



Speech by

Hon. Desley Boyle

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard Tuesday, 20 February 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Child Safety

Hon. D BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (Minister for Child Safety) (10.25 am): There has been considerable publicity about a child safety case on the Gold Coast in which a mother is accused of attempting to poison her children. Child safety officers had visited the mother earlier in the day and made a decision to leave the children with their mother. The woman's solicitor has heavily criticised Child Safety for that decision.

The child safety department's director-general has used special powers to publicly release information about the case to correct the record. The information provided by the director-general shows that on 8 February when child safety officers left the mother at home with her children there were no indications that any harm would come to them. The mother did not appear incapacitated by alcohol and was not making threats against herself or her children. The children were comfortable and happy. The child safety officers had previously interviewed the mother about an alleged threat she had made on 25 January and she had said she would never harm her children.

Additionally, the officers were advised that the mother had undergone a psychiatric assessment and there were no concerns about her mental state. Nonetheless, to be sure, they had contacted the grandmother and arranged, cooperatively with the mother, for the children to be cared for by their grandmother that night. She had said that she was on her way to get the children before the officers left the house.

I am satisfied that the child safety workers who attended acted appropriately and reasonably on the information available to them. Our child safety staff deal with more than 40,000 calls of suspected child abuse a year. They put up with lies and abuse from many of the parents involved in these notifications. Out of the thousands and thousands of investigations of abuse and thousands and thousands of decisions made each year by child safety officers, there will always be some decisions which, with the benefit of hindsight, should have been different. When perpetrators of abuse do not admit their failings, the protection of children will always be an imprecise science.