



Speech by

**Mr M. ROWELL**

**MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK**

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Hansard 2 December 1999

**PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE  
Backflow Prevention Programs**

**Mr ROWELL** (Hinchinbrook—NPA) (10.26 a.m.): As stated in the chairman's foreword, the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing requested the committee to inquire into the department's backflow program. The terms of reference set for the inquiry were broad so as to enable the production of an open and accountable outcome. In the initial stages of the inquiry, there was an intent to ensure that the outcome was impartial and fully reflected the actual position of the investigative process the committee carried out. As the issue had been referred by a Minister of the Crown and the media had focused on the backflow issue, it was incumbent on the committee to ensure that it provided an informed report.

The Department of Health had been placed under the spotlight with a range of controversial issues. With the complexity of procedures in health facilities, it was essential that the committee was confident that the measures implemented were sound to ensure the safety of hospital drinking water. There was an obligation on the committee to use the best endeavours to provide a comprehensive report to the public on backflow issues in hospitals. Did Queensland Health end up with an effective program? The program starting from stage 2 was to cost \$1.19m to audit all sites in the State. It was then renegotiated with BHF/PPK plus Project Services in an agreement in writing for \$205,000, which was part 1 of stage 2.

Following the audit, Project Services terminated the agreement with BHF/PPK, whose expertise was an integral part of the process up to that time. A revised sum of \$95,000 was considered for Project Services to carry out the audit on the four Health facilities to assess the need for backflow devices and requirements. To quote from the committee report presented to Parliament—

"The committee is unable to make further comment on the efficiency of other backflow works undertaken by Queensland Health."

Yet it became difficult to fully examine the background of these activities and others through the committee. It is not unreasonable with sensitive issues, such as the possible contamination of drinking water, that any doubt is removed from the installation of water conducting systems, particularly in hospitals. It may be difficult to track the course of where a sickness could have its origins. Wherever possible, it is only commonsense that prevention is the key to eliminating the pollution of water supplies. Ensuring the backflow issue in public health facilities was examined fully was a responsibility given to the Public Works Committee to inquire into.

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