




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 20 February 2020

PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.13 pm): Today I renew my calls for an independent inquiry into the entire process—both before and after—of the sacking of the Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service CEO, Adrian Pennington. Despite our concerns and, more importantly, the concerns of staff, doctors and nurses, the cover-ups and secrecy continue. This does nothing to address the morale levels and the health and safety concerns of those residents I am proud to represent. On behalf of those whose voices have been silenced and whose complaints to the Crime and Corruption Commission have been referred back to Queensland Health for further investigation, I must represent their calls for answers.

Our community deserves real action from the health minister, who has never addressed the cloud of secrecy that surrounds the Labor appointed Wide Bay health service board chair's decision to sack our high-performing CEO. It is now clear that the minister and the board were well aware of many serious allegations and concerns as far back as July 2019. What is disturbing is what appears to be a cover-up or, worse, a deliberate attempt to hide the issues around the deputy chair of the board including nepotism and the board chair's involvement in contract negotiations between the Wide Bay health service and his private company GenesisCare worth around \$5 million. With many health professionals and staff sharing information, the evidence of nepotism, bullying and harassment, possible fraud, breaches of policy, cover-ups and issues of interference in appointments and much more should be investigated immediately.

What has concerned many is the board chair's use of private emails for correspondence, which would breach the Premier's own policy introduced last year. We know ministers were caught out in this place using private emails. The board used private lawyers and billed Queensland Health, including an unprecedented interference in the recruitment and selection process of a junior officer, Lisa Desmond, about whom I have spoken previously. It is understood that Ms Desmond has been harassed into quitting her role and has left the region. More recently, the Wide Bay health service board chair used a private law firm during mediation and hearings to deal with the fallout from last year's sacking. We believe the estimated cost to taxpayers is around \$80,000.

Staff in the Wide Bay health service are suspicious and nervous about the engagement of Simon Rumore. It is understood Mr Rumore was engaged on a weekly retainer with staff unsure of his role. One function that has been exposed is Mr Rumore was engaged to assist in the sacking of Mr Pennington and was responsible for meeting and escorting Mr Pennington from the hospital on the first day Mr Pennington returned to work from health related leave. Allegations are circulating around the health service about Mr Pennington's dismissal. Most of us just want the answers. There are allegations that the board chair has quoted support from senior public servants including the Director-General, Mr John Wakefield, in its decision to terminate Mr Pennington. Our community deserves to know whether Mr Wakefield, the Director-General, knew of and agreed to the sacking of Adrian Pennington before he was marched out of the hospital.

It is a sad and sorry state of affairs when there continue to be delays in the announcement of the new level 5 hospital due to this process. I believe the firm engaged to recruit our new chief executive has never taken on such a high level recruitment before. We know that interviews are underway. Our community deserves a high-performing CEO to take us forward.