




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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LEGAL AFFAIRS AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (3.24 pm): If the Office of the Information Commissioner's aim is to promote access to government-held information, I have to ask the question why a simple right-to-information request regarding the toxic culture of the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service has been like pulling teeth. My RTI submission into serious allegations of bullying and intimidation at a senior level has been met with nothing but roadblocks and delay. It is almost like the allegations of cover-ups are being met with further cover-ups. The accountability and transparency of this state government is constantly called into question because of cover-ups like the one at the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service and because of the constraints placed on the Office of the Information Commissioner to access and distribute the information for which it was established to do. The critical information that I sought is of great public interest and of benefit to the public, particularly to anyone living on the Sunshine Coast, and should be easy to secure.

I submitted an RTI application in April last year seeking 'all board papers including attachments, correspondence, consultant reports into the culture or workplace environment of senior employees at the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service for the period 1 July 2019 to 31 July 2020'—a simple enough request if there is nothing to hide. The health service's own Clinical Information Access Unit eventually, after many delays, changed the scope of my submission without justification and handed over nothing but heavily redacted board minutes. That is not what had been requested. It had changed the scope of the RTI to suit it.

The alarm bells were deafening, so I went to the Office of the Information Commissioner for an external review—an external review that is mentioned so many times in the committee's report. After months of back and forth with the Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service, which was still trying to keep relevant documents under lock and key, an additional 281 pages were identified by the Information Commissioner as a part of my RTI request. A further 12 pages of correspondence are still being withheld due to the health service claiming that they are contrary to the public interest—presumably because they contain even more damning issues than the one I raised in this place on Tuesday.

I have since disputed the health service's bid to withhold information about the workplace culture of senior management of a public entity with a budget of \$1.36 billion and 6,430 full-time employees and in particular the actions of senior management of that health service. It is in the public interest and it should be publicly available, but due to the actions of the health service we are forced to wait and see. I will be sure to keep the House updated as to the outcome of that RTI. I know the member for Bancroft is particularly interested.

The results that I did eventually get from my RTI submission are highly concerning and damning to the state government. One document in particular highlighted the extremely toxic culture within the health service and that the hospital board and Queensland Health were aware and failed to act. What is most concerning is that the document revealed that this culture was to blame for the poor performance

of both the Sunshine Coast University Hospital and of Nambour Hospital. Both have the worst record for elective surgery wait times in all of Queensland and the impacts for people living in the electorate of Buderim and all over the Sunshine Coast are significant.

The reason I approached the OIC and the reason I have taken the course of action to expose this culture is because health workers deserve better and so do the patients that they care for. Given the serious impacts to the community, the information that I sought through my RTI request should have been easier to access and it should have been handled in a timelier manner. Instead, it has been made very difficult and that raises even more concerns. Some 10 months after my application was submitted I am still waiting on a final result. I do not know when that will be or if the other relevant documents will be released. It is simply not good enough. Issues cannot be addressed, measured and fixed until the truth comes to light.

I am afraid that the Office of the Information Commissioner's aim of promoting access to government-held information is being deliberately thwarted by elements of the state government. It is clear that this state government has lost all integrity and accountability when complaints from senior health workers and 'desperate pleas for direct intervention and help' are at first ignored and then hidden away so they never see the light of day. If the state government cared about being open and transparent, accessing information would not be that difficult. The only conclusion that can be met from the years of cover-ups by this state government is that it is ashamed of what will be found. The Office of the Information Commissioner would be more effective in giving information and help to agencies and members of the public on matters relevant to the RTI Act if the state government allowed the office to do its job without constraints and demonstrated a genuine commitment to open and transparent government in the interests of all Queenslanders.