



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 11 April 2000

PETFORD TRAINING FARM

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.50 p.m.) This is indeed a sad debate that we are having here in the House this evening. It is not, in fact, a debate about the integrity of Geoff Guest, who is being used by the Opposition in a reprehensible manner in an attempt to score some cheap points against the members of the Beattie Government in far-north Queensland.

May I place on record again my admiration for Geoff Guest. I have known him over some many years. I think that I am one of probably very many hundreds in far-north Queensland who have recognised in the past and will in the future continue to recognise the size of this man's heart, his commitment to indigenous youth in trouble long before it was fashionable, his determination to find his own way to help these youths, his use of innovative methods long before we were examining these problems of indigenous youth and for all his efforts in those regards over so many years. For the determination still in his heart, I share with many others in far-north Queensland great respect.

It is not, however, for a Government of any persuasion as simple as finding good people in the community and then sending in cheques with no questions asked. The story, of course, in the case of the Petford Training Farm is not that simple. As fine as have been Geoff's efforts over the years, he has been required, quite properly, by Governments—by those on the other side of the House as well as this Government—to account for the Government moneys. For some good number of years the Government moneys have not been properly accounted for. That is not a criticism of Geoff Guest himself but, rather, of those around him—his board and other employees who were part of the Petford Training Farm and who, either through ignorance or for other motives, did not use Government moneys wisely.

Of course, no Government can ignore that lack of accountability and ignore complaints that come to it. I was present, in fact, at many meetings when the former Minister for Families, Naomi Wilson, herself expressed the same concerns as this Government has expressed and which have led, in the final instance, to the withdrawal of the funding for the Petford Training Farm.

Not only did the problem of accountability for funds and the complaints from members of the public arise, but the times have also changed. I frequently speak in this House about how frustrated we are in Cairns to have things so centralised in this State—run from Brisbane, done in Brisbane, and send our patients, send our kids and we send others to Brisbane for the best of services.

The times have changed also in far-north Queensland, with Aboriginal communities right through the cape saying, "No longer are we satisfied with one facility near Cairns. We want the services delivered closer to home. We want the youth who have problems identified earlier. We want the services to start earlier, before those youths become so entrenched in their behaviour and so dysfunctional that they need dramatic and very difficult methods in order for us to find a more positive outcome for them and for their futures."

The Aboriginal Coordinating Council along with others associated with Geoff Guest consulted widely around the cape, and that is the message that is still coming through loud and clear: "Yes, Minister for Families, don't take the funding away, but spend it differently now." We all give recognition to Geoff Guest for the lead that he has taken but it is time to deliver services differently.

Aboriginal communities right across the north would be very pleased, and I have heard the Minister herself say the same, if Geoff Guest in his senior years would lend his expertise in assisting us to set up many programs in many different communities.

It is important for members of the House to realise that already the department has established a resource unit with two full-time officers, not to do the work themselves but to work with an advisory committee which represents key stakeholders from communities right across the north, and that a further \$205,000 of recurrent funds have been provided for local community responses, which will be decided by the local communities.

In the end, it is not for any of us to decide whether or not Geoff Guest has been a fine human being. It is my view that he has made a significant contribution that will not be forgotten, but that the times have moved on and innovative, early intervention methods are the right and proper place for the funding from the Department of Families in order to, we hope, halt the problems for indigenous youth in far-north Queensland.
