




Speech By
Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE

HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGISTRATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—KAP) (12.23 pm): In speaking to the Health Practitioner Registration and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012, the explanatory notes state that the primary objective of the bill is to abolish the state registration scheme for the dental technology and speech pathology professions. The explanatory notes go on to say that on 26 March the Council of Australian Governments, COAG, signed the Intergovernmental Agreement for a National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for the Health Professions, which provides for a single national registration and accreditation scheme for health professions—the national scheme—to replace state and territory based schemes.

I have a letter from a speech pathologist in my electorate which I want to read into the record and table in which she expresses her concerns with regard to where speech pathologists are coming from. I ask the minister to address some of the issues raised in his summation of the debate. The letter states—

I am writing to express my concern regarding the recent government announcement regarding the discontinuation of State-based registration of speech pathologists in Queensland ...

Speech pathology was one of the professions left out of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health professionals but has continued to be regulated in Queensland by the State-based registration board (which was in place prior to the National Scheme). The national peak body for our profession, Speech Pathology Australia, has continued lobbying for inclusion in the National Scheme since its inception but without success.

I have been working as a speech pathologist at the Charters Towers Hospital since January 2005. In that time, I have been involved in the recruitment of no less than five speech pathologists to fill the joint Queensland Health/Education Queensland position based in Charters Towers. Having State-based regulation of our profession has provided peace of mind that the person we hire has been assessed as being a competent and appropriately qualified speech pathologist.

As speech pathologists, we work with people that are often some of the most vulnerable in our society—those who are not able to communicate effectively. Without adequate communication skills, our clients may not be able to voice any concerns they may have regarding the quality of care they receive.

The decision to remove registration of speech pathologists in Queensland is of major concern to Speech Pathology Australia for a number of reasons, including:

- There was no consultation with Speech Pathology Australia (as the profession's peak body) at either the state or national level.
- There was no consultation with the speech pathology profession across Queensland, employer groups, nor more widely with the general public and other stakeholders.
- There was no consultation with the Speech Pathologists Board with respect to the reasons and implications of the decision and required processes to prepare for transitional arrangements.

Specific concerns if this decision remains include:

- A high number of registered speech pathologists are not members of Speech Pathology Australia and therefore will be left practising without any regulatory framework—Speech Pathology Australia can only assure the public of the ethical and professional competency standards of members and not non-members.

- Some registered speech pathologists do so under a conditional registration, with limitations imposed on the areas or scope of practice—this cannot be regulated under Speech Pathology Australia's membership eligibility and these practitioners may not meet these eligibility criteria.
- The Registration Board has powers to assess and monitor medical conditions of practitioners that may impact adversely on their ability to practise safely and competently—Speech Pathology Australia does not have powers or mechanisms to deal with 'impaired practitioners'.
- There has been no consultation around transitional arrangements; with it not determined how practitioners under ethical investigations or breaches will be dealt with.
- There is no information around whether current health, competence or ethical concerns of certain registrants will be disclosed to Speech Pathology Australia or a relevant government body.
- There may not be sufficient time allowed to obtain appropriate certification including a 'Blue Card' and 'Yellow Card'.
- Some speech pathologists currently practising in Queensland may not be able to obtain provider status with Medicare, Private Health Insurance Funds ... if they cannot successfully apply for practising membership of Speech Pathology Australia.

I believe removing registration of the profession in Queensland will result in less protection of the public and reduced assurance of receiving a safe and competent speech pathology service.

I would greatly appreciate it if you would consider supporting and advocating for further consultation with the speech pathology profession, our employers, Speech Pathology Australia and the general public regarding the State Government's decision to discontinue State-based registration of speech pathologists in Queensland.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Petersen

This letter comes from a passionate speech pathologist, and I do not think that there is any need to condemn her because of her passion. It would be good for the minister in his summation of the bill to alleviate this person's concerns. I bring that issue to the attention of the House.