



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 30 September 2004

VACATION CARE SERVICES

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.07 p.m.): I call on the Beattie government to review the controls relating to vacation care services in Queensland. I believe that that is desperately needed, given the incidents that have occurred involving the abuse of children in some vacation care centres. While we know that the majority of care providers are doing a good job, when there are failures in the system a child could be abused. I am aware of one incident that occurred some six months ago which involved other children abusing a child. While most carers are doing the right thing to provide protection to children, unfortunately incidents such as this highlight the fact that in some circumstances there are flaws in the system which ensures that there are adequate numbers of carers to provide for children in vacation care.

I have raised this issue with Warren Pitt, the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. In his last reply to me, the minister said that, in addition to the national standards for outside school hours care and the National Child Care Accreditation Council's outside school hours care quality assurance system, the Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2000 requires that people engaged in the care of children hold a positive suitability notice, and that includes those people who provide care in vacation services. The minister said that that is a strong measure to protect children and it provides reassurance to parents and guardians leaving children in a service.

Respectfully, I have to disagree. In regard to the positive suitability notice, we have already seen a situation where one person who was charged and convicted of child abuse offences did not declare that conviction against their name and continued to hold the blue card. It was not automatically taken off them. As I understand it, it was only when the issue was raised by someone who knew the person that the card was taken off them.

There are concerns that the mechanisms that are supposed to be protecting children still have flaws. There are still holes in the system and the system needs tightening up. I call on the minister and the Beattie government to review the regulations—or the lack of regulations—surrounding the care of children in vacation care. I believe this is an area that needs investigation and review. The system is failing in regard to the positive suitability notice, the blue card, if people who have had child abuse convictions lodged against them have not had that card taken from them. These are flaws in the system and they must be addressed. I call on the government to take action.