



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
BEANLAND**

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

Hansard 4 March 1999

HEINER DOCUMENTS

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this House—

- (a) condemns the Goss Labor Government for destroying documents pertaining to the Heiner Inquiry and thereby covering up evidence of child abuse and paedophilia within the Queensland juvenile justice system;
- (b) direct the Beattie Labor Government to establish an independent commission of inquiry, separate from the Forde Commission of Inquiry, to investigate the destruction of these documents and the subsequent allegations of former Labor Cabinet Minister, Mr Pat Comben, on Sunday, 21 February 1999, that Goss Labor government ministers were aware these contained evidence of child abuse and paedophilia; and
- (c) calls on Ministers Mackenroth, Gibbs, Hamill, Braddy and Wells to make a full disclosure of their involvement in this matter, to this House."

The issue of the Heiner documents is one that has plagued the Labor Party for nine very long years—nine long years during which the smell of this whole affair has only become worse. However, recent claims by a former Labor member for Kedron, Mr Pat Comben, have forced the Opposition to revisit this matter in the interests of good and open government.

This motion is about accountability. It is about determining whether or not the 18 Ministers of the first Goss Labor Cabinet committed a criminal offence by shredding the Heiner documents. Most importantly, this motion is also about determining whether the members of that Cabinet destroyed evidence of child abuse and paedophilia. That is now the issue. It is about child abuse and paedophilia. It is about the contents of those documents.

This motion is certainly not a witch-hunt. It relates to an issue of paramount importance to the people of Queensland, and in particular to the victims of child abuse, who are only now—nine years later—being given the opportunity to seek justice from the people who violated their freedoms and liberties. In this respect the comments of Mr Comben cannot be ignored.

As we all know, Mr Comben is a former senior Minister of the Goss Government. He is a man with formal legal qualifications, a man of very high public standing. He stated on national television—

"In broad terms we were all made aware there was material about child abuse. That there was material which was said to be highly defamatory and it was accepted on face value that if this matter was of such concern to have got to a level of a Cabinet decision then those allegations must have had considerable merit and substance."

When a man of such standing says that on national television, action needs to be taken. These comments suggest that someone somewhere is covering up for the fact that child abusers and paedophiles were let off the hook by the Goss Labor Government. Even Mr Comben's supposed clarification raises concern. What would prompt a man of such integrity and high standing to say, "The lesson I should learn is not to be so honest, which is fairly sad"? Honest to whom?

I have stated before and I will state again that the coalition supports the establishment of the Forde commission of inquiry. That is an important inquiry and the Opposition looks forward to cooperating with the Government in the implementation of Commissioner Forde's recommendations. It

is important, however, that the matters being investigated by Commissioner Forde are kept quite separate from those matters dealt with in this motion.

The Opposition remains very firm in its opinion that the proceedings of the Forde inquiry must not be distracted by issues which do not directly relate to the elimination of child abuse in Government and non-Government institutions in Queensland. That is why this motion seeks to establish an independent commission of inquiry, separate from the Forde commission of inquiry, to determine whether child abuse and paedophilia were swept under the carpet by the decision of the Goss Labor Cabinet. That is the issue. Child abusers and paedophiles are the lowest form of life. Any Cabinet that turns a blind eye to material about this type of activity should be condemned and treated with contempt.

In Government the coalition commissioned a report by barristers Howard and Morris, QC, to determine, amongst other things, whether it was in the public interest to conduct an inquiry into this matter. In concluding their report, Messrs Howard and Morris recommended that—

"It is in the public interest of the State of Queensland that a public inquiry be conducted to investigate and report on the matters of concern which we have identified arising out of the allegations made by Mr Kevin Lindeberg and such an inquiry should be established."

It must be noted that Mr Beattie, the then Leader of the Opposition, stymied the investigation by refusing a request of the then Premier, Mr Borbidge, to provide the barristers with access to relevant Cabinet documents. This simple action prevented Messrs Howard and Morris from finalising their investigation and, more damningly, ensured that no public inquiry could be convened. The now Premier well knows it.

If the Premier is truly committed to open and accountable government, I challenge him to support this motion. I challenge him to stop actively trying to prevent the people of Queensland from finding out whether any present or former Labor Party Ministers were responsible—

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I find those remarks offensive and untrue. All of the Cabinet documents have been tabled in this Parliament. I seek for that to be withdrawn.

Mr BEANLAND: What I indicated—

Mr BEATTIE: I asked for it to be withdrawn. It is not true.

Mr BEANLAND: I withdraw. The Leader of the Labor Party refused in this House to make those documents available to Messrs Morris and Howard. He should not try to wriggle out of it. What a rort you are, you two-faced—

Mr SPEAKER: Order! That is unparliamentary. I ask the member to withdraw and apologise.

Mr BEANLAND: I withdraw and apologise. It is unfortunate that the now Premier cannot tell the truth and that he tries to mislead the people of this State. He will not get away with it. Those documents were not made available to Messrs Morris and Howard.

Mr BEATTIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. Those documents have been fully tabled in this Parliament. I find those comments offensive and untrue and I seek that they be withdrawn.

Mr BEANLAND: I withdraw. As I said, they were not made available to Messrs Howard and Morris at the time and the Premier cannot deny it. It is no wonder he is trying to weasel out of this today. They were not made available. The now Premier refused in this Parliament to make those documents available. They are the facts of life. That simple action prevented Messrs Howard and Morris from finalising that particular investigation. It is obviously now too late for the Premier to wriggle out of it.

If the Premier is truly committed to open and accountable Government, I challenge him to support this motion. I challenge him to stop actively trying to prevent the people of Queensland from finding out whether present or former Labor Party Ministers were responsible for breaking the law and covering up child abuse and paedophilia in relation to these particular documents. Of course, the former Ministers should have nothing to hide.

We are led to believe that 18 leading Labor politicians sat around a table and approved the destruction of documents that they knew to be legally sensitive, without one person asking for any details. Mr Comben's comments show that that was not the situation. Are we to believe that Cabinet was just a group of 18 faceless people? That is certainly not the case, given the words of Mr Comben. He said of the contents of these documents—

"In broad terms we were all made aware there was material about child abuse. Individual members of cabinet were increasingly concerned about whether or not the right decision had been taken."

It is also apparent from his remarks that there was a discussion about the contents of the documents after they were destroyed. I find it very hard to believe that none of these Ministers seemingly contemplated the idea of introducing retrospective legislation to protect those documents. Of course, there should have been retrospective legislation. It is easy enough now, in relation to the gaming

machine legislation and commercial transactions, to pass retrospective legislation. Labor brought a Bill before this House which contained retrospective provisions. But when it comes to child abuse—no, no retrospective legislation for that; none at all!

Why was the CJC not requested to investigate fully the contents of the documents relating to the whole matter at the John Oxley Youth Detention Centre? I am not talking about the shredding of those documents; I am talking about the contents of those documents. That is the issue here: the documents that contained evidence of child abuse and paedophilia. These are the facts of life but, once again, they have been swept under the carpet.

The CJC, which has the responsibility of investigating official misconduct and corruption, should have been investigating this matter. Any first-year law student would know that. There are a number of lawyers opposite. Three of the Ministers I mentioned are lawyers and, of course, the former Attorney-General.

Time expired.
