

Compensation Act have been retained as much as possible and have only been amended to comply with current drafting practice.

National harmonisation of occupational health and safety laws has been on the agenda for over 20 years. These bills represent a culmination of many years of multilateral and tripartite engagement and discussion between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, business, union, and employer groups. Compromise was made by all parties involved to ensure the overall objective of enacting workable and effective harmonised laws. It is a credit to all involved that this has been achieved. Overall, these bills will benefit the Territory as a whole.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bills to honourable members. I table copies of the explanatory statements.

Debate adjourned.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION (ELECTION) BILL (Serial 178)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr HENDERSON (Chief Minister): Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to provide for the machinery for holding the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention to be held in April 2012 and meeting again in 2013, and to take the next step towards statehood for the Territory.

Statehood may be achieved by either of two ways. Section 121 of the Australian Constitution permits the Commonwealth parliament to admit a new state, and it may do so on terms and conditions including as to representation in the federal parliament, as it sees fit. Alternatively, a national referendum may be held to amend the Australian Constitution to provide for a seventh state of Australia.

Importantly, the Commonwealth government has indicated that, in principle, it would support the Territory becoming a state provided the Territory government provides the Commonwealth with a clearly developed proposal for statehood based on sound financial, legal, and social foundation which demonstrates the proposal for statehood is based on broad consultation with, and support from, Territory residents.

The preparation of the proposed constitution of the new state is crucial to that process. This constitution will provide for the blueprint for the Territory, should it become a state. What that

blueprint will look like is a matter to be determined by the elected delegates at the Constitutional Convention, in consultation with the wider Territory community.

One might ask why there is a need for a bill, or an election for that matter, for the Constitutional Convention. Some of the answers are found in the history of the movement towards statehood for the Territory. Members might recall in 1998, in a Territory referendum, 51.3% of voting Territorians rejected the statehood model put to them. The convention leading up to that referendum comprised 53 appointed delegates, of whom 26 were elected by nominated organisations. Evaluation of that referendum and the process leading up to it pointed towards the need for a more consultative and community-focused future statehood program.

Madam Speaker, on 23 February of this year, you presented to this Assembly the final report and recommendations of the Northern Territory Statehood Steering Committee. That steering committee was formed in 2005 and, between 2005 and 2010, it engaged in education and consultation with the Territory's community about statehood and, in 2010, 50 forums across the Territory involving almost 900 Territorians. The steering committee has now been succeeded by the Northern Territory Constitutional Convention Committee.

The steering committee noted in that report that the 2011 program for statehood should not repeat the mistakes of the 1998 referendum; namely, that the future process should include democratically-elected delegates to the Constitutional Convention. To that end, the steering committee made a number of specific recommendations including that:

- an election process for delegates should take place with all necessary promotion and support, so as to inform Territorians how to become involved well ahead of the convention; and
- the election process should allow pre-enrolled 16-year-old Territorians the ability to vote and to nominate to be candidates for election as delegates to the convention.

This bill provides for the machinery to support the election of candidates who will act as representatives of the Territory community in preparing the blueprint for the future state. I now turn to details of the bill.

The key components of the election are: