




Speech By
Hon. Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Record of Proceedings, 4 March 2014

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Electoral Commission, Redcliffe By-Election

 **Hon. JP BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (9.42 am): An unfettered right to vote is a hallmark of all liberal democracies. There is no greater symbol of our freedoms than citizens being able to cast a vote free from coercion or intimidation. There is no greater threat to our democracy and its institutions than the threat imposed by those who seek to limit the right of citizens to cast a free vote. This is more than an abstract discussion. While it is difficult to imagine that such a debate would have any relevance in contemporary society, it remains a very real issue today.

It is with regret that I have to advise the House that last Thursday I received a letter from the Acting Electoral Commissioner, Mr Walter van der Merwe, concerning events surrounding the Redcliffe by-election. The Acting Electoral Commissioner wrote—

I am in receipt of numerous complaints, both formal and informal, from a range of persons about unacceptable conduct taking place before and during the conduct of the by-election.

The central issue on polling day was the aggressive and intimidating manner in which the supporters of the political parties conducted themselves, not only towards the public and supporters of other political parties but also staff of the Electoral Commission of Queensland.

The Acting Electoral Commissioner pointed to three main areas of concern: first, the overt intimidating and obstructing behaviour towards the public and election staff; secondly, the excessive display of political statements and the manner and time in which those statements were erected and displayed; and, thirdly, the conduct and number of scrutineers at the Saturday night count. The Acting Electoral Commissioner further characterised the nature and extent of the complaints received and the concern expressed by his staff as ‘unprecedented in recent times’.

He indicated in his letter that, in accordance with section 7(1)(c) of the Electoral Act 1992, the ECQ is to consider and report to the minister on such electoral matters as the commissioner considers appropriate. He continues—

I formally now inform you that I intend to conduct an internal inquiry into this matter and to report to you in due course.

It would be my desire that the report I present to you be tabled in the Legislative Assembly as it may contain recommendations for amending the Electoral Act and changing electoral practices.

The Acting Electoral Commissioner has indicated that he expects to finalise his report in about six weeks time and will be engaging with the electors of Redcliffe ‘to ensure that any concerns that need to be addressed are actioned in a timely and appropriate manner’. The Acting Electoral Commissioner has also requested that, in view of the possibility of changes to electoral laws being recommended, further consideration of the Electoral Reform Amendment Bill 2013 be delayed until the report is completed. The government is happy to accede to that request.

I report to the House today with a deep sense of regret that an independent public official has cause to write to me in such terms. Democracy is a fragile structure. Those who take it for granted

and fail to be vigilant in its defence are its greatest enemies. The behaviour evident in Redcliffe nearly two weeks ago demonstrates why our democratic institutions are worth protecting. I can assure the House that this government awaits the commission's report with interest and will do whatever is required to assist the Acting Electoral Commissioner. For the information of the House I table the Acting Electoral Commissioner's advice, dated 27 February 2014.

Tabled paper: Letter, dated 27 February 2014, from the Acting Electoral Commissioner to the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Hon. Jarrod Bleijie, regarding complaints received about unacceptable conduct at the Redcliffe by-election [\[4575\]](#).