



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

---

Hansard 6 September 2000

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Electoral Fraud; CJC Inquiry

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (9.40 a.m.), by leave: On 15 August the Attorney-General, following consultation with me, referred the Ehrmann allegations to the Electoral Commissioner to ensure proper investigation of alleged breaches of the Electoral Act. The Attorney-General and I urged the Electoral Commissioner to take all necessary action to get to the bottom of these allegations. He subsequently referred these matters to the CJC.

I welcome the report from the CJC presented to the Speaker this morning and tabled in the Parliament and I commit my Government to cooperate fully with the inquiry and to ensure that we have the most honest and open electoral system in Australia. I give a guarantee today that my Government will not interfere with the CJC inquiry. Unlike our predecessors, we will not be striking out at the independent umpire and seeking to disrupt and derail the process of justice. Unlike my predecessor, I have sought the highest standards of probity, and that will not change today. The challenge this Government faces is similar to that faced by the Borbidge Government—that is, an open CJC inquiry. We will not nobble the CJC inquiry in the way that the Borbidge and Beanland Government nobbled the Carruthers inquiry. Queenslanders have my guarantee on that today.

It is up to the commission to decide the terms of the inquiry and whether or not there are public hearings. We will abide by the decision, whatever it is. But we support—and let me make this clear—we support open hearings to clear the air once and for all. If any members of my party are found to have transgressed, they will face the full consequences of the law. Queenslanders expect it. My Government expects it and I expect it. There will be no cover-ups. My Government will cooperate in full with this inquiry.

I also promise that I will not allow the business of Government to be put on hold while this inquiry is being held. We are going to get on with the job. My Government has demonstrated that it is here to make a difference to people's lives and it will be business as usual. This can-do Government will continue to deliver for the people of Queensland. The Borbidge Government put Government on hold and made no meaningful decisions during the whole of the Carruthers and Connolly inquiries. We have been busy in turning Queensland into the Smart State and we will not be sidetracked. More than 100 new jobs have been created every day, seven days a week, since we formed Government in June 1998 and we will continue to focus on jobs. We will continue to deliver.

It is essential that if there are recommendations that the law needs to be changed, they should be made prior to the next State election so that the next State election can be run on the new rules and new laws. Should there be serious allegations of unlawful behaviour or official misconduct by anyone in Parliament, these people will stand aside until the matter is resolved. The umpire has spoken and the Government will move quickly to ensure that the CJC's recommendations are implemented.

I call on the National and Liberal leaders to follow my example and let this inquiry proceed without political interference. The independent umpire has spoken, and the independent inquiry should be allowed to get on with its important job as expeditiously as possible without a daily diet of hysterical political carping and half-baked allegations from the Opposition. No-one is guilty until found to be so by a proper judicial process. I call on all members of this House to let the CJC's inquiry proceed without interference so that it can move to a speedy resolution, and if there are recommendations that need to be implemented in terms of the Electoral Act, then let us do it before the next State election.

My Government has nothing to hide. That is why the Attorney-General, after consultation with me, originally asked the Electoral Commissioner to investigate this matter. Queenslanders expect their Government to be honest and accountable, and to ensure that the laws of this State are upheld by all. There can be no exceptions—and nor will there be. Queenslanders, like all Australians, have over recent years increasingly despaired at the way politics is played, have increasingly despaired at our politicians, which is why they are held in low regard, and have seen all political parties tarred with the same brush.

The announcement this morning by the Criminal Justice Commission will confirm in the minds of many Queenslanders the view they have long held—that political parties do harbour a small number of people who do single-mindedly pursue their personal careers and advancement. What Queenslanders expect is that when these matters are drawn to the attention of the Government—when we have these occasional bad eggs—that Government will act, and that is exactly what we are doing; we are acting. No other Government in Queensland has been better placed to ensure that all of these allegations are rigorously evaluated and investigated, and that justice will prevail.

I am dismayed that my party, the Australian Labor Party, with its proud heritage of making life better for Australians over many decades, is the subject of such allegations. All my life in the party, including most publicly in the Queensland reform years of the seventies and eighties, has been directed at making the party's processes more inclusive and democratic, and to removing practices that I described at the time as rorts. I have had no truck with electoral fraud. I will have no truck with electoral fraud under any circumstances.

This is an honest Government. These allegations about individual members of the ALP in three specific electorates will be fully investigated. As we all know, the subjects of all these allegations took place before my Government came to office. Unlike the allegations that confronted the Borbidge Government—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! I intend to hear this statement. If I have to send members out of the Chamber while we hear it, I will do so.

**Mr BEATTIE:** As I indicated, all these allegations took place before my Government came to office. Unlike the allegations that confronted the Borbidge Government and were the subject of a similar public inquiry, no Minister, or the Cabinet, or the Government itself is the subject of these allegations. And unlike the inquiry into the Borbidge Government, its practices and Ministers, this inquiry will have a conclusion; it will have a result.

My Government, as I have indicated, is committed to electoral integrity and fairness. We are committed to ensuring that Queenslanders shall never again be denied democracy through gerrymandered electoral boundaries. As a further demonstration of my Government's determination to deliver electoral justice, State Cabinet last week adopted the unanimous all-party Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee report into issues of electoral reform arising from the 1998 State election. These reforms include continuous electoral roll updating; enabling the Electoral Commission to use data on name, address and date of birth from Government agencies, subject to privacy safeguards; and the use of driver's licence applications as enrolment applications subject to privacy safeguards.

The all-party report unanimously recommended that the Electoral Act be amended to provide for enhanced electoral roll updating by allowing the Electoral Commission of Queensland to obtain information from Government agencies. These reforms will allow the Electoral Commission to collect name, address and date of birth data to trigger further inquiries to confirm the accuracy of the electoral roll. Obviously, this amendment to the Electoral Act will reduce the opportunity for fraud with the incorrect registrations of voters.

Another measure to counter such fraud could be the proposal to require voters to provide identification when they vote. This will be considered by the parliamentary all-party committee. The Government yesterday introduced a Bill to include prominent authorisation information on how-to-vote cards to allow for appeals and to allow for appeals from the Court of Disputed Returns. This fulfils the commitment my Government made earlier this year in response to a report from the parliamentary Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. We will ensure that whatever reforms are needed will be introduced and we will have the most honest electoral system in Australia.

---