



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 17 April 2002

CORPORATE ASSISTANCE GRANTS

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.33 p.m.): I support the opposition's motion that this House condemns the government's policy of hiding behind commercial-in-confidence provisions to keep corporate assistance grants secret and also calls on the government to provide the people of Queensland with full accountability for government departments and government owned corporations. I support the National Party's announcement of a good government policy which will ban secret deals with regard to government incentives to the private sector and overhaul the commercial-in-confidence provisions that have been abused by this government. Governments should attract businesses which are in the public interest and use incentives under careful guidelines, but those guidelines must be changed so that secrecy over government incentives is removed because taxpayers have the right to know if they are getting value for money. I do not think that the Premier knows what value for money is after today's performance when he tried to justify more than doubling the size of his departmental bureaucracy.

But the question here is whether Premier Beattie trusts the people of Queensland to make a judgment about whether these government incentives are good value for money. The answer to that question is that the Premier does not think Queenslanders can be trusted to make that assessment. This is the arrogance of a Premier who should have more faith and trust in the Queensland public and an understanding of true, accountable and democratic processes. As Ernest Titterton said, democracy cannot flourish unless people are properly informed. For people to be properly informed, they have a right to information about how government uses their money. This is the money of Queenslanders. Shouldn't they have a right to know what the government is doing with it? I have listened to members opposite who have contorted and twisted the values of secrecy, yet they are talking about suppressing information about the money that this government is taking out of the taxpayers' purse and providing to certain businesses. I think that the government has got its concepts of accountability to the public completely wrong, as I believe Queenslanders can be trusted and have a right to know this information.

There is another accountability issue which my colleagues have alluded to. How does one know if political parties in government, such as the Labor Party, are giving incentives to people who are giving donations to them? One does not. The register of donations to political parties does not show the other side of the ledger of government donations to businesses by way of incentive packages. That is kept secret. That has to change. That is bad policy. That is what we are calling on the government to change tonight.

Another area of secrecy which needs to be fixed relates to the secret bonuses and performance criteria of departmental heads and senior staff. The opposition has asked questions about how much extra this government is paying to departmental heads—the chief executive officers—in bonus payments. The Beattie government has refused to answer these questions, only revealing a lump sum of more than \$420,000. How much does the director-general of Health receive and how is his performance judged? We have seen the long waiting lists in hospitals. They are basically category 3 surgeries—the never-never list.

We have seen situations at the Cairns Hospital, the Nambour Hospital and a range of other hospitals where in accident and emergency people are waiting unacceptably long periods of time because they are finding that there are not enough doctors, nurses and funded beds to get access to timely treatment. When it comes to assessing how effectively the director-general of Health is doing his job, Queenslanders do not have the right to know the criteria that this government judges his

performance on. However, if we were to look at what is happening in hospitals, I think that the public would say that it does have a right to know, because it is not satisfied with what it is currently seeing, and that is the fault of the minister as well.

Queenslanders are not allowed to have this information about the rich bonuses going to directors-general. How much does the director-general of Families get in bonuses? What are the criteria and targets there? We currently know that there are about 3,000 children at risk awaiting assessment and that children who should have received more timely assessment and follow-up care from the department have died. But the bonuses to that departmental head are a secret, as are the performance criteria. The public—Queenslanders—do not have the right to know under this government. Then there is the issue of freedom of information. This government has brought in a regime where it did not even consult with many stakeholders, including its own departmental people who administer this area—

Time expired.