



Speech by

Hon. JUDY SPENCE

MEMBER FOR MOUNT GRAVATT

Hansard 27 November 2003

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Portfolios

Hon. J. C. SPENCE (Mount Gravatt—ALP) (Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Seniors) (9.54 a.m.): Next Wednesday, 3 December, marks International Day of People with a Disability. This day highlights the abilities of people with a disability and recognises the many positive contributions they make in our society. In the lead-up to such an important day, it is timely that we reflect on what has been an historic year for the disability sector in Queensland.

I am proud of the achievements of the Beattie government in delivering a better quality of life for people with a disability, their families and carers. Future Directions for Disability Services, released with this year's budget, detailed the allocation an additional \$290.5 million over the next four years and a platform of key reform initiatives as part of a planned approach to improve disability services and support provision. This marks a key step in addressing the decades of shameful neglect of this sector by successive conservative governments.

In this term we have increased funding for disability services and support by an additional \$109 million, far exceeding our election commitment of adding an additional \$60.8 million. This funding has been used to increase services to adults, young people, children and families, create a more viable service system and build the capacity of communities to include people with a disability. On top of this, we have introduced a new business model for the department to ensure a more effective and transparent service provision, developed a Queensland government carer recognition policy and initiated a review of the Disability Services Act.

Indigenous Queenslanders are also witnessing historic changes to their way of life as we build stronger communities for a better future. I seek leave to incorporate the rest of my ministerial statement in *Hansard*, and I table this document of achievements.

Leave granted.

The Beattie Government is committed to turning around Indigenous disadvantage.

We know that won't happen in a few years—the report card after all of the attention and resources governments have put into Indigenous communities in the past two decades tells us that.

But this government believes it is on the right track, by concentrating our efforts on tackling the causes of disadvantage, to ensure that Indigenous people have the same opportunities as the non-Indigenous community to healthy, happy lives.

Central to the strategy are the Alcohol Management Plans which are coming into force in 19 Indigenous communities.

We recognised that government cannot reduce the alcohol abuse and the resultant violence alone—it requires a commitment from all stakeholders—and that is why we established Community Justice Groups.

Nineteen Alcohol Management Plans have now been drafted.

Restrictions are already in place in 6 communities—Aurukun, Napranum, Doomadgee, Lockhart River, Wujal Wujal and Woorabinda.

Another 3 have been approved by the Government and will take effect within a month—Mornington Island, Kowanyama and Pormpuraaw.

Seven more community plans are currently under consideration by the government.

We are regularly briefing other stakeholders, including the tourism industry, and have embarked on a communications strategy to ensure the travelling public is aware of the alcohol limits.

The partnerships between government and Indigenous communities are further cemented through negotiation tables which are held once alcohol management plans have been submitted.

These tables are facilitated by Chief Executive Officers—key public servants who are appointed to each community as Government champions to help work through local problems and develop an action plan in the spirit of mutual obligation.

The Beattie Government is also delivering a better system of community governance, with the release of a White Paper which proposes to make Aboriginal Councils much more transparent and accountable.

No longer will they be set apart from other Queensland local governments.

By applying the Local Government Act rules next year, councils in Aboriginal communities will be required to produce corporate and operational plans every year, along with annual reports to inform residents of their activities.

this is about equity—providing the same quality of governance, opportunities and level of service to all Queensland residents.

To support the administration and delivery of services, we have allocated \$8.2 million for new or upgraded council chambers in six Aboriginal communities since coming to office, while investing in infrastructure like sewerage treatment.

These are all significant steps in turning around Indigenous disadvantage.

But the Beattie Government has recognised that in order to move forward, we must acknowledge past injustices.

That is why we have addressed the discrimination suffered by Indigenous people employed by government departments responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

\$39.7 million has been paid out to 5672 people who were underpaid between 1975 and 1986.

We have also made an historic offer of reparations for the government control of Indigenous peoples' wages and savings.

The first payment was in May this year, and to date, 5717 claims have been received, with 927 people paid a total of \$3.7 million.

We accept that this does not replace the money people may believe they are owed. Rather it is a Reconciliation gesture.

The Beattie Government started down the road to Reconciliation in 1998, with the release of the New Directions Statement.

This year we launched a Reconciliation package featuring new business awards, a business forum and a program to foster young Indigenous leaders.

All of these events, held in September, were very successful in demonstrating to business leaders the social and economic benefits Reconciliation can bring and encouraging them to forge working relationships with Indigenous communities.

Mr Speaker, as the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy since the Beattie Government came to office, I am proud of all that has been achieved in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We will continue to work to strengthen the community's commitment to ensuring all Queenslanders can compete for jobs and enjoy healthy, safe and fulfilling lives.