



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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FEES AND CHARGES, IDENTIFICATION IN BUDGET PAPERS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (6.38 p.m.): I rise to oppose the motion of the member for Nicklin. It is a motion no doubt with good intentions, as he and other speakers have said tonight, to improve transparency and accountability. However, I put it to the House that it is an unnecessary motion that would make work, take up further government resources and set in place yet another layer of public sector administrative jobs to no advantage for the people of Queensland.

How much transparency would be sufficient? It is the implication of honourable members opposite that we have insufficient transparency at present. In terms of government fees and charges, that is not true. There are many places where all of the changes to government fees and charges are published, not the least of these being directly to those who have to pay them. Their scrutiny is better than that by members of the opposition of the government's changes to fees and charges. They make it very plain when they think any changes we are making are unreasonable by contacting their local members, including from time to time, dare I say, opposition members, to ask the questions that should properly be asked about the reasons for the changes and to express their view when they think they are unreasonable.

During my five years in parliament I have learnt that while many people across Queensland want the government to do better, to provide more in terms of services to the people of Queensland, when it comes to reaching into their pocket to contribute more cash towards our doing that they are not so willing. All of us across the state of Queensland want more of this or that, or think that services should be delivered in a more timely fashion, quicker and closer to home than they already are; that the latest and greatest from the around the world should be on our doorstep. Yet no-one wants to pay more for that. If we were to consider whether or not the government's present ways of publishing increases in fees and charges were insufficient, we would still have to weigh the effort of doing that and the cost of doing that against delivering new services to the people of Queensland. That is why I oppose this motion.

I wish to give honourable members opposite a comparison of the Beattie government's changes to fees and charges. We have taken the policy position that where private parties obtain a clear benefit from government services they should meet the costs involved. I would have thought the other side of the House would accept that concept. It is a widely accepted concept by conservative governments as well as Labor governments.

Members opposite would be aware that fees and charges have been one of the four main areas of the review at a whole-of-government level through the Aligning Services and Priorities project. In many areas fees and charges have not been adjusted for 10 or more years, not even for the CPI. This is not good government. However, the Beattie government is not about ripping people off, which is the assertion of members opposite. I encourage members to look at the changes over the past years. The charge of the member for Tablelands of some sort of skulduggery is quite unreasonable. Bringing the charges up to date and in line with the CPI is not skulduggery; it is good money management.

Queensland has traditionally not raised as much revenue from user charges as have other states. In its latest 2003 report, the Commonwealth Grants Commission estimates that Queensland's overall revenue raising effort for user charges is now around 94 per cent to 95 per cent. A figure of 100 per cent indicates that the state is putting in an average effort at raising revenue from a source.

While this is up from previous levels, we are still not even at that average level. The Grants Commission report is a fair measure of how we are proceeding.

I put to members opposite that we are already a transparent government. The people of Queensland and members opposite have an opportunity every day to complain about any changes to the fees and charges that they might wish to complain about.