

Family Law Reform

Miss JACKIE KELLY (3.01 pm)—My question is addressed to the Attorney-General. Could the Attorney-General update the House on the implementation of the most significant reforms to the family law system in 30 years? Is he aware of any alternative proposals?

Mr RUDDOCK—I thank the member for Lindsay for her question. I know of her considerable interest in these matters. I would also like to take the opportunity of thanking the members of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee who are considering an exposure draft bill dealing with changes to the Family Law Act which will be complemented by the most significant changes to family law when we implement the new family relationship centres. These are the centre-piece, of course, of our initiatives and almost \$400 million is committed in the budget over time to the implementation of those centres.

I was pleased last Sunday week to attend with the member for Lindsay in Penrith an event where I was able to announce the location of the first 15 centres to be established. They are Lismore, Sutherland, Wollongong, Penrith, Mildura, Sunshine, Frankston, Ringwood, Townsville, Strathpine, Joondalup, Salisbury, Darwin, Hobart and Canberra. I did spend last week in a number of those locations in meetings discussing the implementation arrangements for this substantial initiative of the government. I have to say that the very well-attended meetings organised in so many locations reinforced in me an appreciation of the depth of feeling in our community about this issue and of the fact that we have to have a very clear focus on resolving issues in relation to family law in the best interests of children and at times their fundamental right—all other things being equal—to know both parents.

I notice the member for Gellibrand has had some comments to make about our selection of new centres. One of the observations she made that I saw in a statement she released was that any priority in the running of centres should be given to existing established services. While I think that many of those do provide very important services to the communities they serve, one should not see them as being the only groups who have the capacity to help in this area. We certainly value the work that they have undertaken and that is why we have dramatically expanded service delivery. But I think what the opposition fails to understand in relation to this matter is that we are not only about changing the system; we want to change the culture. That means you need to be prepared to be open enough to recognise that there is a range of people and organisations with skills that ought to also be drawn upon in this very difficult area. I would encourage the Labor Party to put aside its sniping from the sidelines and to support the most significant reforms to the family law system that we have seen in over a generation.

Mr Howard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

PRIVILEGE

Mr NAIRN (Eden-Monaro—Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister) (3.05 pm)—I wish to raise a matter of privilege. I refer to two incidents where fraudulent and inaccurate documents purportedly from my office were distributed to media outlets and to a recipient of government funding in my electorate in what amounts to a dirty campaign against me and the timber industry in Eden-Monaro. In early April my office was contacted by a number of media outlets in my electorate in reference to a media statement which was supposedly released by me. The statement was apparently on my letterhead and was drafted to

appear to have been faxed from my electorate office fax machine. The statement was entitled 'New vision for timber industry' with the content referring to my supposed change in attitude to the timber industry. This media statement was not issued by me, despite the fact that it appeared to be on my legitimate letterhead and the originating fax identification used my name and fax number. This was clearly a forgery.

Then a few days later my office received a phone call from a very distressed director of a Narooma based logging contractor, Bruce Mathie and Sons Pty Ltd. That company had received a letter supposedly from me informing them that a grant from the Australian government under the Forest Industry Structural Adjustment Package, FISAP, recently announced by me, was being rescinded. The grant was for a substantial amount of money, \$165,400, and Mr Mathie was most distressed that it now appeared to him that it would no longer be coming to his company. There was no truth in the statement that the grant was being rescinded and I had no knowledge of such a letter. My office requested that a copy of the letter be faxed to me. It was clearly a forgery.

The letter was printed on what appeared to be my letterhead and it had arrived by post in one of my window-faced envelopes. The letter also carried what appeared to be my signature, although very slightly distorted. The envelope was postmarked at Bega. There are well-known anti-timber activists based in Bega and I would not be surprised to learn of their involvement in this. Mr Mathie informed my office and me that the letterhead was in green—the colour of my legitimate letterhead—and the signature was in blue ink. This is a very professional forgery with a clear and calculated intent to mislead Mr Mathie and to misrepresent my office. It would appear that this is a part of a campaign against a legitimate industry, an

important industry in my electorate, and against one local company involved in that industry. It is interesting to note that a current protest taking place in the Wandella forest is also targeted against the legal operations of Mr Mathie's company and his employees.

Mr Speaker, I am aware that matters of privilege should be raised at the earliest opportunity; however during April and May, you would be aware, I was somewhat constrained due to personal circumstances with the illness and subsequent passing of my wife and therefore limited in initially following this matter up. I have taken the course of contacting the Australian Federal Police, the AFP, as I believe it may be a criminal matter and I understand the AFP are still conducting their inquiries. Given the severity of the matter at hand, I subsequently followed this up with the Clerk of the House and, having done so, I believe this to be a serious contempt of the House and that privilege may have been breached. I ask that you refer this matter to the Privileges Committee. I table copies of the relevant documents.

The SPEAKER (3.09 pm)—In response to the member for Eden-Monaro, may I say that a matter of privilege, as all members would know, is a very serious matter. I will look closely at the points raised by the member for Eden-Monaro and give consideration as to whether or not to refer it to the Privileges Committee, and I will report back on that.

QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

Question Time

Mr TANNER (3.09 pm)—Mr Speaker, early in question time the member for Hunter asked a question to the Leader of the National Party which you ruled out of order on the grounds that it did not cover areas relating to the Leader of the National Party's portfolio. I draw your attention to the fact