



Speech by

**Mrs D. PRATT**

**MEMBER FOR NANANGO**

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Hansard 14 May 2003

#### **MEDIA OMBUDSMAN**

**Mrs PRATT** (Nanango—Ind) (12.24 a.m.): It appears that the Premier wants to regulate the freedom of the press and bring in an ombudsman because of, in his words, 'unfair and inaccurate reporting by media organisations'. This is the same Premier who has become nationally known as the 'media tart' because of his tendency to hog the limelight. But at the first sign of a negative word, however, he goes into panic mode. He wants to crucify those very same people. After nearly six years of government, a lot of cute and catchy phrases, a budget in deficit, bad decisions by incompetent ministers and kowtowing to minority groups with no regard to the silent majority, it appears that the honeymoon is over and the media have begun to see that the Premier is just fluff and duck, blowing this way and that and ducking the hairy questions.

When the Premier and his ministers were sworn in to govern Queensland, they took an oath to act in the interests of the state regardless of any electorate or region's political bias and to govern for all Queenslanders. I want to remind the Premier of the International Federation of Journalists principles on the conduct of journalists. It states—

1. Respect for truth and for the right of the public to truth is the first duty of the journalist.
2. In pursuance of this duty, the journalist shall at all times defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and publication of news and of the right of fair comment and criticism.
3. The journalist shall report only in accordance with facts of which he or she knows the origin. The journalist shall not suppress essential information or falsify documents.

This is unlike the government. Before the Premier starts criticising others, I ask him to check his own conscience as to whether or not he has kept his oath. Many would argue that he has not. The government has not acted in the interests of all Queenslanders and the state. It has shown favour and pork-barrelling to electorates it wants to retain or win. It has denied scrutiny through commercial in confidence and FOI legislation. Now the media is starting to question and evaluate the government's actions and the Premier squirms and squeals, 'Foul!'

The media must be the people's watch-dog, as the Premier's introduction of extraordinarily high FOI costs restricts the average person from obtaining information and keeping the government honest. The revelations of the press may be painful at times, but in the interest of honest governance they are essential. I call on all government members to start delivering the open government policy this government espouses but denies us. They should take the press's comments—good or bad—as a reflection of the government's performance. Do not shoot the messenger; hear the message. The Premier has been quoted as saying that all major power blocks in a democracy should be subject to scrutiny. Well, Premier, the government is the major block to what will happen in Queensland, when it will happen, where it will happen and why it will happen.

I particularly like the Premier's quote that some journalists enjoy high public esteem. No offence to journalists, but on the latest list of respected professions journalists were two steps up from the public perception of politicians and I guess many politicians could aspire to that. It would be more in the interests of the government to lift our profile and stop attacking the only profession that has informed the public of the workings and mistakes of government. To stop that would be another nail in the coffin of democracy.

Time expired.