



Speech by

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### TORRES STRAIT ISLANDS, SAFETY OF PUBLIC SERVANTS

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.30 pm): This morning we heard the government and the health minister boasting about their achievements in improving the public health system. Often members opposite say tritely, 'Queensland Health has turned the corner.' What they do not mention is the fact that their government and their health system have failed Queenslanders. As tangible proof that our health system is still in a shambles, I draw the attention of the House to the recent coverage of the story of a young nurse on Mabuiag Island in the Torres Strait in far-north Queensland. The Queensland health system has grossly failed that young woman.

This government talks about improving health, but not enough has been done. The results of royal commissions into the state of Queensland's health system and many of the reforms advocated in them remain on the health minister's bookshelf. He speaks about standards and accountability, about internal audits and assessments, but this morning he would not reveal when he was first advised about these reports or their contents, even though he says, with his hand on his heart, that he cares about the workers at the coalface. For all of his expansive rhetoric Queenslanders are still suffering, and not the least of those are the people who provide health care and healing to patients.

Again we hear the word 'crisis' in the same syntax as 'health'. There are more crisis talks and talk fests without any real improvement to the system. Last month a 27-year-old woman was attacked and allegedly raped on the remote Torres Strait island of Mabuiag. Her home and office had no locks and broken windows. Her room was infested with bedbugs and there was no water with which to flush the toilet. Not only was her workplace underresourced; it also completely lacked departmental support from either Thursday Island or the mainland. For example, this woman was forced to put a dead body on ice for three days because Queensland Health refused to evacuate it. This is despite Queensland Health's massive budget and its willingness to employ its air services on a whim in other situations.

All of this is cause enough for complaint, but the sad story only gets worse. Sixteen months ago a Bligh government report into staff accommodation and security in remote areas, which has been referred to in the House this morning, was handed down to the health minister. It identified serious risks to staff sent to work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Like the Morris and Davies royal commissions and the Forster review, it was ignored. The Bligh government did absolutely nothing to improve living conditions for its public servants working in those remote communities. The report clearly stated it was only a matter of time before someone was hurt.

Today the minister came into this place and belatedly announced that some measures would be implemented and a new committee formed. Just as happened in Bundaberg, the government is shutting the gate after the horse has bolted.

A young woman who was serving Queensland was allegedly raped by a drunken attacker who gained entry to her home and work space via a broken door. As I understand it, she had asked for that door to be repaired and the workmen had come to measure it. She said, 'Please don't come and measure it again. Come and fix it.' They did not fix it. Today the health minister passed responsibility to the minister for public works via Q-Build and questioned whether Q-Build was responsible for not fixing the door or

whether it was the responsibility of Queensland Health workers. That is the question that the ministers need to answer; it is the question that they have refused to answer today.

Neither the police nor the community liaison officer would help the nurse. When she rang the department the next morning she was told to get over it and go back to work by 9 am the same day. Queensland Health would provide no counselling or medical treatment. Bureaucrats cut off her pay when she fled to a nearby island at the expense and with the help of her boyfriend. Then they did not put her WorkCover claim in.

It is no wonder that the Queensland Nurses Union budget submission points out that the culture has not changed in Queensland Health, especially amongst senior staff and bureaucrats. This morning the minister told us again that culture change takes time but that the culture is changing. However, the biggest group of employees—26,000 of them in Queensland Health—tell us it is not.

We hear similar stories from throughout the state. Only last week in a speech during the adjournment debate the member for Toowoomba South told us about a case of alleged bullying in the mental health unit at Toowoomba Base Hospital. The Premier calls it a stuff-up, but it is far more serious than that. Apart from being cruel and dispassionate, her government's failure to act is illegal and amounts to a violation of the basic human right to safety and security at work and in the wider community.

This morning we heard the opposition leader refer to the departmental security guide that states that Queensland Health will provide a safe and secure environment for staff and others in accordance with workplace health and safety legislation, but we also heard the get-out at clause 4.2.7 which states that where the costs cannot be justified the security arrangements should be reduced or not implemented at all. Apparently, in a community with a history of drunken behaviour and hostility towards public servants the provision of basic locks on doors and windows could not be justified. Spending a few bucks at Bunnings was too rich for the health minister and his department, which collects a quarter of Queensland's \$30 billion budget.

I say to the Premier that her predecessor talked about turning the corner on health and she inherited that mandate. Queensland Health may have turned the corner, but its destination remains questionable. This is but one horrible story about the internal workings of a cold, detached department that fails at almost every step to foster health and wellbeing and promote healing.