



Speech by

Vicky Darling

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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RIGHT TO INFORMATION BILL; INFORMATION PRIVACY BILL

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (3.42 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the Right to Information Bill 2009 and the Information Privacy Bill 2009. I very much want to congratulate the Premier not just for commissioning the Solomon report but for acting on the recommendations that it was time for an overhaul of the right to information legislation.

This bill clearly states that the government should release information administratively as a matter of course and that applications under the legislation should be necessary only as a last resort. On application, documents are to be released unless release would be contrary to the public interest.

In the last term of government, the 52nd Parliament, I very much enjoyed being a member of the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. Our committee was able to continue an inquiry started by the committee of the 51st Parliament which was the accessibility of administrative justice. The report was handed down to parliament last year.

Many of the recommendations made in that report were ideas related to improving the Freedom of Information Act. I want to read part of the findings of the committee. It stated—

The committee suggests that publication of government-held information should be established practice. Almost all information, 'the grist of government processes', should be available generally, without charge, without the need for a written application and without the need to resort to an application under the Freedom of Information Act. Accordingly, rather than wholly discretionary 'administrative access schemes' information should be made available via government policies regarding 'publication'. Delivery of information in this way should be evaluated and improved on a continual basis. Key measures in the evaluation should be whether all Queensland people have an equal right to access to information, irrespective of where they live in Queensland. The use of available technology will be an important element in meeting these measures.

The final recommendation under this section of the committee's report was—

... legislative requirements be inserted into the Freedom of Information Act for:

- publication schemes, rather than administrative access schemes; and
- in accordance with those schemes, general publication without charge and via efficient means of delivery of almost all government-held information.

There was a range of other recommendations.

I am pleased that the Right to Information Bill is part of a broader package of right to information policy reforms. The Solomon report noted, as other speakers have mentioned this afternoon, that information should be pushed into the public arena rather than waiting for FOI requests to pull it out. These reforms certainly make sure that the legislation is the last resort for people seeking information.

There will obviously need to be a change of culture. I think the key is to simplify access to information and simplify the policies by which members of the Public Service release public information as a matter of course. We need to embrace technology. I think we all hop on to the internet these days and Google away to find out whatever information we can. This will enhance what we already provide as far as government information goes. This bill certainly enables this change. The last LCARC is pleased that its recommendations were able to help inform the government's deliberations as well. I commend the bill to the House.