

8 JUNE 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT  
MINISTER FOR FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE AND  
MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES, ANNA BLIGH**

**COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN QUEENSLAND INSTITUTIONS**

MR SPEAKER, I SEEK LEAVE TO MAKE A MINISTERIAL STATEMENT. (LEAVE HAVING BEEN GRANTED)

I TABLE FOR THE INFORMATION OF HONOURABLE MEMBERS THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN QUEENSLAND INSTITUTIONS.

THE BEATTIE GOVERNMENT ESTABLISHED THE FORDE INQUIRY ON 13 AUGUST 1998 TO INVESTIGATE AND REPORT ON ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN IN QUEENSLAND INSTITUTIONS.

I RESOLVED TO SEEK CABINET SUPPORT FOR THIS INQUIRY FOLLOWING DEEPLY DISTURBING AND SHOCKING REPORTS MADE BY MANY PEOPLE OF THEIR EXPERIENCES AS CHILDREN LIVING IN RESIDENTIAL CARE.

ALTHOUGH MANY OF THE PEOPLE TELLING THEIR STORIES WERE IN THEIR FORTIES AND FIFTIES, IT WAS NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE AN INQUIRY WHICH ONLY EXPLORED WHAT HAD HAPPENED IN THE PAST.

IT WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT OUR CURRENT SYSTEM, TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN IN CARE AND IN DETENTION CENTRES, ARE NOT SUBJECT TO ABUSE AND NEGLECT NOW OR IN THE FUTURE.

INDEED, THE MOTIVATION OF MANY ADULTS FOR COMING FORWARD AND TELLING THEIR STORY TO THE INQUIRY WAS, IN THE WORDS OF ONE WITNESS, SO "THAT IT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO OTHER LITTLE KIDS".

NOW, AFTER MORE THAN SIX MONTHS OF INVESTIGATION AND HEARINGS, THE INQUIRY, LEAD BY THE PREVIOUS GOVERNOR MRS LENEEN FORDE, HAS PRODUCED ITS REPORT.

AT THE OUTSET LET ME CONGRATULATE THE COMMISSIONERS AND THEIR STAFF FOR AN EXCELLENT JOB. MUCH OF THE INQUIRY WAS CONDUCTED UNDER VERY DIFFICULT AND EMOTIONALLY EXHAUSTING CIRCUMSTANCES, BUT THE RESULTS HAVE TRULY BEEN WORTHY OF THE EFFORT.

I ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THE WORK OF THE OFFICERS OF MY DEPARTMENT AND THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSION WHO HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT THE INQUIRY HAD COMPLETE AND OPEN ACCESS TO MORE THAN 1500 FILES.

IT IS NOT AN EASY REPORT TO READ.

IT SHINES A LIGHT INTO A DARK AND SHAMEFUL EPISODE OF OUR HISTORY.

IT IS DIFFICULT NOT TO BE DEEPLY AFFECTED BY THE EVIDENCE IT CONTAINS OF PHYSICAL, SEXUAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE, NEGLECT AND DEPRIVATION, OF CHILDREN WHOSE WELL-BEING THE STATE WAS RESPONSIBLE.

ALTHOUGH MANY OF THESE CHILDREN RESIDED IN ORPHANAGES, ONLY A SMALL PROPORTION WERE ACTUALLY ORPHANS.

SOME OF THEM CAME INTO THE CARE OF THE STATE BECAUSE OF PARENTAL ABUSE, SOME BECAUSE THEY WERE CHILD MIGRANTS FROM BRITAIN AND OTHERS SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY WERE INDIGENOUS CHILDREN.

IN THIS REGARD THE REPORT BUILDS ON THE WORK OF THE "BRINGING THEM HOME " INQUIRY AND DOCUMENTS THE FATE OF MANY INDIGENOUS CHILDREN TAKEN INTO CARE.

OTHER CHILDREN IN THE INSTITUTIONS EXAMINED WERE PLACED IN CARE BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS COULD NOT AFFORD TO RAISE THEM OR HAD BEEN WIDOWED OR ABANDONED.

THESE FAMILIES LIVED IN A TIME BEFORE SOCIAL SAFETY NETS SUCH AS SUPPORTING PARENTS BENEFITS, FAMILY ALLOWANCE AND CHILD CARE WERE AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT THEM.

THE REPORT CONCLUDES THAT SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN QUEENSLAND INSTITUTIONS SUFFERED SERIOUS PHYSICAL, SEXUAL AND EMOTIONAL ABUSE. IN MANY OTHER CASES, THERE WAS A FAILURE TO PROVIDE FOR THE BASIC NEEDS OF CHILDREN - EMOTIONAL WARMTH, FOOD, CLOTHING AND EDUCATION.

ONE OF THE KEY ISSUES EXPLORED IN THE REPORT IS THE EXTENT TO WHICH INDIVIDUALS THEMSELVES OR THE SYSTEMS IN WHICH THEY WORKED WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ABUSE OF CHILDREN IN INSTITUTIONS.

THE REPORT SUMMARISES THIS ISSUE SO CLEARLY THAT I CAN ONLY QUOTE FROM IT.

*"ALTHOUGH IT WAS INDIVIDUALS WHO PERPETRATED EACH ACT OF ABUSE, THEY ALONE CANNOT SHOULDER THE WHOLE RESPONSIBILITY. SOME MEASURE OF RESPONSIBILITY MUST BE TAKEN BY THOSE TO WHOM THE ABUSES WERE REPORTED AND WHO DID NOT ACT, THOSE IN CHARGE OF THE INSTITUTIONS WHO DID NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT SAFEGUARDS IN PLACE TO PROTECT THE CHILDREN, THOSE MEMBERS OF RELIGIOUS ORGANISATIONS WHO TURNED A BLIND EYE, THE STAFF AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES WHO DID NOT ADEQUATELY MONITOR THE CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE, SUCCESSIVE STATE GOVERNMENTS THAT HAVE NOT SUFFICIENTLY VALUED CHILDREN TO RESOURCE THE DEPARTMENT ENTRUSTED WITH THEIR CARE, AND SOCIETY, WHICH IGNORED OR ACCEPTED WHAT HAPPENED TO CHILDREN IN THE CARE OF THE STATE".* NEVERTHELESS SOME INDIVIDUALS MAY FACE PROSECUTION.

14 ALLEGATIONS OF POSSIBLE CRIMINAL MATTERS HAVE BEEN REFERRED TO THE QUEENSLAND POLICE FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION.

IN OTHER CASES WHICH MAY HAVE CONSTITUTED CRIMINAL ACTIVITY THE INQUIRY FOUND THERE WAS EITHER INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE, PEOPLE WERE UNWILLING TO PRESS CHARGES OR THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR WAS NO LONGER ALIVE.

THE COMMISSION HAS ALSO PROVIDED ME WITH A CLOSED REPORT WITH FINDINGS ABOUT THE CONDITIONS AT ST JOSEPHS ORPHANAGE AT NEERKOL AND KARRALA HOUSE WHICH I AM NOT ABLE TO TABLE TODAY. THE REASON FOR THIS IS THAT CURRENT PROSECUTIONS OR LEGAL ACTION MAY BE JEOPARDISED. WHEN THESE ACTIONS ARE COMPLETED, I GIVE MY COMMITMENT THAT THIS DOCUMENT WILL ALSO BE TABLED IN THE PARLIAMENT.

THE MOST POWERFUL VOICES IN THE INQUIRY BELONG TO THOSE WHO WERE CHILDREN IN THIS SYSTEM.

FOR EXAMPLE A MAN WHO SPENT TIME IN WESTBROOK AS A BOY RECALLED:

" I SAW MANY FLOGGINGS...TERRIBLE FLOGGINGS. YOU'D SEE HIM FLOG THEM OVER THE BACK WITH BLOOD RUNNING DOWN THEIR BACK. I'VE HAD BLOOD RUNNING DOWN MYSELF "

OR ANOTHER WHO DESCRIBED BEING HIT 58 TIMES BY THE MASTER IN THE DINING ROOM, IN THE PRESENCE OF OTHER CHILDREN WHO WERE MADE TO WATCH AND COUNT THE NUMBER OF TIMES THE BOY WAS HIT.

OR THE STORY OF A 12 YEAR OLD BOY WHO WAS SEXUALLY ASSAULTED BY A PRIEST ON 14 OCCASSIONS OVER A TWO AND HALF YEAR PERIOD.

JUST AS DISTURBING AS THESE GRAPHIC EXAMPLES OF PHYSICAL AND SEXUAL ABUSE IS THE TESTIMONY OF THE HARSH AND BLEAK ENVIRONMENTS WHERE THOUSANDS OF YOUNG QUEENSLANDERS GREW UP WITHOUT BASIC FOOD, CLOTHING OR EDUCATION. WHERE THE SPONTANEITY AND JOY OF CHILDHOOD WAS SYTEMATICALLY SQUASHED.

WHERE THE NORMAL BEHAVIOURS OF CHILDHOOD SUCH AS TANTRUMS AND BEDWETTING WERE CAUSE FOR PUNISHMENT OR RITUAL HUMILIATION. WHERE LOVE, CARE AND AFFECTION WERE VIRTUALLY UNKNOWN.

THIS IS WELL CAPTURED IN EVIDENCE FROM ONE OF THE NUNS WHO RECALLED:

"ALL THOSE BABIES THEY'D ALWAYS BE PUTTING THEIR ARMS UP AND YOU DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO GIVE THEM ANY INDIVIDUAL LOVE. THAT WAS MY ONE BIG SORROW ALWAYS THAT I COULDN'T LOVE THEM AS I WANTED TO."

SOME MIGHT SAY IN RESPONSE TO THESE STORIES, "WELL IF THINGS WERE SO BAD, WHY DIDN'T MORE PEOPLE OR THE CHILDREN COMPLAIN?" THE EVIDENCE IS THAT SOME DID SPEAK OUT. OFTEN THE RESPONSE THEY RECEIVED WAS DISBELIEF AND INACTION, OR WORSE STILL MORE PUNISHMENT. MANY DID NOT – COULD NOT – SPEAK OUT, COMMUNICATING THEIR ANGER AND DISTRESS, THROUGH BEHAVIOUR SUCH AS HEAD BANGING, BITING OR AGGRESSION INSTEAD. OFTEN THIS RESULTED IN ADDITIONAL PUNISHMENT AND IN MANY CASES TRANSFER TO HARSHER INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS DETENTION CENTRES. THIS ALL RESULTED IN FURTHER LOSS OF THE TRUST THAT IS EVERY CHILD'S BIRTHRIGHT.

ALTHOUGH THIS REPORT DOCUMENTS AN ERA IN WHICH ATTITUDES AND STANDARDS WERE DIFFERENT, THE INQUIRY FOUND THAT THE ABUSES DISCLOSED WENT FAR BEYOND THE ACCEPTABLE LIMITS OF THE TIME.

IT WOULD ALSO BE A MISTAKE TO CONCLUDE THAT THESE ABUSES WERE ALL IN THE PAST OR OCCURRED IN ALL INSTITUTIONS AT ALL TIMES.

IN THE SAME WAY IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE TO SAY THAT ALL STAFF WERE INVOLVED IN ABUSING CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE.

MANY STAFF, PAST AND PRESENT HAVE PROVIDED AND CONTINUE TO PROVIDE QUALITY PROFESSIONAL CARE.

HOWEVER, THE INQUIRY MAKES SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS ABOUT THE CURRENT CHILD PROTECTION AND YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEMS.

THE INQUIRY FOUND CLEAR INDICATORS OF RISK IN CURRENT RESIDENTIAL CARE FACILITIES, INCLUDING PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ISOLATION OF FACILITIES, INADEQUATE RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION PROCEDURES, DEFICIENT PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS, AND INADEQUATE PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE.

IT HAS ALSO FOUND THAT CURRENT DETENTION CENTRES ARE PHYSICALLY INADEQUATE AND OFFER LESS TO YOUNG OFFENDERS THAN THE ADULT PRISON SYSTEM DOES.

THE REPORT MAKES 42 RECOMMENDATIONS. BROADLY, THESE REQUIRE BOTH RESPONSES TO THE PAST ABUSE OF CHILDREN BY BOTH GOVERNMENT AND THE CHURCHES AND URGENT REFORMS TO OUR CURRENT CHILD PROTECTION AND YOUTH DETENTION SYSTEMS.

I CAN ASSURE MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE THAT ACTIVE AND SERIOUS CONSIDERATION IS BEING GIVEN TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THESE RECOMMENDATIONS.

I HAVE DIRECTED MY DIRECTOR-GENERAL TO DEVELOP A DETAILED IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR CABINET CONSIDERATION. IT IS MY INTENTION TO PROVIDE THIS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TO THE PARLIAMENT DURING THE AUGUST SITTINGS THIS YEAR.

DURING THE LIFE OF THIS INQUIRY THE BEATTIE GOVERNMENT HAS IMPLEMENTED A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SYSTEM.  
INCLUDING:

- THE PASSAGE OF THE NEW CHILD PROTECTION ACT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHILD PROTECTION REFORM STRATEGY.
- THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A HIGH LEVEL CHILD PROTECTION COUNCIL TO ADVISE THE GOVERNMENT ON STRATEGIES TO PREVENT AND COMBAT CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT.

- THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A \$63M INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN TO REBUILD OUR YOUTH DETENTION SYSTEM.
- A REVIEW OF THE CHILDREN'S COMMISSION TO STRENGTHEN ITS POWERS AND INDEPENDENCE AS AN EXTERNAL MONITOR OF THE WELL BEING OF CHILDREN IN CARE.
- THE INTRODUCTION OF AMMENDMENTS TO THE FAMILY SERVICES ACT TO TOUGHEN THE PRE-EMPLOYMENT SCREENING OF DEPARTMENTAL OFFICERS

WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO YET. THE CHRONIC UNDER-RESOURCING OF SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CANNOT BE REMEDIED OVERNIGHT.

WE MUST RISE TO THE CHALLENGE NOW BEING PRESENTED TO US, AND BUILD A SYSTEM WHERE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SAFE FROM HARM.

I AM DETERMINED THAT IN YEARS TO COME, THE FORDE INQUIRY WILL BE REMEMBERED AS A WATERSHED IN THE CARE AND PROTECTION OF OUR CHILDREN. I TRUST THAT ALL WHO READ THE REPORT WILL BE MOVED BY ITS CONTENTS.

IT IS DIFFICULT TO READ. I URGE YOU TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO LIVE IT.

I TRUST ALSO THAT OUR EFFORTS TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND BUILD A NEW AND BETTER SYSTEM WILL HAVE THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF ALL MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT.

I REALISE THE DISTRESS THAT THIS REPORT MAY CAUSE MANY PEOPLE. FOR SOME, IT WILL BRING BACK UNHAPPY MEMORIES THEY WOULD RATHER HAD STAYED HIDDEN FOREVER. FOR OTHERS WHO WORKED IN THE SYSTEM, STRUGGLING TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE CARE FOR CHILDREN WITHIN LIMITED RESOURCES, AND DOING THE BEST THEY COULD, THERE MAY BE GRIEF AND SHAME AT THE HARM SOMETIMES UNINTENTIONALLY CAUSED. I WISH TO ASSURE ALL THOSE EFFECTED BY THE INQUIRY THAT ONGOING COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT WILL BE PROVIDED. DETAILS OF THIS SERVICE WILL BE FORWARDED TO ALL ELECTORATE OFFICES TODAY.

FINALLY, I WOULD LIKE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THOSE PEOPLE WHO CAME FORWARD TO TELL THEIR STORIES TO THE INQUIRY. MANY OF THEM SPOKE OF PAINFUL CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES FOR THE FIRST TIME, BREAKING DECADES OF SILENCE.

EACH OF THESE WITNESSES ARE ORDINARY QUEENSLANDERS, STRUGGLING TO OVERCOME THE ABUSE AND DEPRIVATION OF THEIR PAST, TO BUILD A LIFE FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES.

I SAY TO EACH OF THESE BRAVE PEOPLE THANK YOU.

WITHOUT YOU, THIS INQUIRY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE. I HONOUR YOU FOR YOUR COURAGE AND THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF THE CHILDREN OF YESTERDAY, TODAY AND THE FUTURE WHOSE NEEDS YOU SO PASSIONATELY REPRESENTED.



10 SEP 1999

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