



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 18 November 1998

MINISTER FOR EDUCATION

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.49 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise tonight to support the coalition's motion moved by the shadow Minister, because the administration of Education Queensland by the member for Murrumba has been nothing short of atrocious. I suspect that some would say that I am being kind to the Minister. One has only to look at his handling of the offer of compensation to Sellars Holdings for the acquisition of the concrete batching plant adjacent to the Maleny State High School to see the inept manner in which the Minister manages his portfolio.

This sorry saga started on 4 September 1998 when the Education Minister, along with the member for Nicklin, Mr Wellington, visited Maleny and took all of the glory regarding the \$700,000 announcement. This occasion was a fairly friendly affair; there was a lot of backslapping and self-congratulations between the two and then they issued a joint press release. As one local said, the two could not be separated. The Sunshine Coast Daily on 5 September 1998 said—

"The funding pledges started in earnest yesterday with Education Minister Dean Wells promising almost \$700,000 to rid Maleny State High School of problems created by a concrete plant on adjacent land. The plant will be removed by June with the site to be used to expand the school."

That is a rather interesting article in the Sunshine Coast Daily of 5 September 1998.

However, here in this Parliament during question time on 18 September 1998 the ALP Minister had his mate on the Sunshine Coast, the supposedly Independent member for Nicklin, ask a disgraceful dorothy dixer in relation to the compensation paid to Sellars Holdings for the acquisition. In that question the member for Nicklin and, by association, his conspirator, the Minister, attempted to intimate that the coalition Government had been involved in some underhanded or improper deal in arriving at a compensation agreement over the land in question. If this issue was not such an important one to the Maleny school community, one would have seen the humour of this inexcusable mistake made in the question. The member for Nicklin stated—

"... with the agreement being reached on 29 June 1998, the very day that the coalition lost Government?"

As it was the decision of Mr Wellington that changed the Government here in Queensland, I would have thought that not only would he have remembered the date on which the coalition Government resigned from office but also the author of the question would have, too. Just for the honourable member's information, I point out that it was during a press conference on 25 June 1998 that he announced that he would be supporting the ALP to form a minority Labor Party Government in Queensland, which saw Mr Beattie and Mr Elder sworn in on 26 June 1998 and hence form a Government.

During his response to the dorothy dixer, the Minister said that he only became aware of the land acquisition on 6 August 1998 when he signed an Executive Council minute requesting approval to expend the necessary funds. This was a month before the Minister and Mr Wellington made the public announcement and a full six weeks before the infamous dorothy dixer, yet the Minister went on to say in his response that he became aware that the school community has supposedly not been consulted about the acquisition.

This brings a troubling question to mind: what financial and administrative standards has the Minister implemented in his department which would have a Minister signing approval for the expenditure of \$700,000 of taxpayers' money without knowing all the details for the expenditure and any associated issues? However, this is probably just another example of the management or, should I say, mismanagement that follows the Minister from portfolio to portfolio.

In closing, I say that the Minister has shown total incompetence in the management of his department and, in addressing this debacle, the Minister will probably use a fall-back statement as quoted in the Sunshine Coast Daily on Saturday, 5 September 1998, as follows—

"I just made a blunder at one point ... as I often do in Parliament."

Mr Wells: At least I'm honest about it.

Miss SIMPSON: How many other blunders has the Minister made? We have already heard a number of others tonight. We have heard about the improper influence being exerted in regard to the matter of the Kimberley College.

Mr WELLS: I rise to a point of order. That remark is offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Miss SIMPSON: I will withdraw whatever remark the Minister finds offensive. There has also been a slowdown in the local area network—a slashing of \$20m down to \$13m under this Government. So we have a situation in which——

Time expired.
