



Speech by

**Mr L. SPRINGBORG**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

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Hansard 27 April 2004

**GOVERNMENT JET, ALCOHOL**

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.30 a.m.): This morning in this place the government continued its evasion and cover-up surrounding the Lockhart River wine affair. We know full well from the outset that this issue was not just simply about a bottle of wine; it was about this government's conduct, it was about what this government did, it was about what officers of this government did once they knew they were potentially in trouble. Quite frankly, if it had just been about a bottle of wine and if people had fessed up that they intended to do no harm, then I am sure that it would have been a one-day wonder. It is quite clear that there is a contradictory range of events and statements which have flowed since that particular date over a month ago.

This morning we saw again in this parliament the Premier and various government ministers seek to evade scrutiny in this place by not answering direct questions.

**Mr Lucas** interjected.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The honourable Minister for Transport has nothing but inaneness to contribute to this particular debate.

We asked the Premier, 'What job is Teresa Mullan doing in your office or your department?' One would have thought that was a reasonable question in the circumstances, considering that nary a peep has been heard from Ms Mullan since she was re-employed under embarrassing circumstances in a major damage control exercise by the Premier some time ago. Surely the people of Queensland have a right to know how much a person who is on at least \$80,000 a year is doing. Surely they have a right to know what that person is doing, particularly when she was re-employed under certain controversial circumstances when the Premier himself had said only a few days before, 'Anyone responsible for this will be sacked, sacked, sacked.'

The Premier knew full well that if he held fast to his particular commitment in sacking Ms Mullan, given what was happening and the other knowledge which was being uncovered, he would have had to apply the same set of standards to those other people. But he did not do that. In order to control the damage, in order to cover up, in order to ensure that Ms Mullan did not continue to go to the media and tell her story, she was re-employed. Surely the people of Queensland have a right to know what she has been re-employed for. What special project is she now doing in the Premier's own office on \$80,000 or \$100,000 a year? What value are the taxpayers and the electors of Queensland getting from Ms Mullan in her job?

In this place this morning we asked the minister herself at what stage did she know—a fairly simple question, I would have thought, but too difficult for the minister. We also asked the minister did Teresa Mullan lie when she alleged that the minister knew about it, and she could not even answer that question. The Premier could not answer the question and would not come clean on the appropriate standards of conduct for a member of this parliament who may have given conflicting information or evidence, or withheld evidence from police at least initially.

Where is this Premier who cloaked himself in this demeanour of accountability and openness when he had a margin of none in this parliament? This is the person who said he was going to give us a clean team, the person who said that he believes in accountability, openness and honesty. Where is he now? Nowhere to be seen! He fudged every question this morning, as did the minister. Why is it that no-one in this place could answer what Teresa Mullan was doing as a special project? Why was it that

the minister for indigenous policy was not able to answer at which stage she knew and also whether Teresa Mullan lied?

**Mr Horan** interjected.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I think the honourable member for Toowoomba South is right. This is a hush job and she has been given hush money. This is a hush job to make her go away. Quite clearly, somebody lied. Who lied? There cannot be such a conflicting range of events. Who told the truth in all of this?

**Mr Johnson:** Thomas Hudson told the truth.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Thomas Hudson told the truth. He was fined, with no conviction recorded. Is it any wonder that people in the cape and right across those dry communities are shaking their heads at the hypocrisy and double standards of this government? The Premier had the audacity to stand here this morning and say that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition raised questions with regard to Mr Whiddon's conduct. The whole reason this came about was Ms Mullan's allegations and her letter published in the *Courier-Mail* in which she said about Mr Whiddon that unless he, the minister and the director-general had misled the Premier about the facts of the matter the Premier was knowingly misleading the media and the public by placing full blame for the matter on her.

All we did was say that this matter deserved to be properly investigated. There was an employee, a senior policy officer of this government, making extremely serious allegations. It is the role of this opposition, the media and the public to appropriately question the conduct of this government. The allegations were not from us; the allegations were from Ms Mullan.

At least in her case what we know is that she has admitted lying on a couple of occasions. Ultimately whether she was telling the truth about the extent of everyone else's knowledge will never ever be properly known, because even the CMC has indicated in its report—

It became apparent that much turned on which version of events should be accepted as truthful (there being a direct conflict of evidence from the witnesses on certain issues).

It is quite clear that, in a word-on-word situation, we are going to have those sorts of things. With regard to the question, 'Did the director-general and the minister mislead the police?', the CMC report states—

Essentially the issue of knowledge of the presence of the wine depends on an assessment of one person's evidence against another's. For the reasons stated above, the evidence is such that the Commission cannot conclude that the evidence of Ms Mullan could be relied on to prove to the requisite standard that Dr Hoey and the minister knew that there was wine on the plane.

So they could not work out the extent of the lie and who was lying with regards to this. Also, the contention from the Premier that everything is hunky-dory is not right, even though the CMC said people have suffered embarrassment and there needs to be no further investigation. However, it is arguable that, if we looked at the code of conduct for public servants, there may be a breach of that but they have suffered embarrassment. Wouldn't everyone in the community who has been through a similar thing or something similar at work love to know that they have suffered embarrassment and there needs to be no further reprimand?

The last two paragraphs of the report are interesting. They state—

The Commission considers that the conduct of the Member for Cook, Mr O'Brien, falls well short of anything justifying the consideration of criminal proceedings, even though he acknowledged to the CMC that he did not disclose to the police all the information he had concerning the presence of the bottle of wine on the plane.

There is evidence which, if accepted, is capable of establishing that four officers gave misleading information to the police about the wine, but, in light of the decision of the Commissioner of Police and for the other reasons set out in this report, the CMC does not recommend disciplinary action be taken.

There are people right across Queensland shaking their heads about this, and that was evident in the letters to the editor which turned up in the paper subsequent to this and also on talkback radio. The electorate at large has concluded and deducted that this is a matter of integrity for four public officers and one member of parliament, and the issue is the capacity of the corruption fighting watchdog in Queensland to establish the facts. We said on day one that in such a word-on-word situation it is unlikely you would ever get to the truth. We said on day one that, unless there were public inquiries with witnesses giving evidence under oath and cross-examination to ensure a robustness in that process, one would never get beyond that.

Now, one element of this actually happened—that is, witnesses giving oath behind closed doors. It was not a robust process. It was always very difficult to go beyond who is telling what and what lies are actually going on. It is, quite frankly, an appalling indictment on this government; an appalling indictment, I also believe, on the CMC and their incapacity to do those things that I mentioned. What message does it send to the people of Queensland—that people lie, mislead and hold back on information and are not be held accountable.