



Speech by

Hon. Liddy Clark

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

Hansard 11 May 2004

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Indigenous Funding and Services

Hon. E.A. CLARK (Clayfield—ALP) (Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy) (10.21 a.m.): Today is the day the federal government needs to show Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples it is serious about the future of indigenous Australians. Last month, the Commonwealth announced the ATSIC experiment had been a failure and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission would be abolished. While we know there have been problems with the commission, there has been no guarantee that services and funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will not be cut back. Yes, we have heard the federal government plans to appoint a national indigenous council as an advisory group. Yes, there appear to be plans for indigenous coordination centres in rural and remote areas.

But we have seen no details. We do not know that this is—as the federal government claims—'better value for money' or whether it is just cost shifting. While there have been statements that ATSIC money will be quarantined, what happens once that money is mainstreamed through different departments? Will the Commonwealth guarantee it will not cut back existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services that already are run through these departments rather than ATSIC? Can the federal government assure Torres Strait Islanders they will provide services which respect them as a separate people with a separate culture? Will the Commonwealth continue to address existing disadvantages and allocate further funds on the basis of need? Will the federal government provide mechanisms that support stronger Indigenous community based organisations that enhance self-determination?

Last week, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs ministers from around the country met and agreed it was impossible to know that the future was on track for indigenous Australians until we find out just where the Commonwealth is going. Today, the federal budget will be brought down. It is more than time that we knew the detail about the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding and services. Let us hope tonight's budget fully outlines a certain future for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.