expects to raise revenue of around \$10 million within six years of the operation of the Bill. It is interesting that the Bill is founded not on the philosophy of cost recovery but rather on the policy of profit. I am not sure philosophically whether the Government should be in the business of profit. That is a domain of private enterprise. However, if the community can gain something from the Bill, whether it be through the manufacture or the licensing of plates, then it will be good for Western Australia. On that note, I wonder whether these plates will be manufactured by a company within Western Australia or whether the Government intends to use the same people as are used in Queensland. We were told in the briefing that the revenue raised by this Bill will be used to improve efficiencies in the licensing business and to support the Government in its priorities of health, education and law and order. It is our view that if the Government raises money from motorists, then the majority of the funds raised should go back into that area so that motorists can see the real benefits of the money they are paying to the Government.

Currently the Road Traffic Act allows a member of the public to own the right to display a numberplate and to on-sell that right. Ownership of the actual plate rests with the Director General of the Department for Planning and Infrastructure. Regulation 22(2a) of the Road Traffic (Licensing) Regulations 1975 empowers the director general to dispose of the right to display special plates. This Bill will place the validity of that regulation beyond doubt. I understand from the briefing that the minister's department is now conducting market research to determine the products that people want to buy, and, of course, how much they are prepared to pay for those products. Queensland has already gone down that path and has a system called Personalised Plates Queensland. That system has been in operation since 1997, and apparently the plate business has gone from strength to strength. The words "from strength to strength" ring a bell to a Liberal. The money raised from the sale of plates in Queensland has increased from \$3 million in 1997 to \$10 million in 2000-01. That is a substantial amount of money.

Hon Ken Travers: Is that for purchasing or leasing?

Hon ALAN CADBY: That is the whole system so far as I understand it. That is the same system as the one that the Government is trying to bring in. That seems to match what the Government is proposing to raise; namely, about \$10 million by the sixth year of operation of this system.

The benefits for numberplate enthusiasts will be a greater variety of numberplates through product development, and purchase flexibility through affordable lease plan options. The option of leasing private plates will assist motorists who are seeking to lease plates, particularly at the top end of the market, which currently may be out of their reach.

We have some concerns about the Bill. We were told at the briefing that the research is being undertaken now. It is now some months since we had the briefing, so I am not sure whether the research has been completed or is still ongoing. We already have the research from Queensland and know what is happening there, so I would have thought the research would have been completed before the Bill was brought into the House. As I understand it, the research will establish the product lines, the price structure and the product range. This includes establishing which plates will be leased according to the market demand. It is the coalition's view that when the research has been completed, it should be made public. I hope the parliamentary secretary can assure us that that will be the case.

We also have some concern about vehicle recognition. We know that people use the numberplate to identify a vehicle that has, for example, been involved in an accident and has failed to stop. Will the nature of these plates, such as the size, colour combinations and placement on the vehicle, make it difficult to identify the plate? When I was in Queensland last week, I often found it quite difficult to see where the personalised plate was on the vehicle, particularly if it was a four-wheel drive.

Hon Paddy Embry: Were they flat or curved?

Hon ALAN CADBY: The ones that I saw were flat and small, but of course they could go right around the vehicle if the market research says that is what people want. Who knows? Someone might have their registration plate on top of the vehicle. It might be Police 1, Police 2 or Police 3. I have some concern about whether there will be easy public recognition of the numberplates. It is important that the parliamentary secretary tell us how this perceived problem has been overcome in the Queensland experience.

There is some concern that this Bill will affect the current procedure for personalised plates. A number of charities rely a great deal on the money that they raise from the sale of these plates. We have all seen them, such as Dockers 1 and Dockers 2, although I do not know why anybody would support a football team. If it were Reds 1 or Waratahs 1, I could understand that.

Hon Ken Travers: What are they?

Hon ALAN CADBY: Obviously, it is very hard to talk to an ignoramus about footy, is it not?

Hon Ken Travers: You just said you didn't want to support football teams. You are getting me completely confused.

Hon ALAN CADBY: I am talking about real football, not that stuff that is played with the hand. I am talking about the good, old-fashioned rugby. However, we were assured in the briefing that this will not affect charities who currently use personalised plates as a -

Hon Dee Margetts interjected.

Hon ALAN CADBY: Public schools; that is interesting. I went to a government school, and the only sport we were allowed to play was rugby.

Hon Dee Margetts: Rugger.

Hon ALAN CADBY: Rugby, not rugger. For goodness sake! I am talking about rugby union. In fact, when I was sports master and taught in Sydney, the only football that was played was rugby league, the 13-man game.

Hon Dee Margetts: Yes, but this is Western Australia.

Hon ALAN CADBY: I know it is Western Australia, but footy, rugby and rugby league are national games. Therefore, I can comment upon them. It is nothing to do with the school one goes to; it is the State in which one is brought up.

I am sure the parliamentary secretary will reassure us again that it will have no effect on that, and the charities will still be able to raise funds through that mechanism. I believe it is a very important mechanism, and one on which many charities rely.

Hon Ken Travers: Are you saying the Dockers are a charity?

Hon Norman Moore: They are a basket case.

Hon ALAN CADBY: Yes, they are; one could say that. I do not believe there is any need to prolong this speech. We have said that we will support the Bill. In my mind, it seems to be a Bill that maybe the Liberal Party should have brought in several years ago, because it is more in keeping with our philosophy of private enterprise than the Labor Party's policy on private enterprise, if it has a policy on private enterprise - I do not know - although I did hear Hon Geoff Gallop talk about private enterprise today in the other place, so maybe the Labor Party is coming around to our way of thinking. On that positive and hopeful note, I will resume my seat.

**HON JIM SCOTT** (South Metropolitan) [9.12 pm]: The Greens (WA) will support this Bill. There is not much to say about it, apart from mentioning my puzzlement that people are willing to part with good money for those brand identities that they seem to want these days. However, it is not for me to wonder why fools and their money are parted so quickly. If people want to have an ego and are prepared to pay for it, I am happy to go along with that.

Hon Alan Cadby: It could be used to advertise a business.

Hon JIM SCOTT: Yes, if people knew that it was for a business. The point is that there will be so many of these out in the community, who will know whether it is for a business? Once thousands and thousands of people have these little brands of their own, after a while we will not have a clue whether they are for businesses. I have not spent my time going around reading them, but there we go. Whatever people are into, I am quite happy. If they are prepared to pay for it, good on them. If that adds to the State's revenue, all the better. We support the Bill.

**HON KEN TRAVERS** (North Metropolitan - Parliamentary Secretary) [9.13 pm]: Hon Alan Cadby raised a number of questions, and hopefully I will be able to answer most of them. There were some general comments early in the piece. The issue of who will make the plates was raised. I expect there will be a tender process for

that, as there is currently. We all have a different view about the role of Governments in making profits. However, I certainly believe that when the community creates the asset, it has a right, through the Government, to gain the benefit from that. It should not be given to individuals to gain from it. One of the advantages of this process is that the revenues from and the financial benefits of these plates will still accumulate for the benefit of the people who created them; that is, the people of the State rather than an individual. That is a positive thing. The hypothecation of revenues is always an easy argument on the other side of the House. It is always dangerous to seek to hypothecate. However, I believe that the people of Western Australia will be more than happy to see the revenues going back, firstly, into the licensing area from which they are generated, and then into the core areas that people see as important, such as health, education, community safety, and law and order, which obviously have a crossover into the use of motor vehicles.

Hon Alan Cadby raised concerns about the research not having occurred before the Bill was introduced. The question of when the research should be conducted is always an interesting one. I started to write a note that the member was about to say that we started the research before the Bill had passed. It is always an interesting question about how much is done and at what point it is done. I am not sure why the exact timing was chosen. However, the issue of the timing of the research is always an interesting one. It is difficult.

I take on board the points about vehicle recognition. I do not have the answer to that. However, I am more than happy to raise those concerns. There will still be a requirement for the plates to be approved. I will certainly make sure that Hon Alan Cadby's concerns are drawn to the attention of the minister and the officers of the department to make sure that when the officers get to the point of formally approving the plates, they are cognisant of the problems that the member highlighted from the Queensland situation to ensure that the plates are readily identifiable on the vehicle. I concur completely with the member. I believe that is a point worth raising. This Bill is not the vehicle by which we could legislate for that; it will come down to the officers making sure that they are cognisant of that when they formally approve the plates. However, as I said, I am more than happy to take up that issue.

I refer to the impact on charities. The advice that I have is that corporate and fundraising series will still be available for charitable and sporting organisations etc to on-sell the rights to display their distinctive logos on vehicles. The opportunities for those charities and football clubs to raise money in that way will still be available, on the advice I have received.

I thank Hon Jim Scott and the Greens for their support for this Bill. I concur with him. I wonder why people would spend vast sums of money to get a personalised numberplate. I am quite happy with the one I have on the back of my vehicle as we speak today. However, there is definitely a market for those numberplates. It is a positive initiative and will create additional revenue to improve our licensing services and provide extra money in key areas. I thank members for their support for the Bill, and I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and passed.

Bill read a second time.

Leave granted to proceed forthwith to third reading.

*Third Reading*

Bill read a third time, on motion by Hon Ken Travers (Parliamentary Secretary), and passed.