




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Forensic and Scientific Services

 **Mr NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (2.00 pm): Serious questions have been raised about the adequacy of Forensic and Scientific Services in Queensland, and those questions have only increased with today's announcement that the health minister has asked the Attorney-General to reopen the coronial inquiry into the death of Shandee Blackburn, followed by the Attorney's response that she is seeking legal advice about doing so. The Attorney could direct an inquiry today if she wanted to. The Attorney has that power under section 27 of the Coroners Act. Hopefully, a new inquest will provide some clarity and comfort for Shandee's mother, Vicki, and her family.

Why is it that yet again this Labor Party government only acts when the story gets a run in the media? What about the many other people relying on forensic services to get it right who have missed out because of the government's incompetence? This inquest, if it proceeds, will not answer the many serious questions raised about the state of Queensland's forensic science service. This is a serious matter that deserves so much more than the Premier's shallow and glib brush-offs in question time—brush-offs that do not tell the full story revealed in Audit Office report No. 21 of 2018-19, *Delivering forensic services*.

That report bells the cat on the Premier's claims and reveals that: the number of staff in the forensic DNA team declined from 65 in 2014 to 61 in 2018; the budget was reduced by \$1 million over the same period; and DNA exhibits older than 120 days increased by 344 per cent, from 289 to 1,284 over the same period. The problem has been around for many years. Indeed, a pioneer of DNA testing, Professor Angela van Daal, is reported as saying that the problems go back two decades. Recently I received another report into Forensic and Scientific Services that was done in July this year. This report has not yet been made public or published, but this internal analysis makes some damning statements, including that timeliness is an issue. The report states—

Feedback from coroners is that the timeliness of autopsy reports is unacceptable, with 32% of reports being delivered within 120 days—

meaning 68 per cent of reports are not being delivered on time, and that—

There are coronial cases being closed prior to receiving the autopsy report due to significant delays in completion.

Significantly—

There is a long standing issue that current IT systems including the Laboratory Information System (LIS), Auslab, are not suited to forensic pathology.

There is of course much more in that report, but it shows that it is well past time for a full and open investigation into the delivery of forensic services in Queensland. An inquiry is necessary because without an effective and up-to-date Forensic and Scientific Services justice is not served. Courts, coroners, the Director of Public Prosecutions and police are not provided with timely and accurate

scientific evidence. It is serious because victims and their families are denied justice, closure and the satisfaction of knowing a perpetrator has been convicted and held accountable for the crime and removed from society. This is a serious matter that needs a serious response.

(Time expired)