



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 6 March 2002

### MENTAL HEALTH OFFENDERS

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydoore—NPA) (12.02 p.m.): I note the minister's apology for misleading the parliament about the availability of the Mullens review on the Internet. For the record, I obtained a copy of the review last week through other sources after the minister's office refused to give us a copy because, as her staff told us, it had to go to cabinet. This was patently untrue, as the review was reported extensively in the *Courier-Mail*.

It is not to Mrs Edmond's credit how the report was released—even to journalists—with a deliberate strategy to lessen the impact of what was an embarrassing report for the minister. Minister Edmond's office played games with journalists. Some media outlets got it in full. Others were told that what they had was embargoed until the following afternoon, only to find that their trust had been let down and abused and that they were late with their story. A deliberate strategy to undermine the impact of a report which had significant criticisms of the existing minister is without doubt. After a spate of escapes of mentally ill killers from Queensland's mental health system, the Premier acted in the Health Minister's absence to do what she—

**Mr ENGLISH:** I rise to a point of order. The member is misleading the House. The report was not critical of the minister in any way, shape or form. The member is misleading the House by making that statement.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Poole): There is no point of order.

**Miss SIMPSON:** No point of order. The report is critical—

**Mr ENGLISH:** I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, it is up to you to decide whether there is a point of order, not the member for Maroochydoore.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I did say that there was no point of order.

**Miss SIMPSON:** It is not for the member to correct the Deputy Speaker, either. After a spate of escapes of mentally ill killers from Queensland's mental health system, the Premier acted in the Health Minister's absence to do what she refused to do by ordering an independent review. Health Minister Edmond was conspicuous by her absence at the height of the crisis over mental health escapees, bar a cameo appearance for a few hours before the cameras before disappearing on holiday.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is misleading the parliament. What she has said is incorrect. As the minister indicated to the parliament this morning, she was present at Wolston Park. She was also present on a number of occasions, but she was on leave at the time, which she is entitled to do. No doubt the member has holidays, too.

**Miss SIMPSON:** The minister was away for about a month. There has been a deliberate strategy here not to tell the truth about what is happening in the mental health system. We are calling for an independent monitor over the implementation of these changes because the Health Minister has been transient. She said nothing was wrong with the system. She has also tried to construe that this report is not about the current system but about the previous act. There were some significant criticisms of the existing system, not just the previous act. There are still some significant issues that arise from this report that relate to actions that the minister did not take, and I want to outline them.

I know that the minister is relying on the Premier's special political protection, but her defiance to act earlier is noted. There must be independent oversight of the process by someone from outside Queensland Health or else there will continue to be a lack of accountability in the mental health system.

I call on the Beattie government to put in place independent monitoring of the processes. If it does not do this, all that we will see from this report by Professor Mullins—who has done this with the best of intents—is that there will be no accountability, the report will be forgotten and the problems will continue.

I can outline a number of things that this review identified that were not addressed by the Mental Health Act 2000. One was the ability of victims to be notified when their attackers escaped. That was not in the Mental Health Act 2000. In fact, Minister Edmond voted against the opposition amendment and it was lost on the casting vote of the chair. Professor Mullins significantly recommended that victims be able to be notified—something Mrs Edmond previously on the parliamentary record refused to do. She even said that this would be distressing for people. But all we have said is that victims should have had this basic right. Now, if it is that this does not require legislative change, as the minister is claiming, then why did she and her department not notify Robyn Clarke when her daughter's killer, Claude John Gabriel, escaped from a Queensland mental health institution last year? The family of Janaya Clarke was first notified by the media, not the department. I still believe that the legislation should be changed in order to make the government legally responsible to notify victims if those victims have asked to be notified.

The Mullins report also criticised the liberal culture of the Health Department towards leave for mentally ill offenders. However, during the debate on the Mental Health Act, Minister Edmond voted against tightening up these provisions. The Mullins review does not go as far as stipulating that these types of patients should be escorted, but it does identify a liberal culture. This is about a culture—not just an act of parliament, but a culture with the same bureaucrats who are still in place and are still the ones that we are being asked—

Time expired.