



Speech by

# Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 22 October 1998

## APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL

### Committee (Cognate Debate)

### Estimates Committee E

### Report

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (2.40 p.m.): I am very disappointed with the rubbery answers and lack of detail provided by the Health Minister in regard to the Budget. Today in Parliament, Health Minister Wendy Edmond has been caught out. She has been forced to admit that her claims of a 36,000 hidden elective surgery list are false and misleading. The Minister has artificially inflated elective surgery waiting lists by including patients with mental illnesses, skin rashes and diabetes. The fact is that many of those people do not require surgery and will never be placed on an elective surgery waiting list. I have also received advice from medical staff that many of those patients will wait less than 30 days to see a specialist.

Since releasing elective surgery figures in July this year, Ms Edmond has claimed that elective surgery waiting lists will increase under Labor. It is an absolute disgrace that Health Minister Edmond has used patients with diabetes and mental illnesses to increase elective surgery lists. Next the Health Minister will remove all of the mental health and medical patients from the waiting lists and will claim that they have had their operations! Ms Edmond must come clean and release the details of where the 36,000 patients are located, what specialities they include and how long they have been waiting.

After making claims about a hidden elective surgery waiting list, the Minister is now trying to claim that she does not have a departmental report to back up her own figures. How rubbery can she get? She has been asked to table it and she has refused. She cannot back up the statements that she makes in the media through her press releases.

To take another example—the district health reports—we do not know how much has been spent in all of the districts because the Minister has not had the accountability or the credibility to table that information in this Parliament. At no time did she respond to the committee's request for that information. She has treated it with contempt. No details have been released about the actual amounts that are being spent in all of the districts in Queensland. The Minister has refused to do that.

At the end of day, the people want to see this Minister getting on with the job of managing the health system, rather than making excuses as to why waiting lists will get worse under her reign. During the Estimates hearing, the Health Minister said that she was pleased to see that waiting lists were going to grow. That is staggering. What sort of a Health Minister will say that he or she is pleased to see waiting lists about to grow? It is about time that the Minister set some targets and started planning, rather than looking for excuses as to why she is not putting any effort into improving the situation with waiting lists.

Under the coalition Government, Queensland went from having the worst waiting times in Australia to the best waiting times for Category 1 and Category 2 surgery, that is, urgent and semi-urgent surgery. The real number of people receiving surgery increased, with something like an extra 13,000 people receiving their operations. However, that does not mean that the task is over. Under the coalition, the Surgery on Time Program was to be expanded to further hospitals and we had targets for reducing waiting times for Category 3 surgery—non-urgent surgery. However, this Minister has not announced any targets. She has only made excuses and, further, she has rubbed salt into the wounds

of the people who are waiting legitimately to get into hospitals, particularly for Category 3 surgery, by telling them that she is pleased to see that waiting lists are going to grow. That is just not acceptable to the Opposition.

The Beattie Government claimed that it was going to hurry up capital works, but we have seen a slowing down of capital works in the hospital redevelopment program. Approximately \$40m less is being spent in the Brisbane area alone. Vindictiveness came to the fore when the Government slashed about \$10m from this year's capital works programs on the Sunshine Coast. In Cairns—and this is interesting—the Minister claimed that there was a \$17.9m increase in funding for the Cairns Base Hospital redevelopment, but strangely enough she forgot to include that in the Budget papers under the total estimated cost of the redevelopment, which was increased by only \$4.6m. That was the only hospital redevelopment program in the capital works list where the Minister did not outline the full cost of the project. In fact, according to the document, the funding was only increased by about \$4.5m. That is another example that shows that the Minister is not up to the task. She cannot get it right on capital works. She is slowing down redevelopment programs in Brisbane and telling the people that she is pleased that they will have to wait longer for surgery.

Turning to the situation with the Robina and Noosa hospitals, one would think that an organisation such as the Mater Hospital, which is working under contract to Queensland Health, must have been doing something right because it is exactly the same situation: they have been delivering quality health care with public hospital beds to the public, but through a non-Government provider. That is what we had intended with the Noosa and Robina hospitals.

Time expired.

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