

22

3-3-99

1



LAID UPON THE TABLE OF THE HOUSE

THE CLERK OF THE PARLIAMENT

**3 MARCH 1999**

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**THE HON. ANNA BLIGH, MLA  
MINISTER FOR FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE  
MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES.**

**THE PETFORD TRAINING FARM**

MR SPEAKER, I SEEK LEAVE TO MAKE A MINISTERIAL STATEMENT.

MR SPEAKER, I AM PLEASED TO TABLE A COPY OF AN INDEPENDENT EVALUATION AND FINANCIAL REPORT OF THE PETFORD TRAINING FARM IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND.

I AM ALSO PLEASED TO ADVISE HONOURABLE MEMBERS OF MY RESPONSE TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATOR, MR PETER DAFFEN.

IN MAKING MY DECISION I HAVE RELIED ON THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION, ON NUMEROUS DEPARTMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS OVER 14 YEARS AND A RECENT REPORT BY THE QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE.

MY DELIBERATIONS HAVE FOCUSSED ON THREE ISSUES - THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN, THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAM AND THE ACCOUNTABILITY OF PUBLIC FUNDS.

IN CONSIDERING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN I HAD REGARD TO THE ALARMING HISTORY OF THE PETFORD TRAINING FARM.

THE CONSULTANT'S EVALUATION HAS IDENTIFIED AT LEAST 35 INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT AND THE POLICE BETWEEN 1986 AND 1998.

INCIDENTS REPORTED TO THE DEPARTMENT AND THE POLICE BY RESIDENTS, EX-STAFF AND PARENTS INCLUDE PHYSICAL ASSAULTS, SEXUAL ASSAULTS UPON RESIDENTS BY OTHER RESIDENTS AND STAFF, PETROL SNIFFING, ACCESS TO FIREARMS, ACCESS TO MORPHINE AND SYRINGES, ROPE BURNS AROUND A CHILD'S NECK, REFUSING CHILDREN FOOD AS PUNISHMENT, INNAPROPRIATE SEXUAL TOUCHING, A FAILURE TO SEEK MEDICAL TREATMENT WHICH IN ONE CASE RESULTED IN A CHILD INCURRING LIVER DAMAGE, AND THE EXLPOITATION OF CHILDREN AS CHEAP LABOUR.

A NUMBER OF CASES OF ABUSE HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIATED AND ENTERED ON THE CHILD PROTECTION REGISTER.

I AM FURTHER CONCERNED THAT THE MANAGER, MR GEOFF GUEST HAS CONFIRMED THAT HE REGULARLY USES A PSYCHOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE CALLED BIO-NEURO FEEDBACK.

I REGARD THE USE OF THIS TECHNIQUE, ON YOUNG BOYS BY STAFF WITH NO QUALIFICATIONS, WITHOUT THE CONSENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OR THESE BOY'S PARENTS AS A VERY SERIOUS MATTER AND HAVE REFERRED IT TO THE HEALTH MINISTER FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION.

THE POLICE HAVE INVESTIGATED MANY OF THESE ALLEGATIONS OVER THE YEARS.

AS IS OFTEN THE CASE WHEN DEALING WITH CHILD ABUSE, THE POLICE HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY GAINING SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE TO LAY CHARGES.

IN MANY CASES POLICE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SUBSTANTIATE THAT ABUSE AND HARM HAS OCCURRED.

HOWEVER, EVEN WHERE POLICE HAVE RECEIVED STATEMENTS, OR INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN SUBSTANTIATED BY STAFF AND OTHER RESIDENTS, THE ALLEGED VICTIMS OR WITNESSES ARE RELUCTANT TO GO TO COURT OR LAY CHARGES.

DESPITE THIS, THE FREQUENCY, CONSISTENCY AND PATTERN OF THESE ALLEGATIONS OVER MORE THAN A DECADE ARE OF SUCH CONCERN THAT I CANNOT HAVE ANY CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN WHO STAY AT PETFORD.

MY SECOND CONSIDERATION WAS THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROGRAMS OFFERED TO YOUNG PEOPLE AT THIS FACILITY.

THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF YOUNG OFFENDERS BEING SUCCESSFULLY REHABILITATED AT PETFORD.

IN FACT POLICE RECORDS REVEAL THAT BETWEEN 1994 AND 1998 A TOTAL OF 91 OFFENCES WERE RECORDED AGAINST THIRTY-NINE INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE WHO WERE EITHER RESIDENT AT PETFORD TRAINING FARM AT THE TIME OF COMMITTING THE OFFENCE OR WERE RESIDING AT PETFORD WHEN THEY WERE LOCATED BY POLICE.

THESE 91 OFFENCES INCLUDE MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT, POSSESSION AND/OR USE OF DRUGS, ASSAULT OCCASIONING BODILY HARM, AND INDECENT ASSAULT ON A CHILD.

THESE CHARGES DO NOT REFLECT EFFECTIVE REHABILITATION.

THESE CHARGES REFLECT A SITUATION THAT IS OUT OF CONTROL.

FINALLY MR SPEAKER, I AM OBLIGED TO CONSIDER MATTERS OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

A REPORT CONDUCTED BY A FINANCIAL CONTROLLER APOINTED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN DECEMBER OF LAST YEAR CONCLUDED THE SITUATION AT PETFORD WAS SO SERIOUS AN AUDITOR WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO OFFER AN OPINION ABOUT PETFORD'S FINANCIAL POSITION DUE TO THE LACK OF RECORDS.

MR SPEAKER IN THE FACE OF THE APPALLING RECORD OF THIS FACILITY, I BELIEVE I HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO CEASE FUNDING AND HAVE TODAY ADVISED THE BOARD OF THIS DECISION.

MR SPEAKER, I WANT TO ASSURE THE PEOPLE OF FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND THAT THE FUNDS PREVIOUSLY ALLOCATED TO PETFORD WILL REMAIN IN THE REGION FOR SAFE, APPROPRIATE AND EFFECTIVE SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. CONSULTATIONS HAVE ALREADY BEGUN WITH THE KEY GROUPS IN THE REGION TO DETERMINE AN APPROPRIATE MODEL OF SERVICE.

MR SPEAKER, I HAVE BEEN MADE AWARE OF THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT MR GEOFF GUEST, THE FOUNDER OF PETFORD, ENJOYS.

HOWEVER, AS THE MINISTER FOR FAMILIES, YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE, MY RESPONSIBILITY LIES UNEQUIVOCALLY WITH THE CHILDREN OF THIS STATE.

I WILL NOT ABROGATE MY DUTY OF CARE AND PLACE ONE MORE CHILD AT RISK.

AFTER 12 YEARS OF FAILING TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN, OF FAILING TO ACCOUNT FOR PUBLIC FUNDS AND FAILING TO ACHIEVE REHABILITATIVE OUTCOMES THE DAYS OF THE PETFORD TRAINING FARM AS A STATE FUNDED INSTITUTION ARE OFFICIALLY OVER.

END