



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 25 August 1999

MINISTERIAL LEGAL EXPENSES

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (10.10 a.m.): It is clear from statements made by the Premier and the Attorney-General that there has been a secret and dramatic shift in the eligibility guidelines in respect of Ministers and members of this Parliament in regard to legal expenses. Yesterday the Premier told the Parliament that last year Cabinet endorsed guidelines for Ministers obtaining legal assistance; "we have visited those guidelines recently"; Ministers can apply for assistance if they see fit; members of the Opposition can seek to be represented and can apply; and the application goes through the Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General.

The Attorney-General then elaborated further. He said that the new principles involved an application through the Solicitor-General, the Attorney-General and the Premier; however, in the case of the Premier, Cabinet approval is required; and a similar policy applies to Parliamentary Secretaries.

There are a number of inconsistencies. Firstly, it appears as if the new guidelines for legal representation were approved last year and no announcement was made. If that is so, then new guidelines replace those that have been in place in this State for a number of decades. Under those guidelines, Cabinet approval was required and the Attorney-General was the officer responsible for making the recommendations on advice from Crown Law. It would seem from the Attorney's answer that for some reason, with the exception of the Premier, a decision to grant approval for legal assistance can be made without Cabinet approval. Further, in these cases the Premier himself has a role to play.

Why? Where are the guidelines? Why was it deemed necessary by this Government to change the guidelines and why did the Government fail to make any public statement in respect of this matter until it was questioned in this House? It is becoming increasingly obvious that it has gutted the guidelines to benefit its Labor mates.

Time expired.
