




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Record of Proceedings, 28 November 2019

**HEALTH, COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND DOMESTIC AND
FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION COMMITTEE**

Report

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (10.40 am): I lay upon the table of the House report No. 30 of the Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee titled *Investigation of the closure of the Earle Haven residential aged care facility at Nerang*.

Tabled paper: Health, Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee: Report No. 30, 56th Parliament, November 2019—Investigation of the closure of the Earle Haven residential aged care facility at Nerang (Inquiry into aged care, end-of-life and palliative care and voluntary assisted dying) [2173](#).

This report looks at what happens when nursing home providers walk away from their responsibilities.

On 11 July 2019, after a litany and, in fact, a decade of failures, the management at the Hibiscus House and Orchid House nursing homes within the Earle Haven Retirement Village ceased caring for the 69 residents entrusted to their care. The management of the company running the facility at the time, HelpStreet, caused the removal of essential equipment from the facility, told staff they were out of a job and simply called the triple 0 service to do a bulk evacuation. At one of its hearings, the committee heard the recording of that triple 0 call and it will remain with us forever.

HelpStreet was not the approved provider of the nursing home, but a subcontractor to the provider, People Care, through an unsigned commercial arrangement between two entities that would ultimately unravel. The catastrophe that unfolded on 11 July triggered a code brown alert, a disaster-scale response by Queensland Health and Queensland Ambulance Service workers, involving hundreds of people. In our report, we commend the men and women of the QAS and Queensland Health for their professional, compassionate and caring response to those vulnerable, frail, elderly residents.

Events at Earle Haven were also investigated by the federal government in an inquiry led by Kate Carnell AO. As chair, I find it quite perplexing that the recent federal report into the closure of Earle Haven did not agree with the Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Health decision to conduct the evacuation of the residents and suggested that the residents should somehow have remained at Earle Haven, despite authorities' concerns that it was not safe for residents.

Our investigation identified that HelpStreet was not the only problem at Earle Haven. Significant problems with the approved provider, People Care, were documented by the federal government regulators for over a decade, right up until the home's closure in July. Those same authorities gave People Care a string of second chances to correct those problems. In the course of our investigation, the federal Aged Care and Quality Safety Commission finally acted to rescind People Care's accreditation as an aged-care provider. People Care staff employed by owner and director, Mr Arthur Miller, also documented problems at Earle Haven and attempted to bring them to his attention, but he failed to listen or act. Mr Miller told the committee that he will not provide aged-care services any longer.

Put bluntly, the events at Earle Haven should never have happened. The committee calls on the federal government to take action. The federal government is primarily responsible and accountable for deciding aged-care funding arrangements, the standards of care, how complaints are dealt with and the accreditation of providers, which are all issues that we saw at Earle Haven.

We are also cognisant of the fact that the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety looked at the regulatory issues surrounding the closure of Earle Haven as part of its work. Their report is due in November 2020. The royal commission's interim report leaves no doubt that the aged-care system 'lacks transparency in communication, reporting accountability' and it must change.

The federal government can and should act now. The funding model for aged care simply must change if the underlying problems afflicting the industry are to be fixed. Aged-care workers should not be treated as the poor cousins of the health sector. Until pay rates are improved, providers will continue to struggle to attract and retain good staff who want to make a career in the aged-care sector. If the federal government is serious—

Mr BLEIJIE: Mr Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I believe that the chair is debating the committee report, rather than tabling the report for a later debate time to give all members the opportunity to debate the report. He is making political statements that indicate debating the report, which is not due for debate this morning.

Mr SPEAKER: As the member is currently tabling the document, I am not privy to the contents of the report. I am taking it at face value that the report contains many of the statements that the member is making. If that is not the case, there may be merit to the point of order. I cannot ascertain that and I do not think you can either, member for Kawana. As the chair of the committee, the member is the spokesperson for that committee. Please continue, member for Thuringowa.

Mr HARPER: If the federal government is serious about ensuring quality aged-care services in nursing homes, it should enshrine in legislation minimum staffing levels and minimum staff contact hours for the care provided to residents. Sadly, the reality is that this may not occur at a federal level. The Commonwealth Department of Health has made it clear that it does not support the same features of the Health Transparency Bill currently before the House. The federal government needs to pay closer attention to the operating conditions in the nursing homes it has accredited. Reporting arrangements for the industry also need—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Pause the clock. Members to my left, I have given clear guidance about the member on his feet and the tabling of this report. Interjections will cease or I will start naming members.

Mr HARPER: Reporting arrangements for the industry also need to be more transparent. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the committee has recommended that the federal government establish an independent aged-care commissioner to provide oversight of the aged-care system. I would like to acknowledge the former staff of the facility who worked unpaid to ensure that former residents were properly cared for on the day. I also thank—

(Time expired)