



Speech by
**Mr DENVER
BEANLAND**

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

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APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]; APPROPRIATION [PARLIAMENT] BILL [No. 2]

Mr BEANLAND (Indooroopilly—LP) (2.30 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Appropriation Bills, I want to touch briefly on two or three issues. First of all, I refer to the report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, otherwise known as the Forde inquiry. That was an important inquiry which had major ramifications. In establishing the inquiry the Government built up many expectations. Raising expectations creates a demand that those expectations be met. This side of the Chamber cautioned about building up too many expectations, because one has to tread carefully in relation to this issue.

Appropriate support services need to be put in place to ensure that once issues are brought up—in many cases, they are nightmares for many former residents—there are appropriate support services to meet those requirements. Expectations regarding the Forde inquiry were built up, but unfortunately according to many former residents of institutions those expectations have not been met. Sufficient support services have not been put in place. It needs to be stressed that one has to exercise a great deal of care when reawakening the abuse people have suffered. People live day to day knowing what happened to them, but once they begin to talk openly about their experiences before an inquiry there needs to be an appropriate support structure.

The Government indicated that it would accept all but one of the 42 recommendations of the Forde inquiry. However, that has not occurred. In fact, the Government has not met the recommendation in relation to funding the inquiry recommendations. Far from it. I turn to the report to the Parliament by the Forde Implementation Monitoring Committee dated September this year. The committee made very scathing comments in that report. We need to remember that this is the Government's own committee. It was not a committee set up by anybody other than the Government, yet the Government's own committee has been most scathing in relation to funding. The report states—

"Current projections indicate that even after the full flow through of the 'Progressing Forde' funds in 2002-03, Queensland will only be funding at 52% of the standardised expenditure. On current projections an extra \$32.53 per capita would be required to bring Queensland expenditure on family and child welfare in line with the costs to deliver a nationally comparable standard level of service. This is now equivalent to \$113 million."

The Government is a long way short of that amount indeed. Whilst the Government might say it has met all but one recommendation—the one it has not met deals with placing juveniles in justice detention centres—it is quite obvious that the implementation committee says that this commitment has not been met by the Government. It has not met this recommendation at all. Here is yet another recommendation not met by the Government in relation to this inquiry.

Page 16 of the report refers to recommendations 18, 24, 34 and 35. I turn first to recommendation 18. It is worth noting that under that recommendation the department has a legislatively imposed responsibility to collect information relating to the abuse of children and young people in residential care facilities and juvenile detention centres. Again, progress to date is very abysmal indeed. The report mentions the collecting and publishing, or helping collect and publish, information and statistics about harm to children. Whilst that is contained within the Child Protection Act 1999, the report states—

"The Committee considers this section to be a general power and believes that it does not meet the intent of the recommendation for FYCCQ to be legislatively mandated to collect information regarding the abuse of children and young people in residential care facilities and juvenile detention centres and out-of-home care."

It goes on at length in this regard. It states further—

"The Committee believes that the information should be published in each annual report of FYCCQ."

We again see that a recommendation has not been met by the Government, even though it has been well over 12 months since the Government indicated it would support all but one recommendation. This report is dated September of this year.

I will move to another section of the report, because every section of this report is scathing in its attack. It quite clearly highlights the fact that the Government has a lack of basic information, amongst other things, in relation to the implementation of this report. Without knowledge and information, it is obvious that there will be great difficulty in implementing the report itself. The Government should appreciate, as the Forde Implementation Monitoring Committee does, that this is a basic requirement of the recommendations. Recommendation 24 is that the department develop and implement an information system that records individual complaints and trends and institutional abuse. The report states—

"The Committee regards the implementation of this recommendation as a priority. It recommends that FYCCQ and the Children's Commission provide to the Committee by the end of 2000 a comprehensive framework that will articulate the manner in which complaints are recorded, investigated, responded to and trends reported. The Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of changes to give effect to this recommendation."

I will have more to say shortly about the way in which the department handles complaints it receives about child abuse. I raised that matter during the Estimates committee and there has been more media attention given to the issue in recent times.

Continuing with the issue of complaints and grievances, the Minister was given another hurry up in yet another section of the report. Recommendation 34 covers a range of matters requiring the department to develop and implement policies which ensure a range of easily accessible, confidential complaints mechanisms for children and a range of other issues of a like manner. The report states—

"The Committee believes that the creation of a comprehensive and flexible framework for complaints and grievances available to children and young people is a core recommendation of the Forde Inquiry and believes that implementation must occur this year. It will continue to monitor the implementation of changes to give effect to this recommendation."

Again, whilst there are things in the pipeline, that is some distance away. Whether they meet the requirements of the recommendations, only time will tell.

Out of the 42 recommendations, it is fair to say that the committee is scathing of a large number of them. I again stress that this is the Government's own committee. It is not a committee of the Parliament. It is not a committee set up by the Opposition. This committee was set up by the Government itself to monitor the implementation of the Forde inquiry recommendations. There are a whole range of matters in relation to recommendation 35 to be put in place by December 2000. This has not occurred to date. The report states—

"Again the Committee is of the opinion that the implementation of this recommendation is of crucial importance to ensure prevention of the problems documented in the Forde inquiry. The Committee believes that the implementation of this recommendation in the near future (by the end of 2000 at the latest) must be given priority. The Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of strategies to fulfil this recommendation and has requested that copies of policies or procedures be provided to the Committee as they are developed."

And so it goes on.

Recommendation 23 is covered on page 29 of the report. This recommendation is that the department establish a short-term residential facility to enable proper and comprehensive assessments when children are first admitted to care. The report states—

"The Committee strongly believe that every child or young person admitted to care has the need for an individual case plan and ongoing assessment of that case plan. The Committee will continue to monitor the activities to implement this recommendation."

That is yet another recommendation that has not been implemented at all.

I raise these matter because I have been getting more and more calls and letters from people who are concerned because the recommendations are simply not being implemented. The Government may say that they are, but as we know it is all about perceptions with the Government.

This can't do Government has not implemented these recommendations. Far from it! The more time the Government spends looking at these issues the less likely it is to put in practice many of the recommendations. It hopes that time will dim the memory in relation to these matters.

There are more pages of recommendations. Recommendation 41 states—

"That the Department develop transitional programs to prepare young people in the care of the State for independent living and help them to make the transition by providing assistance to gain employment, education and housing."

The committee report states—

"The Committee recognises this as an important area and will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the strategies and provide a detailed evaluation of them in its second report."

We see these scathing comments being made time and time again, and so the report goes on. It deals with issues of funding. There was grave criticism in relation to the setting up of the trust fund to provide support services and counselling services for many of these former wards—people who had been in these institutions.

Whilst the Government talks about these matters, the recommendations are simply not being implemented according to the Government's own implementation unit. The chronicle of the Government's incompetence seems endless. Individually, these issues should embarrass the Government. It seems to want to make so much out of this. This can't do Government, a Government of perceptions and rhetoric, is certainly a Government of non-delivery.

Even worse are the personal tragedies being lived out by people who were given false hope by the Government when it set up the Forde inquiry and made promises about setting things right. These people get on the phone, crying—that is understandable—because the counselling and support services they need are not available. Many of these people have become desperate. There are reports of people taking their own lives.

The situation is becoming more desperate by the day, and there is a need for the Government to address some of these issues if it is serious. Issues were raised in this report and the Government made certain commitments. The report of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions was presented to this Parliament in August 1999. More than 12 months later the Implementation Monitoring Committee highlighted the fact that many of these strategies have not been put in place and that commitments have not been honoured. Many people faced abhorrent abuse over time in these institutions, and they believed in the rhetoric of the Government. Now they find that promises have not been fulfilled. Many of the comments they are making are most scathing indeed.

A matter that flows from this is the child protection reform strategy. I will refer to some of the issues we have seen in the media of late. During the Estimates committee hearings I raised the issue of reports of suspected child abuse and neglect. In relation to complaints that were being phoned in, I asked whether there was follow-up and exactly what was occurring. Certain assurances were given by the Minister at that time. Yet it now quite clearly appears that many of the priority 1 cases and certainly well over 200 priority 2 cases in this State have been simply written off by the Government and by the department and swept under the carpet.

It has been reported that some priority 1 cases and some 97 priority 2 cases at Ipswich were written off. These are cases with a high priority because they involve assessments that there is the prospect of real damage being done by people about whom complaints are being made—people who are allegedly committing abuse of these young people. Cases that are categorised as priority 2 involve a high risk of future significant harm. Priority 1 cases involve a high risk of immediate danger. Priority 3 cases involve a low risk of immediate danger or low risk of future significant harm.

Surely priority 1 and 2 cases must be investigated. Yet the Government is simply wiping its hands of these matters, and the Minister simply says, "An error was made", and blames the department. All too often in this area the department gets the blame for a whole range of matters that crop up from time to time. If the department is to blame for these issues, then it is up to the Minister, as the responsible person, to put in place processes and programs to deal with these situations when they arise, to ensure that they are properly followed through. That is the responsibility of the Minister.

In the September quarter alone some 97 priority 2 cases were written off in Ipswich, out of a total of over 200 priority 2 cases around the State. Clearly, one of the reasons is that departmental officers are having trouble with the heavy workload involved in these matters. If the Government does not put in place the resources it said it would to meet these requirements, then departmental officers find that they have to move on to other issues that come in. Certain cases are slipping between the cracks and are being written off.

That does not send the right message to people who are committing child abuse in the community—far from it. It says to those people that there is a chance that, even though a complaint has been made, their case will not be followed up and they will get away with it time and time again. That simply is not good enough. Abuse cases cannot be shelved—that simply cannot be defended—because it just sends the wrong message and, of course, real cases are slipping between the cracks.

The Government talks about fulfilling many of these commitments in three or four years' time. In three or four years, much more damage will have been done to Queensland's young people. The way this Government meets its commitments, those commitments will not have been met in three or four years' time anyway.

I refer to the issue of noise barriers on the Western Freeway in my electorate. This is an issue which has not yet been resolved. Whilst some work has been done in relation to noise barriers, the situation is that, unlike in many other areas of the city, these noise barriers are not high enough to combat noise. Noise is still a major concern and is a major problem for those trying to get some sleep in the wee hours of the morning, particularly in the hours between 4 and 6, when noise from heavy vehicles travelling along the freeway travels considerable distances because of the lack of background noise.

Whilst the Government has engineers looking at this problem from time to time, many of the people affected by noise lived there long before the freeway was upgraded. In fact, some of them lived there prior to the freeway even being built. There are some residents of very long standing in the area. Little has been done in recent times to resolve the noise issues. I again ask the Government to give further consideration to this problem of noise.

The noise levels currently are in the mid 60s. Unfortunately, it always seems that the threshold noise level is never met at whatever time of the day the tests are carried out. But noise levels coming from the freeway in the middle of the day, with the great deal of background noise, are vastly different from those experienced in the wee hours of the morning, when there is no background noise and noise travels a far greater distance.

There is a need to upgrade the noise barriers, to increase the height of the barriers. It is an issue that concerns a large number of my constituents living along the edge of the freeway—more so in recent times with the upgrading that has occurred and even with the upgrading of the bikeway. The placement of a bikeway along the edge of the freeway has meant that some of the vegetation has been removed and other changes have occurred which have aggravated the noise levels that emanate from the freeway.

Finally, I refer to the lack of will on the part of the Government to get on with the job of cleaning up graffiti on Government property around the city. It is quite apparent that graffiti being put on these facilities is simply not being cleaned off. I know that the railways are supposed to have a program of regularly going around cleaning graffiti, but that simply is not occurring. The same applies to other Government instrumentalities. When the graffiti is finally taken off, after many weeks, it is not long before it is back again, unless the police have been fortunate enough to apprehend the offenders in the particular instance. I do think that there is a greater will needed, because one needs to ensure that graffiti is not allowed to run rampant—

Time expired.
