



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

Hansard 21 July 1999

CHILD ABUSE; FORDE INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (6.18 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

"All words after 'this House' be deleted and insert—

applauds the establishment and report of the Forde Commission of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Government and Non-Government Institutions;

notes the Inquiry's primary recommendation for additional resources to be directed to frontline responses to child abuse;

notes the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care's commitment to table the Government's full and considered response to the Inquiry in the August sitting of Parliament, including the establishment of a mechanism to ensure independent scrutiny of the implementation of the Inquiry's recommendations; and

commends the Government for the significant work achieved to date in protecting Queensland children."

The establishment and report of the Forde Commission of Inquiry is the most significant leap forward in Queensland's child protection and youth justice systems in decades. The inquiry's report forms a blueprint that will fundamentally improve the services that we provide to our children. It is legitimate for this House to want to know how the report will be implemented and the mechanisms that will be put into place to monitor its implementation. I have already indicated that the Government's full and considered response to the inquiry recommendations will be tabled in the August sitting of Parliament. In the meantime, it is important that our response be considered carefully by Cabinet in consultation with the other relevant bodies that are affected by the report.

The Forde Commission of Inquiry was a fully and properly constituted commission of inquiry under the Commissions of Inquiry Act. It has given us 42 recommendations and we have an obligation to examine each one carefully. However, what does the motion before us tonight call for? It calls on us to establish an independent special implementation unit to further examine where necessary and implement the Forde inquiry recommendations. The motion does not talk about where such a unit would be located, to which Minister it would report, how long it should remain in existence or at what cost it would come to the taxpayer. It is an insult to the recommendations of the commissioners that the shadow Minister would seek to come in here and put forward Recommendation No. 43, which lacks rigour or any application. It is sloppy work from the laziest shadow Minister in this House.

What did the inquiry recommend that we do about implementation? Almost half of the recommendations specifically state that responsibility for implementation should fall to the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, others to the Children's Commission, others to some other agents of Government and some to the churches. Recommendation 42 specifically requires regular implementation reports to this Parliament for the next two years. It is not my department that will be implementing this report, it is our Government.

In developing our response to the inquiry, I have already given a public commitment, which I reiterate to the House this evening, that a mechanism for implementation will include external representation and will ensure independent scrutiny of the implementation process. But when I seek to

ensure the independence of this mechanism, I will not be looking for advice from the member for Indooroopilly, whose complete disregard for the notion of independence is well known. However, neither I nor the Government accept that another agency of Government needs to be established to implement the report's recommendations. The fact that the member for Indooroopilly suggests this indicates that he has missed the point of the report entirely. As the amendment notes, the real story in this report is the desperate need for resources at the front line—not like the Connolly/Ryan inquiry, where the good old boys were allowed to turn on the meter. Now the member for Indooroopilly seeks to come in and turn it on again. I am not prepared to squander one cent on the establishment of another layer of bureaucracy that will suck up precious funding.

This report gives us 42 recommendations. The proposition from the member for Indooroopilly is not one of those recommendations. As I said, there are 42 recommendations. The member for Indooroopilly seems intent on inventing new recommendations. He has bypassed completely the fact that the report of the commission of inquiry has made specific recommendations. For his benefit—if he would bother to listen—I point out that recommendations 25 to 34 go specifically to the introduction of a system of accountability for decision making by my department. I urge the member for Indooroopilly to read the report and keep up with this. It must be very galling for him. People speak of the politics of envy. I can well understand the frustration of the member for Indooroopilly. How galling it must be to be the member in this Parliament who spent more money on commissions of inquiry than ever in the past, yet he does not have one recommendation to show for it. How much it must stick in his craw that this inquiry came in on budget and actually delivered recommendations. Every inquiry that he touched fell over, came to naught and delivered nothing—not a recommendation to bless himself with. We will not be distracted or deterred from the real task. We will not lose sight of the fact that that task is to rectify the shocking neglect of past decades. We will drive those reforms regardless of the sloppy rantings of Denver the dud.
