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Your reference:

Mr N Laurie
Clerk of Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Service
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in relation to the parliamentary petition concerning Gold Coast Schoolies Week lodged by Mr John Hill on 21 April 2004.

The petitioners have requested that the House "implement an independent commission of inquiry into the conduct and management of the Schoolies Week Festival, nightclubs and Indy culture in Surfers Paradise, Gold Coast region, as an urgent issue of deep concern to the Surfers Paradise community".

I acknowledge the issues raised by the petitioners and am sympathetic to their concerns about alcohol misuse and the inappropriate behaviour of a minority of participants. However, an independent inquiry is not necessary as the government is working diligently to ensure that safety and security matters concerning nightclubs, Schoolies Week and Indy receive priority attention, and that the needs and wishes of local residents, businesses and participants are taken into account.

Gold Coast Schoolies Week

On 15 May 2003, Premier Beattie announced the government's Gold Coast Schoolies Week *Three-Point Plan* to provide better coordination, improved safety and an awareness of rights and responsibilities.

The Department of Communities is responsible for implementing this plan, in conjunction with the Gold Coast City Council and other State Government departments. Making Schoolies Week as safe as possible remains a major priority of the government and the efforts of all participants, including young people, local residents, parents, accommodation providers, and tourism operators resulted in an improved and largely incident-free 2003 Schoolies Week event.

In planning for Schoolies Week 2003, the concerns of local residents were taken into account and, as a result, 285 police were deployed, which was approximately double the number deployed during the 2002 event. An additional eleven Liquor Licensing staff were on patrol from late afternoon until 6am. Increased and more advanced security measures were designed to provide a safer environment on the beach in front of the stages and at each diversionary activity. The increased security is in line with the Commonwealth Government's *National Safety Guidelines for Public Events*.

The petition calls for the banning of Schoolies Week. However, this is not feasible as young school leavers will continue to come to the Gold Coast to celebrate, regardless of whether organised diversionary activities are organised or additional safety and security measures are in place.

Planning for Schoolies Week 2004 is well underway and again the emphasis will be on making the event as safe as possible, and minimising negative impacts on local residents. Queensland Police will provide high visibility during Schoolies Week and once again Liquor Licensing staff will ensure the compliance of nightclubs, and police under-age drinking.

The Department of Communities will ensure that local residents and businesses are kept well informed about all aspects of Schoolies Week 2004, and residents will have the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions to ensure a safe and well-managed event.

Gold Coast Nightclubs

Issues regarding Gold Coast nightclubs are a matter for the Liquor Licensing Division of the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development.

I am advised that action has recently been taken by the Chief Executive Officer of that department in relation to late trading approvals in the Gold Coast region. This action resulted from incidents recorded by the Queensland Police Service and Gold Coast City Council. The imposition of a patron lock out after 3am for late trading venues, and the refusal to renew 5am extended trading permits for four venues is currently subject to an appeal to the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal by venue operators. Recorded incidents and associated management practices will shortly be reviewed by the Tribunal, which is the appropriate review body under the *Liquor Act 1992*.

Indy

The annual Lexmark Indy 300 event is promoted as a family event. Event organisers seek to attract spectators not only from the corporate sector, but also family groups. The event has been conducted since 1991 with full support from the Gold Coast City Council, Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce and the broader Gold Coast community.

The 2003 Indy generated more than \$50 million to the Queensland economy with significant benefits delivered to the Gold Coast community. The Queensland Government will ensure the 2004 Indy is again well-managed and provides ongoing benefits to the Gold Coast.

I thank the petitioners for raising these matters with the House and welcome their continuing interest in, and contribution to, the achievement of safe and well-managed events on the Gold Coast.

If further information is required, please contact Ms Liz Pommer, Principal Project Officer, Schoolies on (07) 3872 0762 or email Liz.Pommer@qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Warren Pitt MP
Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors