



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard Thursday, 15 March 2007

DEATH OF MR A DENNISON

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (6.18 pm): I was recently concerned to see the case of respected Toomelah Aboriginal Elder, Albert Dennison, who died in his home in February of this year and the resultant trauma for his family as they sought closure of their grief by viewing his body. They found when they sought to do so that his body was so badly decomposed that it was listed as a public health risk and they could not.

Following this the blame game started between the undertaker and Queensland Health over the storage and transportation of the body, as the body was stored for some time in the Goondiwindi Hospital morgue. The most telling admission to me was the concession from the undertaker that the body was taken in a body bag on an 11-hour round trip to Armidale for an autopsy using an old panel van without even basic air conditioning in the middle of our summer heat. Make up your own mind about the consequences of that.

Because the death was in New South Wales, the person contracted to shift a body can do so in an unrefrigerated vehicle and a body bag for up to eight hours each way, which is an absolute brainless lack of common sense. What does this have to do with Queensland, members might ask? Well, our regulations on the removal and transportation of bodies is just as lax, if not more so. It is not uncommon for bodies to be transported within the state for 12 hours or more in unrefrigerated vehicles. Frankly, it comes down to the fact that the dead do not complain and it is out of sight, out of mind. This unacceptable practice still goes unregulated and, frankly, our government medical officers and forensic pathologists are used to dealing with bodies in various states of decomposition.

We have strict regulations on the disposal of bodies, but not on the removal and transportation of them. I implore the government to bring in 21st century regulations, which ensure minimum standards for the removal and transportation of deceased persons. These regulations should contain maximum travel times of no more than a couple of hours before a deceased person must be transported in a refrigerated vehicle. Of course, the transportation of a deceased person directly to a funeral service and/or interment is a different matter.

It is true that some undertakers have some form of cooling for transporting the deceased over shorter and longer distances, but many do not simply because they do not have to. The greatest irony is that the transportation of a deceased person by a properly accredited operator with refrigerated equipment can be as much as half the cost charged by some unrefrigerated operators, as reported recently in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

If the government does not move to properly regulate this practice, then I will consider introducing a private member's bill so that this issue can be properly considered by the Queensland parliament. Deceased Queenslanders and their families simply deserve better and our respect and concern for them should not stop just because they are dead.