



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Wednesday, 7 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Safety

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.15 am): I thank the Minister for Transport and Main Roads for that important statement in relation to the Bruce Highway and flood proofing in far-north Queensland.

Over the weekend I announced a \$5 million boost that will improve our child safety system and ease the pressure on child safety staff. Some \$3 million will fund another major assault on the backlog in cases and another \$2 million will continue the important work of dedicated records officers. It is great news, and today I can provide further information on how this money will be put to use. The \$3 million in backlog money will fund about 25 extra child safety officers, five team leaders, three senior practitioners and six administration staff. We are talking about specialist backlog teams which will be sent to the areas and offices that need them most.

Our urgent cases—category 1s—are investigated within 24 hours and immediate action is taken to protect these children. However, we have many category 2 and 3 cases not finalised. This is our second attack on this backlog. Previous funding of \$2 million has helped achieve a 37 per cent drop in the number of outstanding cases in the last eight months. The total has dropped from 12,699 in April 2006 to 7,977 last month. But as minister I will not rest until that number is zero. The backlog has been one of the major stresses for Child Safety staff. It has contributed to case loads that are too big. Staff in centres where the backlog has been conquered tell me it is a huge relief and that it is a very different job working with current cases and not having to worry about the past. One Child Safety officer even referred to no more backlog as 'nirvana'. The \$2 million to continue the work of our 48 dedicated records officers is good news for our staff as well. These officers provide accurate, up-to-date information that eases the pressure on front-line staff and makes sure we are making decisions with the very best information to hand. Our vulnerable children deserve nothing less.