



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Wednesday, 12 March 2008

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### MOTION: ORDER FOR PRODUCTION OF DOCUMENTS

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (5.56 pm): This week we have seen some extraordinary behaviour from the health minister. Yesterday he refused to release the report on the security assessment of Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District facilities compiled 16 months ago. When pressed by the opposition in question time as to whether the health minister had seen the report, he refused to answer our questions in parliament and confirm or deny his knowledge of the report. In true form of this media driven administration, it was the media who finally got him to admit that he had seen the report but only after he had actually learnt about the report through the media. The minister still refused to release the report to the public.

This morning he tabled the Torres Strait risk assessment report, and what a damning read it is. As I read the report, I could not believe that the minister and his senior departmental staff had no idea the situation was so bad in these remote communities. There are 20 district managers in Queensland Health—yes, 20, not 200 or 200,000. There are only 20 who answer to three area health managers who answer to the minister. How far up the chain do you have to go to be confident that a message will get through to the minister? Can we seriously look at these assessments in this report and say that the minister has never had any complaints from staff on any of these remote islands about problems with their accommodation?

The other thing which I think is an issue here is that the assessment that was done for the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Health Service District was done by people from the Townsville Health Service District security service. Wouldn't the people who did these assessments have come back and said to their district manager, 'My God. I've just assessed the Torres Strait and you wouldn't believe the problems they've got there with security and possible crimes'? Wouldn't the district manager have then said, 'I'd better have a talk to the Torres Strait district manager and maybe we'd better talk to the minister'? Is that what is happening amongst Queensland health district managers—of whom there are only 20? That is the question the minister needs to answer. Do the 20 district managers get to speak to him and report the problems that are obviously out there? Has he had any reports of these problems?

The November 2006 report found that the likelihood of security breaches on Mabuig Island was 'possible', the consequences 'extreme' and the risk 'very high'. Similar assessments were made of health facilities on Sabai, Boigu, Badu, Horn, Murray, Erub, Masig, Coconut, Bamaga and Thursday islands. Regardless of whether the health minister had seen this particular report or not, he should have been aware that his staff were being forced to live and work in these squalid conditions. If we are to believe that the health minister was not aware of the appalling conditions his department inflicted upon its employees and if we are to believe that the health minister did not know about the existence of this report, then we can conclude that the member has been derelict in his duties.

The individual whose sad case highlighted the latest crisis in health—and, let us face it, it was only a matter of time before there was another one—had complained to her employer, Queensland Health, the minister's department, about the dangerous, filthy conditions she worked in and that she worked in isolation. Her pleas for help were ignored by the minister's department, as was the risk assessment report that I have just mentioned by the Townsville Hospital security service manager, Russell Grigg, and the security coordinator, Bruce Irvine.

If the living conditions are as bad as this report leads us to believe, there is no way the minister could not have known he was sitting on a time bomb. It was only a matter of time before someone was attacked. We have heard the health minister talk about how saddened he is by the story of this young nurse, but instead of taking responsibility and apologising to this woman, he is buck-passing his responsibilities as a health minister and blaming public servants.

Firstly, he blames his own department for not alerting him to the problems. He has publicly berated senior staff in Queensland Health, labelling them completely inept and their behaviour unacceptable. It is little wonder staff morale is so low in Queensland Health. The health minister is once again shooting the messenger. Secondly, he points the finger of blame at Q-Build. I see that the minister for public works is here.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I rise to a point of order. That is untrue and offensive and I demand that it be withdrawn.

**Mr ACTING SPEAKER:** Minister, we are not going to debate the accuracy of that comment so there is no point of order.

**Mr LANGBROEK:** I wonder how the minister for public works feels about his colleague passing the buck to his department for the security problems in the Torres Strait. Queenslanders do not want to hear excuses for their stuff-ups; they want to see action. It is not good enough to order that improvements be made as soon as possible; they need to be made immediately. It is not good enough that the minister orders another audit of the standard of security and maintenance within Queensland Health staff accommodation. The health minister has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure that no person is left unprotected and at risk for one more night working on his clock. He needs to take action now. He needs to either urgently introduce physical security into these facilities or immediately withdraw his staff and make arrangements for a nine to five, fly-in fly-out facility. We cannot afford to wait another day, another week or another month to improve health facilities in remote areas of north Queensland.