



Speech by

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (3.36 pm): I am very pleased to rise to speak to the Freedom of Information and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. In doing so, I reiterate the concerns of my fellow Liberal members. I begin by quoting Dr De Maria, ethicist for the business school at the University of Queensland. He said—

... this is classic behaviour of a third-term government, it is acting with great hubris and arrogance to the great citadels of democracy.

This is one of the most succinct and pointed summations of Beattie government policy I have ever heard. Just imagine the castle of democracy sitting up on the hill above the peasants giving them security and shelter from those outside the city's walls who want to penetrate that serenity and ruin democracy's stranglehold. This time, though, the demon is from within. The ruler sitting in the castle of democracy is the one treating its customs and tenets with reckless abandon.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr LANGBROEK: Poetic! Tenets like freedom of information, openness and accountability—things that the public expect and democracy demands by its very nature—are being slapped around and tortured by the current administration.

Dr De Maria goes on to say that Beattie has come to the conclusion that he does not need democracy to survive. This is a profound statement about the mentality of the Premier and the government. Democracy can simply be collateral damage on the road to victory: 'if anything is going to hurt or damage us, let us just put another rule in place to make sure that this sensitive information cannot get out'.

Dr De Maria continues and says that he is acting like an African dictator. Again, this is such a telling assessment of the situation. The Premier is acting like an African dictator. These amendments ensure that information that is uncovered in investigations which may be sensitive in nature will have their access by the public blocked. Remember, we are talking about the people of Queensland accessing documents and information that are of vital importance to the running of the state in terms of the actions of those in government.

The basic reason for FOI is so that people can, when requested, see the workings of government and ensure that they are to the standards that the people of the jurisdiction require. The only time in which an FOI request should be denied is in circumstances where the government deems something to be too sensitive that it may harm the public if it were released. Aside from all of that, all information should be made available so that the public can be informed participants in the processes of democracy. This legislation will put in place a situation where documents that can only harm the government's reputation will be considered sensitive enough to be kept from the public's view. This is unacceptable. This leads to Dr De Maria's final point. He states—

This type of legislation is not being done in any other jurisdiction in Australia. No other state feels the need to implement these policies, no other state has skeletons lurking in their closets that need to be protected from public view. More to the point the Federal Government has not seen the need to implement these provisions or provisions that provide more secrecy. They are a fourth term

Government now, perhaps Labor can take some pointers about the openness and accountability they showed in their third term. A level of openness and accountability that was ratified by the Australian people at the election last year.

As a final point, I would like to refer to the concerns of a Morningside resident who sent a letter to all state members requesting that we look at certain provisions and possible amendments of this bill. I believe she makes some very good and valid points. Perhaps the minister should take some of them on board to ensure the efficiency of the system and the user friendliness of the way in which FOI is carried out. The member for Toowoomba South has quoted extensively from this lady's personal experiences but her summation, owing to her frustration, was that fair trading practices or concepts from contract law are to apply when state government departments enter into an agreement to supply documents and that the state Ombudsman is given authority to investigate complaints about FOI agreements.

When this lady wrote to the Information Commissioner to make a complaint, he basically told her that concepts obtained from contract law are essentially irrelevant. She felt frustrated in her attempts to get some FOI information which came to her incorrectly, even though she paid the fees and was trying to get the correct information. I urge members of the House to vote against this bill.