

Queensland Parliament Hansard Green

DATE: 12/10/2016

FILE: 12102016_001179_LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY_GREEN CHAMBER.DOCX

SUBJECT: Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service

MEMBER: Mr LANGBROEK

Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service



Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (5.58 pm): I move—

That this House directs the Auditor-General, pursuant to section 35 of the Auditor General Act 2009, to conduct an audit of the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service, specifically:

- (a) the forecast financial performance for 2016-17 and the resulting job losses;
- (b) the circumstances of the resignation of the board;
- (c) whether the oversight of the board's operations by the Minister for Health and Ambulance Services was appropriate in the circumstances; and
- (d) any other relevant matter that becomes apparent during the audit

Labor loves to talk about health but only the LNP has a proven track record of getting things done for Queenslanders. We can see that in what we achieved in Cairns and throughout Queensland in the time that we were in government, as opposed to the Minister for Health, the member for Woodridge, who today spoke about the 2016-17 budget in his ministerial statement before question time, where he spoke about something that one does not normally associate with the Labor Party—financial prudence.

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He is like a horse race tipster who keeps tipping losers. When you come to the form guide on a Friday, you look at it in some sort of hope that maybe the tipster will get it right for the next day, Saturday, but you look at their form and you realise that they are never going to return a surplus because they have not done it in the past.

The best example is to see what happened in the financial year 2015-16 across our 16 HHSs. The forecast deficit was a \$14 million deficit. It ended up being a \$99 million deficit and Cairns was the most classic example. There was a forecast deficit of \$6 million and it ended up being \$20 million. That is the first part of our motion, which talks about the forecast financial performance for 2016-17 and the resulting job losses.

I asked about the \$6 million deficit for 2015-16 that turned into \$20 million at estimates in July. I asked a number of questions. I asked about the fact that the air conditioning was being turned off and the lights were being switched off. You would have thought that if the lights were off in Cairns maybe the lights went on in the ministerial office to ask, 'Why have we got a \$20 million deficit in Cairns? And why is it that within a couple of months of the new financial year we had an \$80 million deficit in the Cairns HHS?' That is an \$80 million deficit.

Mr Walker: \$80 million?

Mr LANGBROEK: I take the interjection from the honourable member for Mansfield—an \$80 million deficit, and that has caused the board to fall on its sword. Let us look at the contrast between what the LNP achieved in government. We gave HHSs autonomy. I note that the former minister will speak about his budget oversight when he was the minister. There was no way that we would have an HHS returning a \$20 million deficit let alone an \$80 million one, because we said we wanted HHSs to deliver surpluses—reinvest them in what was called the Better Healthcare Bonus, reduce the surgery waiting lists, expand statewide access to child health specialists, make improvements in telehealth, online bookings and central booking coordination with GPs. Under Labor we see that ramping is back at Ipswich, Redlands and Logan, and bed block is back. This is across the state, not just in Cairns, and patients are waiting longer.

It is all in the budget papers. With regard to specialist outpatients, 39 per cent of category 1 patients waited longer than clinically recommended; 50 per cent of category 2; and 26 per cent of category 3—all under Labor. It is obvious when we look at this motion that the ministerial office has serious questions to answer. In fact, we cannot trust them to have the oversight with the report from Ernst & Young that has not been released because we understand it was too specific about where the prospective deficit was coming from. I have written to the Auditor-General asking him to undertake an

audit, because we need to look at all of these circumstances—the resignation of the board and the job losses that we are going to see.

Today I table a statement from the secretary of the Together union, Alex Scott, who at today's parliamentary committee hearing said that there will be job losses in Cairns.

Tabled paper: Article from the *Brisbane Times* online, dated 12 October 2016, titled 'Queensland health job losses in Cairns, Townsville predicted for coming year: union'.

That is in the budget papers—247 jobs there. There are going to be 164 lost in Wide Bay HHS and 243 in Metro South.

It is important for us to know about the oversight of the board's operations and whether it was appropriate in the circumstances. Why did the ministerial office not take any note of the things that I asked? I asked more questions of the Cairns HHS CEO at estimates than of any other HHS and yet still the alarm bells did not ring in the ministerial office. Instead of that, within two months of the new financial year there is an \$80 million prospective loss which will affect clinical services and outcomes in Cairns and the Far North where patients deserve to have the best treatment.

The final part of our motion is `any other relevant matter that becomes apparent during the audit. I commend this motion to the House, and I ask all members to support it. It is too important for the people of Cairns, Far North Queensland and the hinterland to see the great things that we did in government—including getting the bed block project done and practical completion of many things—now in danger of being wasted, affecting the outcomes for patients in Far North Queensland.