



Speech by

Steve Wettenhall

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard Wednesday, 25 November 2009

MOTION: CRIME AND MISCONDUCT COMMISSION INQUIRY; GOVERNMENT GRANTS

Mr WETTENHALL (Barron River—ALP) (6.08 pm): I rise to oppose this motion and support the amendment. All week we have heard opposition members engage in a low-rent debate about integrity and accountability issues in this state. The parliament has just passed laws to enhance the integrity and accountability framework in Queensland and the parliament has rightly rejected another attempt by the opposition to amend the Commissions of Inquiry Act for its own base political purpose—a purpose that is inherent in the motion before the House this evening.

All citizens have a right to expect the highest ethical standards are set and observed by members of parliament, public officials and government agencies and corporations. The CMC is an independent statutory authority with a mission to combat crime and promote public sector integrity. Its operating principles state that it will act with independence, impartiality and fairness in the public interest.

Yet again this motion demonstrates the complete failure of the opposition to understand and accept that our independent statutory authorities must be allowed to operate free of political influence. Yet again the opposition seeks to debase and demean the institutions of government by subjecting them to political whims and purposes. This motion is yet more evidence that the opposition is recklessly, if not purposefully, determined to undermine public confidence in our system of justice, undermine public confidence in the Crime and Misconduct Commission and demean this parliament with spurious claims that it will not back up with one skerrick of evidence.

One of the significant roles of the CMC is to investigate misconduct by public sector officers. If there is any evidence of misconduct by ministerial staff or former staff in the awarding of grants by any government department, this government would welcome and expect that matter to be referred to the CMC. It is ridiculous to contemplate that the CMC would be tasked to waste taxpayers' money on what is nothing more than a fishing expedition.

This motion reveals a lot about this opposition. It proves that it is not interested in due process, evidence or fundamental principles of justice. Members of the opposition are not interested in the reputations of highly experienced public officials to whom this parliament has entrusted the carrying out of important public functions. No-one who carries out public duties in this state is safe from the scurrilous attacks of this totally unscrupulous opposition. The parliament has become a place which opposition members think gives them the green light to make wild allegations, cast slurs and trash reputations. Even the independence and integrity of the judiciary comes under continual and cowardly attack as they go about their difficult task of ensuring that justice is done in our civil and criminal courts.

By contrast, the Bligh government respects the institutions of government and the independence of the CMC. Day after day we hear members of the opposition carp, criticise, denigrate and degrade, but when are we going to hear their policies? We should not hold our breath. The LNP can berate but it is bereft. It is bereft of ideas, bereft of principles, bereft of leadership, bereft of policy fire power—a complete and tragic political wasteland.

As I have said in debate on legislation this week, Queensland's integrity and accountability framework is the most comprehensive, robust and well resourced of any state in Australia. I have confidence in the CMC to carry out its functions, not only because of the legislation, the systems that are in place and the resources that are provided to support its functions but also because of this essential fact: if the CMC were unable to carry out any important investigation into crime or misconduct, I have no doubt it would have no hesitation in approaching this government and make a case in the appropriate way for additional resources. I note that no such request has been made in connection with the current inquiry mentioned in this ridiculous opposition motion. Not only do I have confidence in the independence and integrity of the CMC to ask for additional resources if they are needed; I have confidence in this government to give proper and thorough consideration to any such request, as it has done in the past and as it will continue to do in the future.