



Speech by

Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard 4 March 1999

HEINER DOCUMENTS

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—IND) (6.26 p.m.): I rise to support the motion, although I have some concerns about some of the wording of it. An attempt earlier to amend it has not been successful. However, in an endeavour to clarify her perspective, I have spoken with the Minister for Family Services about the Heiner issue.

One of the things that is most characteristic of this whole issue is that it continues to arise not in a compact form but in a revealing form. Over the past four years of my involvement, more and more information has become available for consideration. The very fact that that is occurring indicates to me—and this is the only issue that is still of concern in my mind—that there will be a point in time when this issue must be put together and an independent person or an independent body must review the material and make a final decision. There must be a closure.

To achieve that result it is proposed that material will be aggregated in one specific area, that it will be examined by a person who is acceptable to all parties and that a final report will be given to allow this matter to either be laid to rest or those elements that are shown to be inappropriate can be dealt with. Unless this is done, those involved, particularly Mr Lindeberg and Mr Coyne, will never reach closure of the event that has so disrupted their lives. Over the past years Mr Kevin Lindeberg has been in contact with almost all members of this House. Indeed, he has kept in regular contact with my office. In the interest of completeness, I seek leave to table a further document relating to this matter.

Leave granted.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: This document is Mr Lindeberg's submission to the Forde inquiry. Before anyone becomes concerned that the tabling of the document may compromise the Forde inquiry, I will quote from the covering letter returned with Mr Lindeberg's submission from counsel assisting the inquiry. That letter reads—

"While I understand your very real concern to have investigated the issues surrounding disposal of evidence gathered in the Heiner inquiry, I cannot agree that the circumstances of the shredding, as opposed to the underlying allegations of mistreatment of inmates at the John Oxley Youth Centre, fall within the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry.

... whilst the Inquiry is most anxious to look at the substance of the allegations which gave rise to the Heiner Inquiry, it is not in a position to investigate the further issue of how witness statements obtained by it were disposed of.

I recognise that this means for you the frustration of being unable to ventilate the issues raised in your extensive and lucid submission; but to seek to address those issues in this Inquiry would entail an overstepping of its Terms of Reference. As you will appreciate, that is something that the Inquiry simply cannot do."

I am confident that that document will in no way compromise or impede the Forde inquiry. It has been stated here, and accurately, that the previous Government has admitted that it did not progress the matter when it had the opportunity. I commend the current Government because it has instituted investigations into child abuse, including John Oxley. It had to be done, it should have been done and it has been done. The kids are the most important people.

However, this matter, the dealing with the Heiner documents, remains like a festering sore. Unless we address it and clear the decks, it is going to remain as an impediment, not to any one side of Parliament but to all of us as parliamentarians. It goes beyond the function of this House. It goes into the function of the departments, and the very department upon which families in this State rely greatly, the Department of Families, and it affects families.

I have spoken with Mr Lindeberg. Those documents are tabled with his acknowledgment and approval. As I said, I am concerned about only one further matter, and that is the finalisation of the concerns that relate to the disposal of the documents; not to paedophilia, not to abuse in institutions but the disposal of the documentation. I think that it is in the best interests of this State to see this matter closed in an accountable, accurate and open manner. On that basis, I support a commission of inquiry.
