



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

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CHEMICAL, BIOLOGICAL AND RADIOLOGICAL EMERGENCY POWERS AMENDMENT BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.43 p.m.): I rise to support the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Emergency Powers Amendment Bill. We acknowledge that, with the new range of threats that now face us, it is necessary to have the appropriate safeguards and coordination between appropriate agencies. This is about coordinating that response. It is about ensuring that the right legislative framework is in place to support the response of our emergency services, because a number of government agencies are involved in providing that support.

It is interesting to note that two years ago during debate on the Health estimates, when I raised an issue to do with radiation safety and possible implications with terrorism, the Health Minister laughed it off and treated the question flippantly. That was extremely disappointing. With recent terrorism, the issue was very current in the media. At that time, when I raised issues to do with the appropriate regulation and monitoring of radioactive substances, the minister made some quip like, 'What do you want? Police officers chasing people with smoke detectors?'

Obviously the minister was not aware at that time of moves within her own department and other departments to coordinate the appropriate response from agencies. This legislation is part of that response, though I note on the record that I still have some concerns about the monitoring of existing regulations and control of some of those radioactive substances, which comes under the control of the Queensland Health Department.

I did just mention the unfortunately flippant response of the Health Minister a couple of years ago on that issue, but my concern is that staff operating in this area need to have the resources to ensure that this legislation and the Health Department's legislation are appropriately enforced. The legislation that is before this parliament is very much about the coordinated response. There are also the issues of what happens outside of an immediate crisis. What happens with regard to the tracking and tracing of a radioactive substance? What happens with regard to how people who are licensed to hold these substances are monitored in terms of tracking and the transport of those particular substances?

We cannot just assume that these things will automatically fall into line. There must be accountability measures. There must be some independent way of auditing and ensuring that these substances really are under appropriate control, that they are stored in places that have the highest level of security and that appropriate tracking is undertaken. Unfortunately, as we have seen, sometimes access to legal sources can be abused by those who seek to wreak terror in our community. People will look for weaknesses in that process.

I do have concerns about the lack of staffing available within that particular section of Queensland Health. It is not a criticism of the staff who are tasked to undertake the implementation of legislation; it is a criticism of the lack of staffing in what has become an increasingly critical area, not just from the point of view of delivery of good health care services but also from the point of view of ensuring that the appropriate security regime has been put in place and is being complied with by people who have legal access to radioactive substances.

There have also been concerns raised with me by some of the opponents of the Stereotech development. I think some of the concerns raised have been extremely valid. People have raised concerns about security issues with transport and about what emergency plans are in place to ensure the local emergency departments in that particular area are able to respond to a particular breach of

that facility. They have also raised issues to do with the insurance measures to ensure that citizens have some redress in the event of some adverse event.

I do not believe that those issues have been adequately dealt with by this government, be it under legislation or by administrative arrangement. We know that in appropriate circumstances there is safe use of radioactive materials. Obviously it is part of our life. It is part of our medical health system in delivering good diagnostic procedures. But there has to be very stringent monitoring of those elements in the work force and in transit, whether they are in public or private control, to ensure those who have bad intents do not get access to them in such a way that they are able to use them for terror or to breach security in our community.

I wanted to put those issues on the record. I do support the legislation before the House. My colleague the honourable member for Gregory has some questions with regard to the specifics of the legislation. We obviously want to see a safer Queensland and an appropriate regulatory regime that supports that and supports our emergency services. We want to see a regime that ensures, outside of those immediate times of crisis, that there is the appropriate monitoring of facilities that have the potential to be abused by those who have wrongful or negligent intent.