




Speech By
Colin Boyce

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 15 September 2021

ADJOURNMENT

Theodore Maternity Services

 **Mr BOYCE** (Callide—LNP) (9.15 pm): I rise today on behalf of the Theodore Maternity Services. I believe Theodore maternity was set up to fail by this government in its push to centralise health services. After the 2011 flood devastated Theodore, a new state-of-the-art birthing suite was built as part of a \$2 million hospital overhaul. In 2018 a decision was made not to reinstate planned birthing services at Theodore Hospital. After much community and political lobbying, the Rural Maternity Taskforce was set up. It is my view that this task force was set up to ensure Theodore Maternity Services would never be fully reinstated. The task force was asked by the minister to advise on the safety of rural maternity services in Queensland and explore what steps can be taken to minimise the risks for mothers and babies in rural and remote communities, whilst providing services as close as possible to where they live.

A two-day summit was held in Cairns and the health minister, Mr Steven Miles, announced that all hospital and health services must have ministerial approval for any changes to rural maternity services. The task force report states that, between 1996 and 2005, a significant number of rural maternity services were downgraded. Since then, there has been a preference to keep maternity services centralised to major towns and cities.

The task force report introduced the Australian Rural Birthing Index. This tool was accepted and recommended by the Queensland Rural and Remote Maternity Services Planning Framework and was delivered by the task force this year. A consultant from Victoria was engaged to deliver the report on the pilot of this framework in Theodore. The consultant's report notes that the Rural Birthing Index is problematic for Theodore because of the population. It seems this was the only tool they were instructed to use, and I question if they were allowed to consider any other method of inquiry.

The task force report states that an area for further investigation is the birth before arrival rate in Queensland. This is literally giving birth on the side of the road. The rate of births before arrival has increased in Queensland over the past 10 years and is particularly high for women who live one hour or more away from a maternity service. This barely rated a mention in the framework and, in my view, requires further investigation.

The current health minister made a statement earlier this month adopting the recommendations of the consultant's report. The recommendations are a list of seven open-ended opportunities to be delivered in the next six to nine months. The Theodore community deserves better from this Labor government and we will be watching closely to see how these plans unfold before June 2022.