



Speech by

# PETER WELLINGTON

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

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## USE OF PLAIN ENGLISH IN GOVERNMENT CORRESPONDENCE

**Mr WELLINGTON** (Nicklin—IND) (5 p.m.): I move—

"That this House request all Department heads to ensure that plain English is used in all Government correspondence and that this directive apply to all consultants working for this Government."

In the program Yes, Minister, that famous bureaucrat, Sir Humphrey Appleby, answers a simple request with a 3,000-word response of mumbo jumbo. His aim is to make sure that his Minister understands nothing about the running of his department and in this he is highly successful. It appears that Sir Humphrey is a role model for the architects of some Government reports. Those reports use jargonistic and technical language that is almost impossible for a lay person to understand.

I cite the case of successful small businessman Mr Peter Briety of Yandina. Mr Briety was a member of a State Government board. He telephoned me recently in an absolute rage. He told me that he had been asked to comment on a Government document that could only be described as mumbo jumbo. In fact, Mr Briety was so incensed by the document that he resigned from his position as a member of the State Government Small Business Training Advisory Committee.

As a member of that committee, Mr Briety was asked to comment on a report from the Vocational Education and Training Public Funding Framework discussion paper. I make the point that he was asked to comment. Mr Briety found the paper impossible to understand. To illustrate that point, I quote the following extract from the discussion paper to see if honourable members share my confusion. The paper states—

"The Queensland Government has a charter to enhance economic growth through a strong commitment to job creation"—

that was from the Governor's Opening Speech of 1998—

"and therefore will be guided by principles of fiscal and social responsibility. ANTA Commission report noted that 'VET has both positive social externalities which include its role in promoting shared values, social cohesion, and the cultural and knowledge base for democratic citizenship, and in contributing to equal opportunity through access to education and positive economic externalities in its contribution to national economic development.' Allan Consulting Group 1994 pages 5 to 8."

I am happy to table that discussion paper for members to read in full if they so desire.

After trying to make some sense out of the document and failing miserably, a very angry Mr Briety wrote to VET, criticising the paper. The letter that he received from the committee stated—

"The discussion paper was not a useful means of obtaining comment from those not immersed in the system on a day to day basis."

Members should bear in mind that Mr Briety was asked to comment on the paper. It further states—

"It would have been much more fruitful had there been the opportunity to talk directly with members of the Small Business Advisory Committee. I also accept your criticism of the language of the document. In preparing the final report and actually describing the strategic priorities for VET, we have aimed to be mindful of the wider audience for the report."

I am informed that Mr Briety then spoke to a staff member of the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Committee and she told him that in order to understand the report it was necessary for Mr Briety to "speak the VET language". Yes, it is quite true: a staff member was telling Mr Briety that one has to be able to speak bureaucratic mumbo jumbo in order to understand what is going on.

After this, a very angry Mr Briety sent off his letter of resignation to the Small Business Training Advisory Committee, and wrote to me. I will read part of that letter, but first I would indicate that Mr Briety made it quite clear to me that the staff were being frank with him. He certainly does not want to see any recriminations resulting from their comments to him. His letter states—

"I am incensed that to sit on the committee one needs to learn another language. How can a concerned businessman who has much to contribute from practical experience gained over many years advise these Government boards who make the decisions influencing our industry, if we are excluded because of bureaucratic language."

This is a disgrace. Why should Mr Briety learn a new language? He already speaks and writes excellent English.

It is almost the start of a new century and we have advanced to the stage where we cannot even understand each other. We do not want our State Government boards monopolised by smart alec academics, but by people with commonsense—people such as Mr Briety who have made it in the business world and who have plenty to contribute.

There is no doubt that Mr Briety is the very best type of person to sit on that committee. He is a highly successful businessman who is well educated and articulate. Mr Briety is the owner and operator of the Spirit House Restaurant and Cooking School in Yandina. He won the American Express award for the best restaurant in 1998 and the GIO Excellence in Small Business award for medium-sized businesses in the hospitality industry. The cooking school is fast becoming famous throughout this State and nationally. The private sector and industry use it. Chefs and apprentices from leading hotels, such as the Hyatt International and the Twin Waters Novotel group, are trained in Asian cuisine there and the two restaurants owned and operated by Mr Briety employ more than 40 people and train their own staff.

This is a very serious matter. There is no use in producing reports and documents that lay people cannot understand. That is the height of arrogance, to say the least. Those types of documents have only one purpose, and that is to confuse. In the case of technical reports, the language should still be easily understood by everyone, otherwise the only people to understand such reports will be fellow technicians. Reports must be reader friendly with short sentences and simple language that everyone can understand. To do otherwise is both arrogant and contemptible. I commend the motion to the House.

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