




Speech By
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FORENSIC SCIENCE QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (12.08 pm): I rise to speak on the Forensic Science Queensland Bill 2023. I note the contribution of the member for Stafford, who said that whenever the opposition asks about something in a negative way it is seen as politicising an issue. We saw that over the weekend as well in election results—that supposedly raising issues on behalf of our constituents is politicising issues. This forensic science bill is a classic example of the opposition having raised issues for some time. We heard contributions from others that these issues were raised and then dismissed by the government as political opportunism, yet significant inquiries have shown that there were issues that needed to be dealt with. As we heard from the member for Currumbin and others, that is why 37,000 cases have to be looked at again. That shows it is not about politicising—just as the issues that were decided on the weekend were not about politicising issues but those in the opposition standing up on behalf of Queenslanders for the issues they raise with us. That is our job—to hold a government to account—and that is why this Forensic Science Queensland Bill 2023 is proof positive that the issues that we have raised from 2020 and 2021 have significance.

That is why now the government is struggling to bring this in so that we can actually deal with some of these issues and so that Queenslanders can rely on their justice system. To have those opposite try to paper over it and say anything about politicising shows that they just do not get it, just as they did not get it on the weekend, or subsequently with today's performance. They just do not get the messages they are getting from Queenslanders. Queenslanders must not forget that this bill lies in the dark shadow cast by the failures of the Palaszczuk-Miles government in addressing critical issues within the DNA lab. We cannot ignore the reality that these failures have rocked the very foundations of our criminal justice system.

We have heard from others that the tireless advocacy of individuals like Vicki Blackburn—as we just heard the member for Whitsunday mention—the mother of murdered woman Shandee Blackburn, and forensic scientist Dr Kirsty Wright brought to light the true extent of these failings and we owe them a debt of gratitude for their courage and persistence.

I refer to an article in *ABC News* dated 31 October 2023 titled 'Queensland Health's Forensic and Scientific Services lab criticised over DNA testing automation'. According to this article, Dr Kirsty Wright told the commission of inquiry that practices at Queensland's forensics lab were 'appalling and reckless'. Dr Wright told the commission the scientists at the lab lapsed in their responsibilities, saying—

To introduce an incomplete method, that was demonstrated to not be performing, and apply those on precious crime scene samples, they must have known that some of those samples would fail.

I table that article by Alex Brewster.

Tabled paper: Article from *ABC News* online, dated 31 October 2023, titled 'Queensland Health's Forensic and Scientific Services lab criticised over DNA testing automation' [391](#).

It is a fundamental principle of our legal system that justice must not only be done but also be seen to be done. As opposition members, we endeavour to raise pertinent questions regarding the extent of cases necessitating forensic retesting and the number of cases affected by previous substandard testing, leading to potential retrials or reopening of cases. Despite the opposition's repeated calls for a commission of inquiry into the DNA laboratory—along with calls from the media, experts and victims of crime—we were consistently dismissed or sidelined by the Labor government. Queenslanders rightfully expect transparency in the administration of justice, and the absence of such information prompts legitimate concerns about the integrity of the process. Since the emergence of concerns regarding failing forensics services, Brisbane Labor's response has been at best sluggish and at worst dismissive. It is deeply regrettable that it took considerable time for the government to acknowledge the issue adequately and initiate corrective measures.

Whilst the opposition acknowledges that the Forensic Science Queensland Bill 2023 aims to address the issues unearthed by the commission of inquiry, it is imperative to emphasise that a properly functioning forensic laboratory is indispensable to ensure the integrity of our state's criminal justice system. All stakeholders, including those within the system and those seeking justice, deserve nothing less.

The time line of events leading up to this moment paints a damning picture of the Miles Labor government's inaction and disregard for the voices of the victims. From the initial questions raised by the LNP in December 2021 to the subsequent revelations uncovered by the *Shandee's Story* podcast, it is clear that the government's response has been woefully inadequate. In February 2022, the then minister for health stated—

There has been no evidence of systemic failings in our forensic pathology unit.

Only one month later she initiated an external review. It then took until June 2022 for the government to cave and announce the commission of inquiry. The interim report subsequently revealed shocking findings, including that 1,840 court statements made were not true and had to be changed, along with the minister saying that 30,000—now 37,000—cases would need retesting.

The commission of inquiry led by Walter Sofronoff delivered a scathing indictment of the failures within the DNA lab and, despite the findings, the government's response has been lacklustre at best. The decision to omit key recommendations from the bill, such as the appointment of a chief operations officer, is troubling and indicative of a broader pattern of negligence.

Victims deserve justice and the people of Queensland deserve a forensic laboratory that operates with the utmost integrity and accountability, and the opposition will continue to push for greater transparency and oversight within our forensic services.