




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 30 November 2016

MOTION

Child Protection

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (6.00 pm): I move—

That, given the current child safety crisis, this House expresses no confidence in the Minister for Child Safety.

This week we have continued to see in this House the Minister for Child Safety attempt to justify the systemic failings that have occurred and continue to occur under her watch. No matter how the minister tries to placate the parliament or those we represent, she cannot deny that all of this has occurred under her watch. We have seen backlogs increasing, case loads expanding, resources remaining stagnant and child safety officers struggling to cope. We have seen excuses being made, reports being hidden, data being washed, solutions being ignored and careers being terminated. Most frighteningly, we see children suffering and children dying because this department is not getting to them on time. We see children at risk of abuse right now—today—waiting helplessly for child safety officers to come knocking on their doors, but in many cases help never comes. This is happening right here in our backyards in Queensland.

While the minister hides behind slogans, talking points and denials, sighs and rolls her eyes, Queenslanders remain appalled. We know that four months ago the minister confirmed that in October last year she issued a direction to the director-general to drive better responses in the regions for commencing investigations into child abuse cases. It is now 13 months later and things are worse than ever. Yesterday the minister walked into this House and claimed that every day she is demanding more from her department on investigations and assessment time frames, but after almost two years in the job she has apparently issued a lot of demands and delivered no results.

Meanwhile, she continues her culture of secrecy by hiding away damning reports into the handling of Mason Jet Lee under her watch. Instead of a full, open, transparent release of the internal findings and given the extraordinary level of public interest in this case, the minister shamelessly refuses to release it. In fact, we know that if the minister has her way, it will never be released despite a *Nine News* poll yesterday showing that, as of last night, 88 per cent of Queenslanders believe the government should release all the information it has on this little boy. We should not hold our breath on the external panel review either. If it is half as damning as the secret internal reviews, they will have some excuse not to release it. We cannot wait for the coroner's findings as they will be three years away. Queenslanders are demanding answers now.

While this minister purports to be open and transparent, her actions are anything but. At the same time we have continued to see massive issues in performance data with this minister now struggling to defend the leaked October data which, until recently, she claimed did not even exist or was not readily available. The data shows that on the Gold Coast and in my electorate of Mudgeeraba only 1.3 per cent of 10-day investigations are starting on time. I have seen the same issues with the same feedback with the same concerns and the same public outrage as I travel right around this state in areas like Roma,

Cairns, Townsville, Toowoomba and the list goes on. In the electorate of Mount Isa, investigations overall are at record low levels with only 16.7 per cent of five-day investigations starting on time. It gets worse for cases requiring a 10-day response time, with only 12.5 per cent starting on time. Across North Queensland more than 300 kids were caught in a hidden backlog, waiting for action in regional intake centres. If that is not a crisis, I do not know what is. This should be evidence enough to vote for this motion.

What have we seen from the minister as this crisis has unfolded over a number of months? We have seen her head south to enjoy Splendour in the Grass while children in Queensland suffered under her watch and her failings, which continue to occur. We have seen carers walking away from looking after the most vulnerable children in this state. We have seen careers ending as staff are sacked and marched out of the department as scapegoats for their minister's incompetence. We have seen her refusing to backfill positions.

Yesterday this minister announced by press release that the so-called new drug testing measures would be put in place, but they are already there. For too long we have seen this minister go from failure to failure, excuse after excuse, creating diversions as the child safety crisis worsens. Even the union has said that the department is failing under this minister and they will not stand idly by. Most importantly, Queenslanders have no confidence that the department of child safety will protect the most vulnerable Queenslanders in this state. The fish rots from the head. The minister is deceiving the media, the public and the parliament. The Premier needs to show some leadership and remove this minister from her portfolio. If the department can see it is time to go and the union can see it is time to go, then it is time for the minister to go.