




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 17 February 2016

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Rockhampton Courthouse

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice and Minister for Training and Skills) (2.35 pm): Late last year this government became aware of an upcoming appointment of a permanent Federal Circuit Court judge at Rockhampton, after the federal Attorney-General made a public announcement to that effect on the steps of the Rockhampton courthouse. Being aware of the difficulties and delays faced by Central Queensland families in having their family law matters dealt with, I welcomed this development.

I then wrote to Senator Brandis, requesting that if the federal government intended to accommodate the new appointment in the state courthouse for contact to be made with Justice Services to discuss what arrangements could be put in place. Senator Brandis did not respond and no arrangements were made with the state government, my department or, indeed, the Chief Justice, who the senator should realise has responsibility for the control and management of all Supreme Court buildings across the state.

Rockhampton courthouse provides a range of important services to the people of Rockhampton, which was made very clear in my letter to Senator Brandis. He chose to completely ignore my request, announcing on 2 February—via the member for Capricornia's Facebook page—that a permanent appointment had been made, with a welcome ceremony to take place on 7 March.

When I raised concern about the non-existent arrangements for the accommodation of the new appointment, Senator Brandis was reported as claiming that 'arrangements for the accommodation of the Federal Circuit Court judge are in place and have been the subject of discussion between those who administer the Federal Circuit Court and the state court authorities'. This is simply untrue. The federal government's arrogant approach actually risks compromising the delivery of existing state services at that courthouse. Is Senator Brandis suggesting that District Court sittings be reduced in Rockhampton? Is he suggesting that the people of Rockhampton should not have access to QCAT hearings?

I wrote to the senator again on 5 February. To date, I have had no response but he has had no problem responding to questions on this topic at Senate estimates on 9 February. He assured the committee that he was personally familiar with the courthouse and that there was a vacant courtroom which would accommodate the new judge when she commences, to be based in Rockhampton. This is untrue. What the senator refers to as a 'vacant courtroom' is presently used by visiting judges of the District Court, the industrial tribunal and members of QCAT, as well as the visiting Federal Circuit Court judge. There is no vacant courtroom.

Mr Bleijie interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Kawana, you are warned under standing order 253A for your interjections, which have not been taken.

Mrs D'ATH: The senator's comments were not only untrue but arrogantly dismissive of the diverse needs of the people of Central Queensland. They should be measured against his responsibility as a minister to answer truthfully to Senate estimates and his status as an officer of the Supreme Court of Queensland. He has treated the government, the Chief Justice and the people of Queensland with disdain. I call for Senator Brandis to respond to my correspondence and to answer questions about what Commonwealth funds will be committed to to make substantial modifications to the Rockhampton courthouse to deliver on his announcement.