




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 15 October 2013

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Gommers, Mr B

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (11.10 am): I rise today to right a wrong. I will read to the House a letter. It states—

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Ben Gommers.

After long and careful consideration, I have decided, through this letter, to outline the pain, both physical and emotional, that I have experienced over the past 18 months due to a sustained attack on my character by three journalists from the Courier Mail.

I feel now, that is important to correct the record in relation to countless defamatory reports published about a range of issues including my qualifications, my previous work history and CMC and Ethics investigations.

I feel that it is equally, if not more important, for these three journalists, Robyn Ironside, Steven Wardill and Alison Sandy to understand the impact their reporting has had on my health, both physically and mentally.

For months, following my commencement at the Department of Transport and Main Roads, they perpetuated a sustained attack on my character, particularly in relation to my tertiary qualifications and previous work history.

I would note from the outset that not one of these three journalists ever attempted to contact ... me.

For months it was reported that my only qualifications had been '*a stint at Toys R Us and at the lobbying company Entrée Vous*'. A particularly hurtful and untruthful article written by Steven Wardill attempted to further this myth, writing that I had gone from, '*He's gone from selling toy trains to advising about real ones.*'

I table the article.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Courier-Mail*, dated 21 July 2012, titled 'Minister defends fast-tracked son' [[3715](#)].

The letter continues—

For the benefit of all, I would like to outline my previous experiences, which the Courier Mail failed to report for a number of months:

1. I studied for five years full time, from 2005 to 2009, a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Business, Majoring in Management.
2. I was awarded Griffith University's Top Student Award for Commercial Law.
3. In my final year of study, 2009, I applied for, and was successful in obtaining a position within the Roads and Traffic Authority of New South Wales in Public Policy, commencing in Sydney in January 2010.
4. Within the RTA I worked in public policy in Driver and Vehicle Policy.
5. Following this, I was offered a placement at Transport Certification Australia, based in Melbourne, as a Legal Project Officer.
6. In January 2011, I returned to Sydney and Transport for NSW to work in Business Strategy and Performance, which was based within the Office of the Director General.

What is particularly damning about the Courier Mail's reporting of my qualifications, is that News Limited, through the Gold Coast Bulletin, published an article on the 2 January 2010 explicitly stating that I had graduated with a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Business and had taken up a position with the Roads and Traffic Authority in NSW.

I table the article.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Weekend Bulletin*, dated 2-3 January 2010, titled 'A degree of pride' [3716].

The letter continues—

Further, a media statement released by the Office of the Minister for Transport and Main Roads on 17 July 2012, which I was not consulted about, nor was my permission given specifically mentioned that immediately prior to commencing my position at the Department of Transport and Main Roads, I had worked at Transport for NSW.

I table the document.

Tabled paper: Media release, dated 17 July 2012, from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads, Hon. Scott Emerson MP titled 'Ministerial statement' [3717].

In relation to Entrée Vous the letter continues—

I now turn my attention to the claims that I founded, owned and worked at the company Entrée Vous Pty Ltd.

I put on the record that I did not found the company, I did not set up the company and I was never an owner or shareholder of the company. A simple check of the ASIC Company Register confirms this.

I table a copy of the register.

Tabled paper: Current and historical company extract, dated 28 October 2012, from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission regarding Entrée Vous Pty Ltd [3719].

The letter continues—

Further, I was never employed, nor did I work or lobby in or for Entrée Vous. I received no salary, no wages, no director's fees, nor any other form of remuneration. In fact, during this time I was supposed to be working at Entrée Vous, I was studying full time, five days a week, and working at Toys R Us on weeknights and on weekends.

I table a redacted document which proves that.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 23 October 2012, from Coogans Pty Ltd Chartered Accountant regarding Entrée Vous Pty Ltd [3720].

In relation to the CMC investigation the letter states—

I now turn to perhaps the most inaccurate and untruthful part of the Courier Mail's reporting. For months, Robyn Ironside and Alison Sandy in particular, reported that I was under investigation by the Crime and Misconduct Commission, as evidenced by the front page of the Gold Coast Bulletin which says, '*The son of a Gold Coast State Minister is under investigation by the Crime and Misconduct Commission over claims his appointment was dubious.*'

I table the article.

Tabled paper: Article, dated 26 September 2012, from the *Gold Coast Bulletin* titled 'Complaints over \$103,000 'job for the boy' MP's son in CMC probe' [3721].

The letter continues—

I can confirm that at no stage have I ever been the subject of a Crime and Misconduct Commission investigation as confirmed by the CMC by letter.

I table the letter.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 9 September 2013, from the Crime and Misconduct Commission to Mr Peter Baston regarding Mr Ben Gommers [3718].

The letter continues—

I would also like to place on the record that at no stage did my mother employ me, nor did she ask anyone to give me a job.

Impact the above had on my health

As a result of the Courier Mail's failure to report any of the above accurately or fairly, on 22 October 2012, after reading yet another hurtful and defamatory article written by Robyn Ironside, I was hospitalized and treated for depression.

The night before my hospitalization I wrote in my diary:

'It seems the Courier Mail and Robyn Ironside won't rest until I am lying dead in a gutter somewhere. I don't know how much more I can take.'

On the day of my discharge from hospital, television crews turned up and camped outside my mother's home, following yet another defamatory article by Robyn Ironside.

All my mother tried to do was protect me, and to ensure I did not end up back in hospital but the stalking by the media did not let up, even after my mother stepped down as a Minister.

You tried and convicted me in the court of public opinion, in effect—

Mr STEVENS (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (Leader of the House) (11.15 am): I move—

That the member be further heard.

Question put—That the motion be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

Ms BATES (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (11.15 am): The letter continues—

You tried and convicted me in the court of public opinion, in effect telling your readers I was a criminal under investigation by the Crime and Misconduct Commission and the Ethics Committee. Again I repeat, at no stage during this time did anyone of you attempt to contact me or my family for comment.

I feel it is important that these journalists, Robyn Ironside, Steven Wardill and Alison Sandy, who have already been made aware of the consequences of their actions, realize and understand that inaccurate and untruthful reporting can and did lead to severe and potentially fatal consequences.

In relation to the Courier Mail, those journalist mentioned, and the faceless people on Twitter and Blogs I reserve my rights in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Gommers