




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2020

LEGAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.56 pm): The examination of this audit report No. 6 of 2018-19, *Delivering coronial services*, raises a lot of questions. We must be thankful, as has been said here earlier, for the role of the Auditor-General in highlighting and holding to account these issues that continue to be in our midst.

I again thank the committee for allowing this to be reported. It is very interesting that since then we have all welcomed the increased funding. We are very much attuned to reflecting on how it got so bad and the wait times that have been spoken about by other speakers are truly unbelievable. We must again reflect on how our families and the loved ones of these people who get caught up in this system must be feeling.

The Queensland Auditor-General has done an amazing job here and has instigated so many changes that have recently passed through the House. The performance audit, as I have said, was really quite damning. Again, without the Auditor-General, this would have bubbled on for a number of years and we would have continued to see the backlog that was forecast to get even worse. When we talk about a two-year waiting list or even longer—we heard the member for Lockyer's example of some three or four years—we should be concerned.

The auditor looked at how efficient and effective the processes and systems for delivering these services were, whether they are providing adequate support services to bereaved families and where they are planning effectively to deliver sustainable services. It was a worry to get the results.

The lack of governance has been spoken about. The State Coroner has responsibility for the efficiency of the system but has little function control to fulfil this responsibility. The core business for the three agencies at times had competing priorities, and that let everyone down. No one agency is accountable for managing a coronial investigation. The seven recommendations have been read out and I do not need to repeat those. It is encouraging that this report has led to very important legislative changes and, again, we must all be calling for consistent review. I encourage the Auditor-General to have a look at this again in a year and see how far they have progressed some of these issues. If we let these practices continue in our agencies, providing such an important service, we will all be disappointed.

We welcome the increased funding. Again, it has been highlighted by committee members that that needs to be reviewed and reviewed regularly. Again, we must work very hard to continue to get the wait times back to an efficient model.

As the member for Gympie said, we could not believe the issue of vessel monitoring systems was kicked around as a political football when this was about the families being communicated with. The families deserve nothing more than the facts and the natural justice of a process that would have provided some sort of closure after all of these years of not really knowing what happened. We

commend the Auditor-General for putting in such a lot of work. I again remind people that back then the minister still would not apologise for the department. He has still not apologised to those families for the way they carried on in that Coroner's inquest. Subsequently, the minister continued to fight our calls for the VMS system to be used in a better manner, so you could imagine my delight when, on 3 December last year, the minister finally said—

I am looking forward to having engagement with the Queensland Police Service and my department to make sure that information is possible and available and useful.

It took some months for the minister to finally step up and admit that he got it wrong. I hope that the department or the minister has reached out to the families of those fishermen, who wanted all of the Coroner's recommendations to be implemented. We also look forward to a review of the vessel monitoring system and how effective it can be to ensure that we do as much as we can to save fishermen at sea.