



Speech by

Hon. M. FOLEY

MEMBER FOR YERONGA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Legal Aid Queensland

Hon. M. J. FOLEY (Yeronga—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for The Arts) (9.50 a.m.), by leave: Much has been said in the media recently about the crisis facing legal aid throughout Australia. This crisis is a direct result of savage Federal funding cuts. Queensland has not been immune to the Federal coalition's slash and burn mentality. Legal Aid Queensland has suffered a \$2m a year Federal funding cut, with devastating consequences, particularly for people seeking assistance for family law matters. By contrast, the Beattie Labor Government has increased the State's contribution to Legal Aid Queensland by \$5m a year over the amount received when the members opposite were in control of the Treasury. That extra funding includes a \$500,000 boost to community legal services to enable them to expand their crucial services.

It was as a direct result of the increased State funding to Legal Aid Queensland that I had the honour, during a recent visit to Cairns, to launch the integrated indigenous strategy—an initiative which aims to make a real and practical difference to the lives of victims of crime in remote indigenous communities. The development of this strategy is evidence of the Beattie Labor Government's commitment to tackle violence against women in our society and to support victims of crime. The strategy will bring relief and support to many indigenous women and their families living in remote and isolated communities. It will assist indigenous women who have been the victims of sexual assault, domestic violence and other forms of assault to gain access to specialist legal services. A focus of the strategy will be informing and educating women in remote communities about their legal rights and empowering them to use the justice system to protect themselves and their children. It is about turning back the tide of violence against women in our society.

While developing this strategy, Legal Aid Queensland found from speaking to indigenous community support service workers in far-north and central Queensland that indigenous women often had little awareness of their basic legal rights, including their rights in criminal law, such as criminal compensation; their rights in relation to dealings with police, the Government and the local community; and their rights under family law. This strategy aims to change that situation.

The \$240,000 allocated to this initiative comes from the extra \$5m a year in funding that the Beattie Labor Government is providing to Legal Aid Queensland, and I congratulate Legal Aid Queensland for its fine work in developing this strategy. In addition, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Legal Aid Queensland for gaining further recognition for its outstanding service to Queenslanders despite Federal funding cuts.

Today, I am able to inform the House that Legal Aid Queensland has just been recognised as a finalist in the Australian Quality Awards for Business Excellence. This means that Legal Aid Queensland has been recognised by leading Australian business organisations as a leading edge organisation in all areas of business performance. This award has been the result of a serious commitment to a total quality service approach to management at Legal Aid Queensland notwithstanding the financial strains caused by the Federal coalition Government's savage funding cuts.
