




Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2018

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Rural and Regional Queensland, Maternity Services

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.28 pm): I rise to speak about the birthing service crisis that is gripping our regional and rural communities and putting mothers and babies at risk. Queenslanders deserve a world-class public health system no matter where they live. Newborn babies are dying at a higher rate in Queensland country towns due to there being no maternity services. Some 23.3 babies in every thousand are dying in towns where no birthing services are available, compared to 6.1 babies per thousand in rural areas with obstetrics. This equates to a death rate in newborns that is almost four times higher in towns where there are no birthing services.

Queensland has the highest rate of freebirthing, which is a birth without a registered midwife, in the nation. More than one child every day is born before arriving at hospital, often at the side of the road. This problem has been escalating since 1995. This is a problem wholly and solely created by Labor. Under Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk and 26 years of consecutive Labor governments, 36 maternity services have closed. Labor has been slashing these services at a rate of three per year—from Mossman to Texas and Quilpie to Nambour, with Theodore recently added and Chinchilla and Emerald set to join the list.

Earlier this year it was revealed that the Chinchilla Hospital has been on maternity bypass since December 2017. Over eight months later there is still no firm time frame for when these important services will be restored. We have seen the impact on patient care already with the harrowing story of an emergency caesarean birth earlier this year. The Theodore Hospital in the Callide electorate, as we know, has had a reduction in regular maternity services as well. Despite the fact that the Central Queensland town raised money to rebuild its own hospital maternity ward, ruined in the 2010 floods, local residents have been told full birthing services will not return. The hospital had maternity services up until the floods and since then has only been able to cater for emergency deliveries.

These are two examples of a major reduction in front-line services under Anastacia Palaszczuk and Labor. Rural and regional towns are being treated like second-class citizens. These closures are forcing desperate mums to either deliver their babies at home with no medical support or to risk a roadside birth by driving hundreds of kilometres to the nearest hospital. When asked in the recent budget estimates hearing, the government downplayed the Chinchilla Hospital maternity closure as referring residents to Dalby as being in relative close proximity. The distance is almost 85 kilometres—further than the distance from the Gold Coast to Brisbane. I put this to the minister: would he find this an acceptable situation if it were his wife and his child? I doubt it. Why are families in rural and regional towns being forced to do what many city families would deem unthinkable?

As a mum and as a nurse and as a person who was raised in a regional town and born in a bush nursing hospital, I am appalled by the choices this government has forced hundreds of regional and rural families to make. Sadly, regional Queenslanders have become accustomed to the reduction in important services—whether it is banks, family owned and operated small businesses or local hospital

services—and it is not good enough. ‘Dr Doolittle’ thinks he will solve this problem with a summit. That is code for a no-action talkfest. It is time for Annastacia Palaszczuk and Minister Steven Miles to stop playing politics and start putting patients first. Regional mums and bubs need a solution to this crisis now. Every minute is critical and crucial when the life of a baby is at risk.

While in power the LNP tried to address this mess. We began reinstating birthing services in Beaudesert and Cooktown. Regional women also benefited from our 40 per cent increase in the flying hours of the Flying Obstetric and Gynaecology Service. Thankfully, now the federal government is doing the heavy lifting with increased support for additional rural doctors and more funding for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

Overall, when the LNP was in government we improved front-line health services across the whole state. The LNP made record investments in Queensland Health that led to improvements in emergency departments, with 87 per cent of children seen within the clinically recommended four hours compared with just 81 per cent at the change of government. Ambulance ramping significantly reduced by over 20 per cent under the LNP and we cleared Labor’s long wait public dental patients, who had been left on waiting lists for more than two years. At the change of government, Labor had left 61,405 dental patients waiting for more than two years. By mid-2014, this figure was reduced to zero. The LNP believes strongly that every Queenslanders, no matter where they live, deserves a world-class public health system—no matter where they live. This government has demonstrated that it does not care.