

**Bill introduced on motion by Mr Richard Torbay.**

**Agreement in Principle**

**Mr RICHARD TORBAY** (Northern Tablelands) [10.03 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

Today I am reintroducing the Cross-Border Commission Bill. To be accurate, it is the reintroduction of a bill that has been before this place on two previous occasions. That bill was introduced by the member for Ballina, who is currently a Minister in the Government. I supported the bill on 1 April 2000, and in 2005 when he reintroduced the bill, and I indicated to the member for Ballina how supportive I was. It was a good bill then and it is a good bill now. The reason I have chosen to reintroduce this bill is that this is a critically important issue for those border communities; it is a problem that has not gone away.

In fact, the need to establish an independent and stand-alone cross-border commission is as strong now as it was in the past. The aim, as it was then, is to resolve the many issues confronted by communities on the New South Wales border with Queensland, Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. At stake are the cost burdens that run into millions of dollars a year plus the massive inconvenience experienced by thousands of businesses and residents in these communities.

The proposed cross-border commission of New South Wales would consist of a chair and between four and eight part-time members appointed by the Premier. Commission members would be qualified to represent cross-border issues in the interests of consumers, business, farmers and local government. The members would be residents of New South Wales but, importantly, not sitting members of the State or Federal parliaments. This is a deliberate move to avoid politicisation of the issues and to promote solutions to issues with bipartisan support. Let us invest in the solutions rather than just talk about the problems. The commission would have the power to call witnesses, take evidence and undertake all other necessary actions to allow it to make regular recommendations to the New South Wales Parliament.

The commission would invite members of border communities to make submissions; conduct inquiries referred to it by the Premier or as the commission considers appropriate; identify issues to refer to the Premier; prepare an annual report for tabling in Parliament; and carry out other functions conferred or imposed on it by or under any Act or law. The bill proposes that the commission be a small, smart and effective body to address cross-border issues and recommend solutions, and that it be reviewed after five years. Issues that the commission would address, and there are many, include the anomalies in payroll tax, which varies unbelievably in each of the border States; duties that exist in some States but not others; the disruptions caused by daylight saving; variations in the formulae to calculate workers compensation premiums; differing licensing agreements—members have received many

representations about licensing and other matters, including agreements for a range of licences such as those for the fishing industry; tax disparities; and the content of education courses.

These are legitimate concerns. They vary in just about every State and Territory on those borders. Of course, there are many varying rules relating to businesses. There are issues arising from weight limits relating to transport—I can see members nodding. There are also variations in electricity prices, and so the list continues. I could go on but I see members nodding and clearly there is support for what I am saying. The member for Clarence is still nodding, as is the member for Murray-Darling. Property and business owners have interests that in many cases straddle State borders. This is certainly the case in the north of my electorate in communities such as Tenterfield and many other border towns. School bus owners have conflicting schedules during the daylight saving period, occupational health and safety standards differ between bordering States, and licensing and registration of tradespeople differs, depending on where they are located. It can be a matter of whether they are across the river or across the road, particularly where there are many border communities such as in my electorate of Northern Tablelands.

When this legislation was last debated the member for Lismore pointed out when speaking to the bill that people living on the Queensland-New South Wales border have post office boxes in Queensland but live in New South Wales. I can certainly vouch for that. In communities like Mingoola, Bonshaw, Yetman and Jennings, and the border community within Tenterfield Shire there are people who have Queensland phone numbers and Queensland postcodes, but live in New South Wales. Indeed, they are constituents of mine in Northern Tablelands. When they ring for services they are told, because of the technology, "Sorry, you're ringing from Queensland", when their number flashes up.

They say, "No, we're not ringing from Queensland. We're ringing from New South Wales." They go through that time and time again in their attempts to get through to a terribly frustrating bureaucracy that does not understand the limits that border restrictions impose on people. The benefit of a cross-border commission would be that it would allow border communities to put all such issues on the table for discussion and resolution. Some cross-border arrangements already exist and work well. For example, cross-border arrangements are in place with policing. I know the member for Dubbo was involved in those arrangements when he was a police sergeant at Tenterfield in the northern part of my electorate. The commission could and would present a very clear picture of what works, what does not work, the frustrations of creating barriers to the smooth running of business and community activities, the difficulties for individuals, and extra costs incurred just because of geographic location.

I urge the Government to support the bill. As I stated earlier, I openly acknowledge that it has been introduced at the instigation of the Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast, Don Page. This is very, very important legislation. In conclusion I cite the most recent example that illustrates the need for this legislation. When floods hit Queensland,

affected border communities in Queensland and New South Wales received different emergency service assistance. The rules and emergency services processes applying to support were a nightmare. Yesterday I gave notice of a motion calling for a review to ensure that natural disaster relief and recovery arrangements in New South Wales, which provide for a payment of \$15,000 for disaster relief, are brought into line with the payment in Queensland of \$25,000. Currently people who live across the road or across the creek from each other receive disparate payments.

People in dire circumstances, many of whom have lost everything, find the level of disparity incredibly frustrating. The Cross-Border Commission Bill 2011 is good legislation. I again acknowledge that it was instigated by the Minister for Local Government, and Minister for the North Coast, Don Page. I am reintroducing this legislation because we do not have time to waste. I am confident that it will receive the support it deserves and that it will provide relief to the community. I commend it to the House.

**Debate adjourned on motion by Mr Daryl Maguire and set down as an order of the day for a future day.**

**The SPEAKER:** Order! It being before 10.30 a.m. the House will now proceed with Orders of the Day (General Orders) and General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).