



Speech by

Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

COMMUNITY SERVICES BILL

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (5.30 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Community Services Bill 2007. This is a very complex piece of legislation. Under the Family Services Act 1987 the department provides funding to 860 community organisations. At the outset I point out that the most important aspect of this piece of legislation is what it will provide for communities. Many people in our communities are not aware of their entitlements.

I think about the multipurpose centres throughout our state and the work that is done by our allied support staff in Queensland Health, other government agencies and other organisations to provide services to those in remote and regional areas of Queensland. The important function of this legislation is to provide for the more needy citizens of our communities. Most times these people are not able to travel to take advantage of these specialist services. I say to the minister that I think a lot of advertising still needs to be done to bring to the forefront of people's minds exactly what these multipurpose centres throughout the state provide.

Funding non-government organisations is a very creditable policy. Communities are assisted and enhanced through the work of these organisations. There are a lot of these organisations out there. We could name them all. There are organisations like Red Cross, Anglicare and the list goes on. There are hundreds of such organisations in reality. They are doing magnificent work behind the scenes.

I do not like mentioning names but one person I will mention is Barbara Anderson in Longreach. She is a tireless worker for disadvantaged people through the central west and far west. This is a woman who has dedicated hours and hours to the plight of others. I believe that the funding these organisations receive does not go unnoticed when we see people of the calibre of Barbara Anderson and others like her who work in these organisations. They identify and bring to the fore the plight of people who are less fortunate. I really believe that the dedication and commitment of these people has to be recognised further down the track. I talk with these people on a regular basis. They will have a word to me on the side. This is all about representing people who might need assistance. It can be done in a quiet manner rather than doing it in a manner that these people are not accustomed to and do not want.

The other aspect of this piece of legislation is the inclusion of Indigenous communities in this state. That is an area that is crying out for support and assistance. I heard the member for Pumicestone make reference to this in relation to public housing. Public housing is the issue at the top of the list for our Indigenous communities. It is something that I am passionate about. I certainly hope that we will see some breakthroughs in this regard. I do not believe that it is an issue that we should be playing politics with today. We should be out there identifying how we can get genuine outcomes for these people and get these people into their own houses. That is all that most people in this country ever want. They want to be able to live in their own home or have something that they can call their own. Indigenous people are no different.

The other thing I will make mention of in relation to Indigenous communities is that the Auditor-General's report No. 3 came down today. It made recommendations in relation to some of these

communities. I think collectively—that is as a government and as an opposition—there is a lot of work to be done. Together I believe we have to be passionate about making a difference.

Legislation like that which is before the House today with regard to non-government organisations shows that there are people out there who want to make a difference and do it in a voluntary capacity. There are a lot of areas that we could identify where these people could assist and where I believe we could get better value for our dollars. We have people who genuinely want to make a difference on a voluntary basis.

I touched on a couple of organisations a moment ago. There are a lot of people out there who do not understand precisely what they are entitled to. That is the sad fact of the matter. I say to the minister that I really think that a lot of times people are too proud to seek assistance through whatever quarters are available. I think we need to expose, whether through the print media or whatever, the assistance people can access and how they can access it without putting themselves at the forefront. A lot of people are very private and do not go out saying, 'My family needs help here or help there.' I think we have to respect people's privacy but let them know that we can get them assistance.

As the minister says in his second reading speech, a number of organisations which have received funding from the department over a number of years have asked whether they will need to start from scratch and resubmit information already lodged with the department. The minister goes on to say that he is pleased to clarify that under the transitional arrangements set out in this legislation community organisations which are currently receiving funding from the department will automatically be deemed to be approved service providers.

I think that is a very rewarding part of the legislation. A lot of service providers out there now think they have to start from scratch. That is another part of the legislation. Through the Department of Communities and under the Blueprint for the Bush project we could do further advertising about exactly what services are open to people and how they can take advantage of these services. These services provide medical services and health care for aged persons and persons who are too proud to ask for a bit of assistance. This piece of legislation is certainly going to go a long way to getting outcomes for the needy and those we are not aware of through non-government organisations operating in conjunction with government. It is with pleasure that I do support this piece of legislation and trust that it is going to have great benefits and outcomes for a large number of Queenslanders and that more people than we realise will be able to take advantage of it.