



Speech by

Mrs J. GAMIN

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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CHILD ABUSE; FORDE INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS

Mrs GAMIN (Burleigh—NPA) (6.47 p.m.): Commissioner Forde wrote in her foreword to the report of the commission of inquiry into abuse of children that she "took on this job to enquire into the truth". It is now our job to ensure that the truth as reported by Mrs Forde is transferred into justice for the many people who were subjected to abuse and mistreatment in Queensland institutions. It is also our job to ensure that children in institutions are never again exposed to the same kind of treatment.

There is no doubt that the Forde inquiry presented a most important and valuable opportunity for the victims of child abuse to tell their stories. These stories provoked many emotions, and it is because of the need to ensure that no more Queenslanders have to live through these nightmares that I have chosen to speak in this debate tonight.

As parliamentarians, we need to ensure that justice is delivered to the victims of child abuse in Queensland institutions. We also need to ensure that the recommendations of the Forde inquiry are taken seriously and implemented in an independent and apolitical manner. There is no question of the fact that for far too long many of the problems in Queensland institutions were overlooked and ignored by Government.

The motion moved by the member for Indooroopilly is all about ensuring that the recommendations of Commissioner Forde are implemented in a fair and independent manner. It is also about establishing a system of accountability that takes note of the interests and needs of children and families. The time has come for the people of Queensland to be assured that the Premier and Minister Bligh are committed to ensuring the full consideration and reasonable implementation of Commissioner Forde's recommendations.

This motion also seeks to ensure that political interference and expediency will not affect the protection of Queensland children. We have already witnessed the Government trying to interfere politically with this inquiry. The appointment of Mr Hans Heilpern as an assistant commissioner to this inquiry was at the outset a great let-down to those who hoped that the inquiry would be apolitical and beyond reproach. This appointment was a great let-down to those who believed that the Beattie Labor Government was serious about investigating all allegations of abuse and especially those allegations contained in the evidence collected more than 10 years ago by the Heiner inquiry. The professional and political background of Mr Heilpern has raised some very serious concerns about the appropriateness of his appointment and the real intentions of the Government. The fact that Mr Heilpern was a former director-general of a department criticised by the Wood royal commission, the fact that Mr Heilpern appears to have been sacked as a director-general and the fact that Mr Heilpern demonstrated a history of political activity and mismanagement during the term of his employment by a Queensland Government authority all point to the fact that the Beattie Labor Government has been running a dual agenda on the Forde inquiry.

These concerns highlight the need to ensure that the recommendations of the Forde inquiry are implemented independently and free from political interference. They also highlight the need to ensure there is a system of accountability that will enable a fully transparent disclosure of decision-making processes. With 42 recommendations, the Government has a massive responsibility to ensure that there is reasonable consideration given to each and every issue regardless of how difficult or sensitive it is. This responsibility should not interfere with normal decision-making processes and should not be

subject to vested interests operating within the department or Government. The only way of ensuring this scrutiny and accountability is through the independent implementation of recommendations and the inclusion of all interested parties.

The Minister needs to have the political will to tackle the issues presented and highlighted by Commissioner Forde. A failure by Minister Bligh to act in a decisive and conclusive manner would be most disappointing to most Queenslanders and particularly to those who had the courage to speak out and tell their story to the inquiry. If everything is to be done to prevent further abuse of children and to ensure justice for the victims of child abuse, the Government is going to have to make some tough decisions, and the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care is going to have to start delivering on commitments.

I urge the House to support the motion of the member for Indooroopilly. A commitment to independent implementation and a system of accountability will send a very strong signal to the community that the Government is serious about implementing Commissioner Forde's recommendations and is serious about preventing any further instances of abuse in Queensland institutions.
