



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 25 May 1999

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT BILL

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.10 a.m.): I move—

"That the Bill be now read a second time."

Honourable members opposite, particularly the honourable member for Brisbane Central, will recognise this Bill; he introduced it. He may even recognise elements of the fine speech he made on that occasion as I introduce the 1999 version. I hope that he does. That will indicate that he has not forgotten absolutely everything he promised before he got into office and started finding excuses for not doing what he said he would do.

The time for excuses is over. The Premier has had nearly a year in office to put some real substance into his plan to bring accountability and honesty to Government. Those were his words, uttered in this Chamber—from this very seat—on 4 March last year. And he has failed to deliver. We are not surprised, but we are disappointed. He promised so much and he has delivered so little.

In the FOI area we are happy to help him and his colleagues opposite. This Bill is the Bill which the Labor Party introduced last year and for which it would have voted in the fullness of time. In his speech on 4 March last year, the honourable member for Brisbane Central said—

"This Bill amounts to a legislative promise that my Government will not sneak documents into Cabinet meetings as a device to hide them from the public. The Bill makes it clear that the Cabinet exemption from FOI does not arise when material is submitted to Cabinet for the improper purpose of avoiding FOI access."

Last year, the House was told that Labor in Government was committed to ensuring that FOI legislation is kept up to date and in accordance with the public's legitimate expectation for scrutiny of public administration in this State. Those were the then Opposition Leader's words—the Premier's own words. I am sure he will recall them. And if he has suffered an understandable attack of selective amnesia, Hansard has them on record.

His Attorney-General—the invisible member for Yeronga—helped draft this Bill in its original 1998 version. We are now informed by the non-AWU faction leader of the caucus opposite that the Attorney-General is looking into FOI reform. Why? He had all the answers last year; he said he did. So did the Premier—or so the Premier claimed. He was forever returning from the mount with tablets that he passed off as stone. It was always clear that they were far from rock solid and that the honourable member for Brisbane Central was in fact engaging in an alabaster act.

The Government knows, we on this side of the House know and the people know that this Government's feet are made of clay where freedom of information is concerned. For nearly a year this Government has engaged in government by smoke and mirrors, especially in the area of opening itself to the sort of public scrutiny about which the honourable member for Brisbane Central was forever bleating when he was on this side of the Chamber.

This Bill, which the Labor Party was fully prepared to vote yes to last year, is an opportunity for the Government finally to put its mouth where it says its conscience is. It promised full disclosure. It presented this Bill when it was in Opposition to achieve full disclosure. It can vote on this Bill to achieve that full disclosure—the Opposition will happily accommodate the Government on the matter of

parliamentary time for debate to assist this process—and then it might have some claim on the trust of the people. I commend the Bill, which was introduced by my predecessor, the current Premier, as Labor Party policy, into this House.
