



NORM Alford ...
'commission accountable'.

Govt to fast-track Neerkol inquiry

By SEAN PARNELL

THE Children's Commission could be cut out of a proposed inquiry into allegations of widespread abuse in Queensland orphanages.

Families, Youth and Community Care Minister Anna Bligh said last night she was determined to have the allegations resolved as quick as possible — even if an inquiry clashed with her planned review and possible overhaul the Children's Commission legislation.

When asked if the commission could run the inquiry after legislative changes, Ms Bligh said the allegations were too important to wait.

"We're not going to do it (review the legislation) on the run and we're not going to do it in a piecemeal way that ends up creating more problems than it fixes," Ms Bligh said.

Children's Commissioner Norm Alford yesterday rejected Ms Bligh's comments current legislation left the commission unaccountable.

He said under the Children's Commission and Children's Services Appeals Tribunal Act 1996, the commission was obliged to report on its work directly to Parliament.

But Ms Bligh said the commission was not subject to the Financial and Administration Audit Act 1977, had no audited financial statements and should be required to explain how they spend their money.

Mr Alford said the commission was subject to the Act and was attached to Ms Bligh's department for the purposes of administrative support in respect of financial and human resource matters.

Members of the Neerkol Action Support Group, as well as the Sisters of Mercy who ran the orphanage and have been accused of the abuse, said yesterday they believe Mr Alford should conduct any inquiry into the allegations.