



Media Release

Independent Committee will strive to prevent child deaths

17.11.04

Premier Peter Beattie today announced the six members of Queensland's first independent Child Death Case Review Committee, whose work will advance child safety and ultimately save young lives.

"The Child Death Case Review Committee will begin almost immediately to look at the deaths of children who came to the attention of the child protection system during the last three years of their lives," Mr Beattie said.

"The committee will "watch the watcher" by reviewing the Department of Child Safety's reviews of child deaths.

"Establishing the Child Death Case Review Committee fulfils another recommendation of the Crime and Misconduct Commission's landmark inquiry into the abuse of children in foster care (completed 10 months ago) and is an important step in improving the child safety system," he said.

The committee members appointed by Cabinet for three years were chosen for their professionalism and expertise in child-related fields. They are:

- Queensland Police Commissioner Robert Atkinson
- State Coroner Michael Barnes
- Psychiatrist Colin Brennan
- Torres Strait Islander representative McRose Elu
- Aboriginal representative Trudi Sebasio and
- Social work consultant Jennifer Wiltshire.

Mr Beattie said they will hold monthly meetings, and start by reviewing the department's work following twelve deaths of children since the new legislation took effect on August 1.

"The committee will have the power to recommend whether disciplinary action should be taken against any employees of the Department of Child Safety," Mr Beattie said.

"Its other powers include making recommendations to improve the department's services to Queensland children and families, and it must monitor the implementation of its recommendations.

"The committee's role will at times be heartbreaking, but what could be more important than preventing senseless child deaths?" Mr Beattie said.

The committee will review the department's reviews of deaths of children who were involved with the department in the three years leading to the child's death.

Under reforms introduced by the government since the CMC inquiry, the department must review child deaths if:

- the department was aware the child was subject to alleged harm or risk of harm;
- the child received action under the Child Protection Act; or
- the department reasonably suspected the child would need protection once they were born, although they were not born at the time the suspicion arose.

The department has six months to review from the date it becomes aware of a death, and the Child Death Case Review Committee has three months to look at the department's original child death review and provide a report to the Director-General of Child Safety.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian will chair the committee, and the Assistant Commissioner is also a member.

Acting Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Barry Salmon said under the legislation, the committee can ask the Director-General of Child Safety whether steps have been taken to implement its recommendations within a reasonable time.

"If the committee isn't satisfied with the department's response to its recommendations it can provide a copy of its report to the Premier and the Minister responsible for the Department of Child Safety," he said.

"I believe this is a real step forward in improving accountability mechanisms in Queensland," Mr Salmon said.

The Child Death Case Review Committee will be supported by staff from the Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

17 November 2004

Media contacts:

Premier's office – 3224 4500

Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian – (Sam Keegan) 3247 5346