



Speech by

**Hon. R. SCHWARTEN**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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Hansard 22 October 1998

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Historic Bricks, West End Public Housing Project**

**Hon. R. E. SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton— ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing) (9.48 a.m.), by leave: Last Friday, the Courier-Mail carried a story quoting a Criminal Justice Commission spokesman saying that there appeared to be no basis for suspecting any misconduct in the disposal of historic bricks originally meant to be used in a Housing Department project at West End. I am pleased to inform the House that yesterday, almost a week after the Courier-Mail story, I received official advice from the CJC to that effect. This advice should put an end to the Opposition's efforts to imply that I as Minister for Public Works and Housing was somehow to blame or had overseen or approved a transaction that was less than honest. The Opposition took this approach despite the fact that the bricks were advertised for sale and sold in early 1997 over a period spanning the time in office of two Liberal Ministers.

Honourable members would be aware that the issue of the missing bricks first arose publicly when the member for Mooloolah scored an own-goal by asking questions at the Estimates hearings that only embarrassed his own party and two former Liberal Ministers. Not even tougher gun laws could prevent the member for Mooloolah from shooting himself in both feet and wounding two of his colleagues in the process.

Last week's Courier-Mail article carried comments attributed to the Liberal Leader, who was the Minister for Public Works and Housing at the time the bricks were sold. His advice to me was that I should instruct my department to find a way to get them back. That is the sort of hands-off, do-nothing attitude that caused this problem in the first place. But it is typical of the approach of the former Minister. It is no wonder, coincidentally, that when he held this portfolio, in his department he was nicknamed "Brick". And they still refer to him that way.

I became aware of the sale of the bricks only a few weeks before the Estimates hearings and had been trying to secure their return. Let me say that I did not take the Liberal Leader's advice. I did not leave it to my department. Yesterday, after receiving the CJC letter, I rang the person who bought the bricks. Today, I am pleased to announce that we agreed that my department would buy enough of the bricks to enable them to be incorporated into the West End public housing project, as promised to the Brisbane City Council and local residents.

I have never publicly mentioned the name of the person concerned, believing that he and his family were being dragged unfairly into the spotlight by Opposition point scoring. I do not intend to deviate from that practice. But I do call on the member for Mooloolah and the Liberal Leader to make a full and public apology for the distress that their cheap and misguided stunt has caused to the person concerned and his family.

**Mr LAMING:** I rise to a point of order. That comment is untrue and offensive and I ask it to be withdrawn.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The member has asked for those words to be withdrawn.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** If he wants me to withdraw my call for him to make an apology, I withdraw it. The reason members are sitting on the Opposition side is that they never admit it when they are wrong. They have distressed this family beyond belief with their cheap and childish stunt that backfired and embarrassed them.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! The Minister will return to his statement.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** In its response, the CJC suggested that——

**Mr LAMING:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Speaker, I ask for that comment to be withdrawn. That is not the reason that I brought up the matter.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! There is no need to debate the issue. The Minister will withdraw.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I will withdraw. The member should put away his gun.

In its response, the CJC has suggested that the Department of Public Works examine its storage and record keeping practices—systems that were in place under the previous Government that allowed this mistake to occur. I have ordered my department to do just that to ensure this incident will not be repeated.

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