




Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Record of Proceedings, 18 April 2023

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Gladstone Hospital, Maternity Services

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (Minister for Regional Development and Manufacturing and Minister for Water) (2.51 pm): Today I rise to talk about maternity services in Gladstone.

Mr Head: Finally!

Mr BUTCHER: The member for Callide is the last person I want to hear in this chamber today. I said that we would restore these services, and that is exactly what we are doing. Amidst a nationwide shortage of obstetricians, we have secured more doctors and we are an important step closer to returning all services. Women who are in low-risk categories in Gladstone can now have their babies in the hospital that we know and love in Gladstone. We worked continuously to ensure the return of these services by the middle of this year. We know how tough it is, as do those opposite, to recruit specialist obstetricians not only in Queensland but in Australia.

Mr Head interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Member for Callide, you are warned.

Mr BUTCHER: We have even had to spread our net internationally to get obstetricians to come to Australia, and that is progressing well. As we have said, there is still more to do, but this step means that over half of the women identified who would have had to travel to Rockhampton will no longer have to do that. There has been a lot of rhetoric from those opposite making all sorts of claims in my local community, fearmongering that maternity services would never, ever return to the Gladstone Hospital. That was never, ever going to be the case.

Ms Bates interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order, member for Mudgeeraba.

Mr BUTCHER: We committed to returning services to Gladstone in a staged approach as we said we would do when it was safe to do so, and that is exactly the plan that we have in place which is working right now. To be clear once and for all, in October the Leader of the Opposition came into my community and said to the women of Gladstone that once a maternity service goes on bypass it never, ever comes back. That was a lie and he knew that. He knew that he was lying to the women of my community. I am not sure—

Mr WATTS: Mr Acting Speaker, I rise to a point of order.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Pause the clock. Resume your seat. I will just take some advice before I take your point of order. Member, you have used—

Ms Bates interjected.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Member for Mudgeeraba, you are warned. Member for Gladstone, you have used some unparliamentary language. I would ask you to withdraw it.

Mr BUTCHER: I withdraw.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Does that satisfy you, member for Toowoomba North? If so, I call the member for Gladstone.

Mr BUTCHER: I am not sure what the opposition leader's agenda was, whether it was just to cause fear or to spread more negativity about our health services or simply just dog whistling in my community. It does not matter what his agenda was; it was gutter politics designed to scare the expectant mothers in my electorate and in my community. The Leader of the Opposition should be ashamed and he should apologise to the Gladstone community, especially to the mothers in Gladstone. In response to his fearmongering and that of the LNP, I did put my job on the line. I wanted my community to know how serious I was about getting this issue fixed and I said that we would return this service, and we are. I am not going to stop fighting for my community in Gladstone and the mothers and children in the Gladstone community, and I am not going anywhere. For the information of those opposite, I am going to stick around and assure the mothers and babies in my electorate that the Gladstone Hospital will continue to service the community of Gladstone.

My wife delivered two babies in the Gladstone Hospital and we have also had two beautiful little granddaughters recently, so I know how tough it has been for mothers in the Gladstone community. That is why I have been fighting so hard to make sure we get the staged approach right and we started to deliver on that staged approach, and that is exactly what we are doing right now. I know how important it is to have those services so that mothers are able to birth there so that they have their support network around them with family close by. There is no doubt that the bypass has certainly caused serious distress to pregnant women and their families in my community and I wish to acknowledge the anxiety of those expectant mothers and want to apologise for that. I also want to thank them for their patience and their understanding while we worked through this staged approach to get maternity services back in Gladstone.

I also want to thank those in my community who have advocated for the return of this service. I have met with many mothers in my office who have talked to me about this issue and returning those services, and advocate groups have certainly been looking to ensure that these services come back. Most of all during this whole time I want to thank the nurses and the maternity staff who have been helping the mothers and expectant mothers in the Gladstone region and ensuring that those delivering in Rockhampton were looked after and that they had the support needed from not only the Rockhampton Hospital but also the nurses and midwives from Gladstone who were travelling with them to ensure that those births were done safely and in a timely manner. As I said, we are working on a staged approach. We are delivering the service back to Gladstone and those opposite should be ashamed of themselves for saying that we are not.