



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000–2005

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services) (9.59 a.m.), by leave: Those of us who are parents are well aware of the importance that we all place in having safe, affordable and accessible child care for our children. Unfortunately, it has become more difficult for parents to find the quality, affordable care their children deserve. Many services are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain their viability, with many forced to close their doors. This is due to a range of factors: massive cuts in Commonwealth Government funding have left the child-care sector reeling, changes in labour market and demographic patterns, the changing needs of families and unplanned growth in some parts of the sector.

The Howard Government has ripped more than \$800m out of child care across Australia. The State Government can never replace those funds, but we can work with the industry to create a more viable, secure child-care sector. To that end, I am pleased to inform members that the Beattie Government has been actively working in partnership with the child-care industry and families to tackle these issues. Later today, I will be launching a new direction for child care in Queensland with the release of the Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan 2000-2005. This plan will take Queensland child care into the new millennium. It will aim to facilitate a modern child-care system that is flexible and responsive to the ever-changing needs of Queensland parents and families. It will aim to maintain the viability of the valuable child-care sector, which employs around 30,000 people in this State, and will allow working parents to maintain their employment knowing that their child is being cared for in a safe environment.

The Beattie Government is committed to working in partnership with this valuable industry to ensure that it has a viable future, with greater job security and quality care for our children. In order to develop the plan, more than 40 focus group meetings were held across the State, around 500 telephone interviews were held with parents, and nearly 300 written submissions were received. The child-care industry forum, established by the Beattie Government early this year, also brought together a range of stakeholders, from the child-care industry, Government departments and trade unions to help develop the plan.

The consultations raised many important issues facing service providers and families, including—

rising child care costs, which have forced some parents out of the work force;

the need for a greater range of affordable and accessible child care to meet the changing needs of families and people working non-standard hours such as shift workers;

a lack of integration between child care services and early education services;

differing regional needs;

a renewed philosophy to inform and guide policy development; and the need for a more flexible regulatory framework.

This feedback was then used to develop our plan. The plan encompasses five key goals to help create—

a strong child-care industry to improve Queensland's standard of living;

- better access to child care and early education services;
- better employment and training opportunities for child-care workers;
- better planning for the provision and location of child care services; and
- a new regulatory framework for child care in Queensland.

Proposed strategies to help reach these goals include—

- establishing a one-stop employers' and industry child care information and advisory service;
- piloting child-care service hubs, which would provide education health and information services;
- expanding mobile outreach service models;
- introducing traineeships as an entry level requirement for unqualified child-care workers, to increase the quality and retention of staff; and
- developing a new regulatory framework to enable safe, innovative, flexible service delivery.

The plan also proposes changes to the current regulations to address the changing child-care needs of parents, and tackle the rise of unregulated or "backyard" care. The Government intends to develop regulations to limit the number of children in backyard care situations and to introduce parent information campaigns to assist parents in choosing safe and suitable care for their children. The Government will be addressing this as a matter of priority.

The strategic plan is a "living" document, designed to reflect the dynamic and changing nature of Queensland, the needs of Queensland families and the child-care industry. As such, the plan will need to be reviewed regularly. Reports on achievements will need to be made and changes will be published annually.

The Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan reflects the Beattie Government's commitment to working in partnership to deliver high quality child-care services for all Queensland families. This plan aims to ensure that Queensland parents have access to the best child care in Australia, one that meets the modern needs of parents and children in the 21st century.
