



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Wednesday, 15 September 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Watson, Mr DG

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.10 am): On 9 February this year I provided the House with a detailed outline of issues involving David Gabriel Watson, the state of Alabama and the death penalty. I am pleased to report that last week this matter, which raised very serious questions about the death penalty, was resolved by the Queensland government.

In February this year I wrote to the Attorney-General of Alabama setting out in simple and clear terms the undertaking required by the Queensland government in death penalty matters of this type. After waiting several months for a response, the Queensland government finally received on 1 September 2010 an undertaking from Alabama authorities to not pursue the death penalty in relation to any possible future prosecution of David Gabriel Watson. Just five days later, on 6 September, I wrote to Alabama Attorney-General Troy King telling him that I had received advice confirming that his revised undertaking was satisfactory.

Queensland has always been willing to cooperate with Alabama authorities on this matter. However, we also had to ensure that our actions were consistent with Australia's longstanding bipartisan opposition to the death penalty. Queensland led the way in opposing the death penalty when it became the first Australian parliament to abolish it when the Theodore Labor government removed the death penalty from the statute books in 1922. The government's main interest in the Watson matter has always been to ensure that its actions do not jeopardise any Queenslanders who may find themselves in similar situations in the future.

The government has now advised the Queensland Police Service, which holds all the relevant physical and documentary evidence, that this material should be provided to Alabama authorities as quickly as possible. This follows the 9,000 pages of material that was provided to Alabama in January 2010, including the evidence of all key witnesses given at coronial and other court hearings. That information alone should have given Alabama investigators a flying start in relation to their own investigations. The timing of the return of evidence will be a matter for the Queensland Police Service to consider in liaison with the state of Alabama. Furthermore, the possible involvement of any Australian witnesses in future criminal matters is covered by well-established police-to-police protocols and national-level mutual assistance arrangements between the United States and Australia.

At all stages of this matter the Queensland government has sought to be helpful but also careful and lawful, and that is what we have achieved.