



Speech by

Paul Hoolihan

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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DISABILITY SERVICES BILL

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (9.00 pm): It is with much pleasure that I rise to speak on the Disability Services Bill 2005. I would like to congratulate the minister and his staff on the bill. I know of his commitment to providing assistance for people with a disability.

We have heard from the member for Burnett that much more can be done. The moneys that are available have to be spread across the whole of Queensland, and that is done in an even-handed way to allow the provision of assistance to all disabled people. If honourable members listened to the figures that were quoted, they would know that the rise in funding for disability services in Queensland since 1998 has been astronomical. Hopefully, that can be increased, but that is subject to other funding obligations that the department would have.

I would like to deal specifically with community engagement. It is an important human rights principle that people with a disability have a right to participate actively in decisions affecting their lives, including the development of policies, programs and services. That is what this bill seeks to address. The Beattie government is committed to ensuring that the system for disability service delivery in Queensland is relative and responsive to the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers. I do not believe that those people, both inside and outside this House, who do not have a member of their family who suffers from a disability fully understand the overall needs of people with a disability. I have a cousin with an adult son who has a severe disability. I know that the quality of his life has been greatly enhanced by the assistance that he receives through Disability Services Queensland.

One of the things that is vital in shaping policy and service delivery is input from the people with a disability and, as we heard also from the member for Burnett, from those peak bodies. Of course, some of those peak bodies sometimes push their own barrow to the exclusion of some of the real needs of the people out there who need that assistance.

There has been extensive community consultation with regard to this bill. The community has been engaged in helping to shape it. In actual fact, the consultation commenced before this parliament; consultation started in 2002 with a reference group of key stakeholders. There have been extensive periods of public consultation. There has been input from many of the peak bodies and the organisations that have been referred to. That consultation continued in 2003 and 2004. Then there was further targeted consultation on a draft version of the bill more recently. The government does not want to sit back and say, 'We know what is necessary for the disabled in our community and this is what is going to happen.' It wants to work with the organisations and the people with a disability to target any of the assistance that is provided.

The bill recognises the importance of receiving advice from the community. It provides the minister with the authority to appoint advisory committees. This role is actually a primary source of advice and is carried out by the Disability Council of Queensland, which is a peak body. There are 10 regional disability councils fulfilling the role. These councils are an important means of facilitating partnership between government and local communities. The members of those councils come from within their local

communities and are mostly involved with the provision of services or have a very good local knowledge of the requirements of people within their region.

Another of the advisory committees which is very important to the minister is the Complaints Management Quality Committee. This committee is to be established to provide independent advice to the minister for disability services on quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the Disability Services Queensland complaints management system. That system allows for those people who believe that their care has not been sufficient or has been compromised to have the matter reviewed by the complaints system and specific instances of difficulties investigated and attended to. That committee is specifically provided for under the legislation. It gives the community itself an important role in overseeing the complaints process under the bill. This provision recognises the importance placed on the right of people with a disability to make complaints about the services they receive and not just to go to their local member. There are very well established procedures, and those procedures will lead to complaints being resolved in a timely and effective way.

I know the amount of work and the care that the minister has put into ensuring that this bill does address the needs of people with a disability in Queensland. I commend the bill to the House.