



Speech by

BILL FELDMAN

MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr FELDMAN (Caboolture—CCAQ) (8.31 p.m.): It is a pleasure to speak again on the Freedom of Information Bill 1999. Since we have not had occasion to speak to this Bill since 31 May 2000, it would be worth highlighting some of the points from where we left off last time. I note that the principal objectives of this Bill are to ensure that ministerial expense documents do not attract the Cabinet exemption from the FOI access, and also to ensure that the Cabinet exemption from the FOI access applies only for proper Cabinet purposes and not for the improper purpose of merely evading FOI access.

It is again worth noting that this Bill was introduced by the current Premier when he was the Leader of the Opposition. Good things are worth speaking of again. It was interesting to note the opening comments in the Premier's second-reading speech made while he was in Opposition. He stated—

"Labor will not wait until it is returned to power in order to start restoring some honesty and accountability to Government in Queensland. We are acting now with the Freedom of Information Amendment Bill to ensure that the National/Liberal State coalition Government cannot continue to hide ministerial expenses from public scrutiny."

It was with a wry smile that the then Leader of the Opposition introduced that Bill in the 49th Parliament. I see he still has that smile on his face. It was introduced so that Government could not hide behind the Cabinet process under the Westminster system to deter people from making inquiries that should be made with respect to good governance. When the coalition introduced this Bill, I am sure that its intent was exactly the same as the intent behind the original Bill, which was to bring back some honesty and accountability to Government.

During the previous debate on this Bill, I touched on some matters relating to Heiner and Governments using that Cabinet process to hide and inevitably destroy documents that should see the light of day and come under public scrutiny. It is the function of the Parliament to ensure that proper freedom of information legislation is in place so that Governments cannot hide from their responsibilities to bring these matters out into the light so that the public can have their concerns addressed and see every piece of evidence that they have a right and an entitlement to see. In the Heiner case, such a process would have produced an inquiry into child abuse a lot earlier. It is a shame that this legislation was not in place in 1989 and 1990, when those matters were brought to Cabinet and it chose to disregard the proper process and not let those matters see the light of day in the public interest. This Government can now be forced into a position of accountability with respect to—

Time expired.
