



Speech by

Mr DOUG SLACK

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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HOSPITAL WAITING LISTS

Mr SLACK (Burnett—NPA) (6.37 p.m.): Let us look at the facts. The State coalition Government established its credentials on Health in a powerful way during the two years and two months it had in power.

Mrs Edmond interjected.

Mr SLACK: The Minister should listen. When it gained office, Labor under Goss had left the hospital system in tatters with an appalling elective surgery record. About half of all Category 1 patients were not receiving treatment on time. Category 2 patients did not fare much better. Only 58% of them were receiving treatment on time. With proper management and resources directed at the front line of health care, the coalition was quickly able to turn these wait times around. Today it should not be forgotten that, when the Borbidge Government left office, our elective surgery wait times had gone from the worst in Australia to among the best. As the member for Moggill said, 98% of urgent elective surgery patients were receiving surgery on time and 80% of Category 2s were on time. The Borbidge Government had at that time set its sights on Category 3s, which also desperately needed improving, once the urgent lists were in hand.

On the back of those dramatic health improvements we have a right to ask: what happened? The Beattie Labor Government happened. No matter how much it fudges the figures, it is clear that the Beattie Labor Government does not have even a shade of this sort of commitment to Health. It has not made any meaningful inroads into the electorate surgery waiting lists. We have had serious blow-outs in hospital budgets all around the State. There have been major increases in bureaucratic appointments to the Queensland Health head office during Labor's term in office, and the district health councils have been getting increasingly frustrated by the way this Government expects them to rubber stamp very poor and very damaging service cutbacks.

In my own area there have been resignations from the Bundaberg District Health Council—both respected community leaders with a genuine interest in health delivery in the region. They resigned out of sheer frustration last year saying that they could not sit by and watch this Government gut services to the district.

Mrs EDMOND: I rise to a point of order. That has to be corrected. He went off to be the bishop of the Northern Territory. I cannot take responsibility for that.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr SLACK: In the Burnett region, elective surgery waiting lists for Category 2 blew out from 18% to 33%, and Category 3 blew out from 20% to 45.5% from July 1999 to January 2000. Those are the facts. Only in the latest elective surgery report has there been any reduction in waiting list figures. Although Category 3 continued to deteriorate, the proportion of semi-urgent patients waiting too long were cut. That is not because they finally fixed up the terrible haemorrhage of dedicated staff and of health funds; the Category 2 reduction was the result of a new Queensland Health policy to send Bundaberg patients to Maryborough and Hervey Bay in an effort to improve the books.

Let us have a look at those books and ask exactly who is doctoring the evidence, to coin a headline from the Courier-Mail of last week? I refer again to the 49 year old disabled pensioner mentioned by the member for Maroochydore who requires surgery for a painful hernia, who last week

disputed the Queensland Health elective surgery figures. When this man tried to make an appointment for treatment, he was told that he had to queue behind others who had been waiting since October last year. The hospital staff showed him the list to prove that there were hundreds of Category 2 patients before him. How does the Labor Government reconcile that with its latest elective surgery report, which shows that there were only 11 Category 1 patients waiting for semi-urgent surgery in Bundaberg? It has no answers.

The honourable member for Bundaberg—surprise—has also written to the Health Minister admitting, "They can't both be right." If the Minister had to deal on a day-to-day basis with constituents who had had operations cancelled time and again and who are in significant pain and discomfort while they are waiting—waiting on waiting lists to get on the waiting list—she would know where the truth lies. She should just ask the Australian Medical Association Bundaberg Branch President, Dr Howard Kingston, who is a highly respected member of the medical profession in my area. He has described the Bundaberg Hospital as being significantly understaffed. He goes on to say that Bundaberg's public hospital patients were being short-changed because decisions on funding were made "based on politics and not on need". Just last month the hospital's chief surgeon was the latest senior medical officer to quit. He said—

"There was already a crisis in the provision of adequate services before I left.

All that's being done is category one (urgent) cases and emergencies."

So it is a bit rich for Queensland Health, the Minister and those only too willing to toe the line to claim that health problems in this State are non-existent.
