



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
BEANLAND**

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPIILLY

Hansard 18 July 2000

DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (11.51 a.m.): When the Government raises the expectations of people, they expect it to meet those expectations. However, this can't do Beattie Labor Government simply raises people's expectations and walks away from its commitments. The Forde inquiry recommendation that the Beattie Government should provide some \$103m in additional funding for families and children was never met, even though the Government stated that it was adopting the recommendation. The Government has simply ignored it. Last year only \$10m was allocated to this area from taxpayers' funds.

Last year we saw a smoke and mirrors exercise whereby 48 temporary staff were replaced with 48 permanent staff and 22 additional permanent staff to make up the Government's total of 70. There were not really 70 additional staff appointed last financial year. In fact, only an additional 22 were appointed. That was an example of the smoke and mirrors one has come to expect from this Government. It raises people's expectations, but it does not deliver any substance. Later today, the Budget will be delivered. The Government will attempt to influence people's perceptions of it by laughing off the truth.

The child protection legislation is a striking example of the Government attempting to influence people's perceptions. The legislation, put into place by the Government over the past few months, places legal requirements on public servants, who can face prosecution for failure to perform their duties. As I said, this is a striking example. And that is exactly what has happened. Because of the additional stress and pressure placed upon them through the additional case workload it generates, public servants have gone on strike over this legislation. Public servants had expected to receive additional resources commensurate with the further legal requirements and case workload imposed by this legislation. However, that has not happened. Whatever funds are allocated today will again fall well short of the perception the Government created when it said that it had adopted that recommendation of the Forde inquiry. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is clear that the Government has failed in this area in a number of very important respects, and most importantly in respect of providing resources. The Government is creating the impression that it is passing legislation and doing things. But without the staffing and other resources to back up a course of action, it all comes to nothing. That is exactly what is occurring in the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. Thousands upon thousands of complaints are being lodged right across Queensland, but the question is: how many of those complaints are being followed up in detail and in what manner are they being followed up? I dare say that only a small proportion of those complaints is being followed up, because the resources are not in place to enable them to be followed up in the manner required. The Forde inquiry was held because of the Government's failure to pursue the shredding of the Heiner documents and the child abuse that went on, about which we are now hearing.

The member for Cairns issued a challenge to me in relation to the activities of the department's office in Cairns. The member suggested that I indicated that the Opposition does not support having a district office in Cairns. We certainly do. I am not sure what her comments were all about. However, some weeks ago in this House I said that we had heard nothing from the member for Cairns about the

fact that four youth workers had been sacked in that area but the Government had been able to find money to fund a regional director's position. Nothing at all was mentioned about the four sacked workers at the coalface, who were assisting indigenous people and others in that area.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! I note the presence in the public gallery of students from the Palmwoods State School, in the electorate of Nicklin. I welcome them to the Parliament.

Mr BEANLAND: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I join with you.

As I said, four youth workers were sacked. They were assisting not only in respect of probation and immediate release orders given by magistrates and courts but were also following up with the case load and ensuring that those young people were able to spend their time on probation or release orders meaningfully so that they would be able to re-enter mainstream society having overcome their problems and antisocial behaviour. We have heard not one word about them in spite of two attempts by the member for Cairns to denigrate us by suggesting that we are opposed to having a director in Cairns. That is certainly not the case.

I expected to hear something from the honourable member for Cairns about the cutback in youth workers, but not one word has been said about that. The service is very important to the people of Cairns and the surrounding areas, such as Yarrabah and areas further north. All of those areas are covered by this office, yet we have not heard a word of support from the member for Cairns. There is no money for youth workers, but there was sufficient money to fund a director position. That was the point I was making. We are not opposed to having a district office in the area. It is serving a worthy cause and I am sure it is pursuing the requirements of the legislation and carrying out its wide and varied responsibilities in far-north Queensland well. It covers not only Cairns and the district but also areas throughout the cape—a significant part of this State that is several times the size of the State of Victoria.

I turn now to a couple of other matters. It has now been eight months since this matter was first raised with the Attorney-General and still nothing has been done. I refer to the minor amendment that the Government needs to make to the Criminal Code of Queensland so that young teenage girls will no longer be able to get away with prostituting themselves on the streets of the towns and cities of Queensland. This amendment would prevent their further commercial sexual exploitation not only through prostitution and pornography but also through adult entertainment venues offering lap dancing. The new legislation that came into effect on 1 July will not change this situation. Adults are able to get around the law and employ teenagers by claiming to have thought they were dealing with someone who was at least 16 years of age.

To change that requires only a small amendment and it ought to happen. It has not happened. Eight months ago, the Minister for Families wrote to the Attorney-General—and I have the letter in the House. I have raised the matter in this Chamber and still nothing has occurred in relation to that terribly important matter. It is time that we got very serious about the opportunities for adolescent girls to enter into prostitution. The new laws in no way will overcome that problem. Of course, parents feel totally disempowered on this issue. If we look across this broad portfolio of Families, Youth and Community Care and Disability Services, we see that there are other problems from which, again, this Government walks away and uses smokescreens.

Recently the issue of the hostel industry blew up. This Government, firstly under former Minister Burns back in December 1990, raised these issues. Minister Burns got a lot of publicity about it. Minister McElligott, the then Minister for Health, raised it in May of 1990 also, and several times through the early nineties this issue was raised by various other Labor Ministers. The other day the Government said, "We do not need an inquiry. We will set up a task force. We know what the issues are." If the Government knows what the issues are, where is the report from that task force? Some four weeks or more have now passed, nothing has come forward and the problems in relation to the need to lift the standards in hostels still exist. This is particularly concerning because many people who live in hostels have disabilities.

But we have not heard anything from the Government. No doubt the three Ministers involved hope that the whole issue will again be swept under the carpet, as they have managed to do in the past. It is no good simply saying that the Hostel Industry Development Unit has been looking at it. That was set up by the Borbidge/Sheldon Government, and that was over two and a half years ago. There need to be standards, and proper checks need to be carried out to ensure that those standards are met.

Time expired.
