



Speech By
Ros Bates

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Maternity Services

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.06 pm): I want to place on record here today my deep concerns with respect to maternity services across Queensland. I have spoken about this many times before in this place and outside of it. The Premier and the health minister might want to close their eyes and hope this issue goes away. Well, it is not. The LNP is not going anywhere either because there are proud regional towns across Queensland where women cannot give birth—Cooktown, Weipa, Biloela, Chinchilla. Call it a bypass. Call it closed. Call it what you want. Mothers are being told they cannot birth there. That is a fact. Take the tricky semantics out of it. Mothers are being told they cannot birth in those hospitals. It is as simple as that.

The minister says we are treating maternity issues like a political football. I will tell the health minister something for free: mothers being sent hundreds of kilometres away from where they live because the Palaszczuk government cannot run and resource Queensland hospitals properly feel like they are being kicked out of their towns away from their families and away from their support networks to give birth. That is how they feel. The minister wants to talk about the political problem. Minister, we are not talking about a political problem; we are talking about people. We are talking about the women of Queensland caught up in this mess made by the ineptitude of the Palaszczuk Labor government, and it is the mothers of Far North Queensland I want to focus on now.

We already know Weipa and Cooktown maternity units are sitting empty, while documents obtained by the opposition through RTI show that Innisfail and Mareeba hospitals have been on maternity bypass in the 12 months to May with monotonous regularity. It is more chaos and crisis. When that happens, it leaves nearly an entire region almost solely reliant on the Cairns Hospital and I feel for all of the staff forced to endure what would be an incredibly stressful situation both for those in Cairns and those in surrounding hospitals, and I fear it is only going to get worse.

A decision on the future of the private birthing unit in Cairns was due to be delivered around September. That time is now quickly approaching and the opposition understands that a decision is now imminent. It could be as soon as tomorrow. The opposition has been saying that the health minister has to stop the 'us versus them' mentality and be willing to work with the private sector. That has to happen, not next week, not next month; it must happen now. How will the Cairns Hospital cope if that private unit is closed? How will it cope if it is closed and there are bypasses in Mareeba and Innisfail? We know that maternity bypasses at these hospitals are now commonplace. This is now a very real scenario. Far North mothers deserve better.

(Time expired)