




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 17 October 2019

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.24 pm): The people of Bundaberg and Hervey Bay regions are entitled to public transparency and answers on the disastrous circumstances of the chief executive officer of the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service being stood down. Our community deserves answers from the board chair and the minister.

Was Adrian Pennington, the chief executive officer, put on special leave or terminated as claimed in a 30 September email to 4,000 staff? Why after seven years of excellent service was the Australian chief executive of the year marched out of the hospital and treated so poorly? What reasons were given for his dismissal and did they directly relate to a mental health crisis? Will the minister call for a review of events prior to Mr Pennington's crisis event and Facebook post and how was he managed leading up to his dismissal?

Can the minister confirm that this was not a personal vendetta and that any complaints used to terminate the chief executive were thoroughly investigated independently of the board chair? Did the appointment of Lisa Desmond, the former CEO of the Fraser Coast Regional Council, have anything to do with Mr Pennington's dismissal?

Exactly what mental health support was provided to Mr Pennington since he was escorted from the Bundaberg Hospital last week? Sources have indicated that, contrary to statements made by the board chair last week in the media, Mr Pennington has been offered no support by the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service at all and his mental health is in a fragile state. In addition, the board chair has banned anyone in the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service from contacting Mr Pennington, and I ask: how does that provide support?

In an organisation that should be about health and wellbeing of staff and the public, I cannot believe that the board chair of the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service was talking about this employee's mental health in the media, especially during Mental Health Week. It is widely understood that, on the days after the chief executive was released from hospital after a three-hour session with a psychologist, the board chair demanded he attend her personal residence to apologise for a Facebook post and suggested the chief executive consider leaving his employ. The way this issue has been handled was designed to cause the maximum damage and to destroy his credibility and future prospects. To be stripped of a phone and car and given a Cabcharge and then marched to the hospital entrance destroyed any dignity left in this sordid affair.

We need a full external investigation of the chair's actions in the so-called sacking of the chief executive. This is going to get a lot worse before it gets better. The Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service will lose staff who will not tolerate working under this board chair. Losing two board members already is bad enough. I say to those staff, particularly in executive positions, 'Hang in there. Things will change, and remember that we do respect you.'

I know that when the performance of this high-performing health service starts to slide in my region—and it will—it will be the minister's fault for not acting sooner. It is easier to find a new board chair than to find another high-performing chief executive. Why would any health professionals or executives now come to Bundaberg to work if this is the new low standard that we have set for ourselves?

With all the issues of concern, the main project—our new hospital—has now stalled. The acting CEO was the project team leader on the new hospital business case. With no-one doing the job, all meetings have been cancelled and the new hospital project is in real danger of future delays. I ask for those questions to be answered on behalf of my community and, more importantly, in the interests of the health and safety of all those involved.