



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Wednesday, 9 March 2005

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### STATUTORY AND JUDICIAL OFFICERS, APPOINTMENT

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.40 pm): I rise to second the motion moved by the Leader of the National Party and Leader of the Opposition, Lawrence Springborg. In this parliament two weeks ago, on 22 February, I expressed my disappointment that I could not fully endorse the government's choice of the Information Commissioner. As I said at that time, a primary concern was that the selection process was flawed and open to perceptions of political bias, particularly because of the Premier's refusal to have bipartisan representation on the selection panel. However, I also questioned how the new Information Commissioner would overcome the perception of conflict of interest with regard to dealing with FOI decisions involving her husband and the Department of Education, of which he is the director-general.

I noted that Cathi Taylor, the new Information Commissioner, had strong ties with this government, serving in senior roles such as acting director-general of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and also as a leader of the Premier and Cabinet's freedom of information and ministerial correspondence teams and that as the new Information Commissioner it seemed somewhat ironic that she would now determine appeals against government decisions to withhold information under FOI laws.

I further queried the selection criteria for such an important statutory role which could allow the selection of someone with extensive working relationships at such a senior level in the Queensland bureaucracy. It is significant that since that time in the parliament—only two weeks ago—very strong concerns have been raised and there has been criticism of the government because of this appointment. There were concerns about the ability of this new statutory office holder to undertake this role and clear up these perceptions of conflicts of interest. Some other information has come to the surface—new information about the Information Commissioner's past and current connections, question marks about the role of the former deputy, Greg Sorensen, and the Premier's claims that the parliament had somehow wholeheartedly endorsed his government's appointment. For the Premier to come up with such an interpretation is not only twisted; it is less than honest. When one considers the strength of those concerns and the issues which had been raised—and since that time further issues have been raised that were not known to the opposition at that time because the government chose not to reveal them at the time—the motion before this parliament is a call for honesty and a call for accountability, which the government has not been displaying.

Let me first revisit the issue of the panel that this government chose to select the Information Commissioner and the fact that the Premier and I met—actually, he came and chatted to me in the chamber in person—to talk about my concerns that I had relayed to him about the fact that there would be no bipartisan representation on that panel which was a move away from the process when the previous Information Commissioner was selected. The Premier at that time gave his reasons why he disagreed with my call for bipartisan representation on such a panel. I am still extremely disappointed that he did not heed those concerns that I raised prior to convening that panel, because what we have seen happen since then has confirmed the very issues that I raised with the Premier—that is, undertaking the selection in such a way meant that the government was going to lay itself open to accusations of political bias. Most importantly, that selection process did not allow for the revelation of certain issues important to the officers of a statutory role that should have been revealed, certainly to the opposition.

The motion before us is one which, as the Leader of the Opposition says, refers to the Fitzgerald report and to the particular recommendations that the state opposition should be consulted prior to such appointments with reference to all potentially relevant circumstances, including any personal or political connections which the appointee has with the government or any of its members or the political party, and the Premier has failed to do this. The Premier has not done this and—

Time expired.