



Premier of Queensland  
and Treasurer

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Hon Geoffrey Davies AO,  
Commissioner,  
Queensland Public Hospitals Commission of Inquiry,  
PO Box 13147,  
George Street, Qld, 4003.

September 20, 2005.

Dear Commissioner Davies,

As you know I am currently in London on a trade and investment mission. I have become aware that there have been inaccurate media reports alleging that the Queensland Government has deliberately covered up information in relation to health that allegedly should have been released to the public. This is demonstrably untrue.

I wanted to write to you urgently in relation to this matter.

I am advised that on November 11, 2002, Cabinet considered an Information Submission numbered 3034 and entitled: Queensland Hospitals in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:- Measured Quality Public and Hospital Reports.

The purpose of the Measured Quality Programs is to improve the capacity of the Queensland public health system to provide quality health services and deliver optimal outcomes by developing systems to routinely measure and utilise performance data.

The process for this particular submission started with collection and analysis of data and preparation of a draft of the *Measured Quality Public Report (Queensland Hospitals in the Twenty-first Century – A First Report – 2002)* and 60 *Measured Quality Reports* for each of the reporting hospitals involved.

The Minister for Health was briefed by Queensland Health on the progress of these reports in August 2002 and made a decision to advise Cabinet.

Taking this matter to Cabinet to inform Cabinet of the material is consistent with the requirements of section 1.5 of the Queensland Cabinet Handbook which outlines the types of matters that should be taken to Cabinet.

The submission asked Cabinet to note the proposed release of Measured Quality Public and Hospital Reports – in other words two distinct issues, a public report and reports for hospitals.

These reports formed phase 1 of the Measured Quality Program.

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The submission started with its title, the relevant Minister and its objective which was stated to be:  
To inform Cabinet of the content and proposed release of the Queensland Health – *Measured Quality Public Report ('Queensland Hospitals in the Twenty-First Century – A First Report – 2002')* and the 60 individual *Hospital Reports* which will not be released publicly.

Please note this was the recommendation from Queensland Health in the submission.

Later in the submission there is a second reference to the hospital reports which says:  
The 60 *Measured Quality Hospital Reports* will be released to each of the relevant District Managers and Zonal Managers within Queensland Health for dissemination and action where necessary. **The sixty reports are not intended for general public release.**

This again was Queensland Health's recommendation.

At paragraph 16 of the submission there is an explanation that:  
The confidential distribution of each hospital report to the relevant District Manager and Zonal Manager will provide the hospital with the appropriate environment to disseminate the results within the report.

The submission also pointed out that this was the first time that an Australian jurisdiction had undertaken this type of reporting and demonstrated that Queensland Health was leading the way in promoting better accountability on public health system performance.

Following Cabinet's consideration of the submission on Monday, November 11, 2002, and prior to the release of Cabinet Decision No. 3758 in relation to that submission, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet provided advice that the Premier wanted to ensure that the reports were not released or disseminated in the format in which they were attached to the submission.

This was because I was concerned about the accuracy and currency of information coming from Queensland Health and that the material in its current form might not bring about change.

Queensland Health had been attempting to develop a blame-free culture where practitioners feel they can admit errors and performance failures so that the system can be improved and provide better care for patients.

On Tuesday, November 12, 2002, an email was sent by the Manager of the Parliamentary and Ministerial Services Unit to the relevant senior officers within Queensland Health stressing that the reports should not be released in their current form and that the Department awaited the official Cabinet Decision.

I am advised that following the official Cabinet Decision, a memorandum was prepared on November 14, 2002, advising relevant senior officers in the Department that Cabinet:

- had noted the submission,
- delegated to the Premier and Minister for Health the responsibility of finalising the reports;
- requested the development of a communication strategy and managing the dissemination of the information contained in the 60 hospital reports to the Health Service Districts concerned; and
- a team be formed within Queensland Health to undertake this work.

I am advised by my Brisbane office today that the Measured Quality Team undertook the work requested by Cabinet and reported to Dr Steve Buckland (then General Manager Health Services) and Ms Norelle Deeth (the Deputy Director-General, Policy and Outcomes).

Because the data had not been collected before and was in a form that was new to Queensland Health staff, the team decided that the best opportunity to effect change would be to send experts to each hospital to sit down with clinicians and managers and hold workshops.

This was a far better option than merely sending the reports to each hospital where there was a risk with so much paperwork of the reports being put on a shelf and gathering dust.

The proposed dissemination strategy of the hospital reports involved the engagement of clinicians and managers at the local level, provision of the most recent and meaningful data available, and a framework and timetable for feedback from hospitals following further investigation.

I am advised that this proposed strategy was approved on March 17, 2003, by the Minister for Health and the dissemination to Health Service Districts commenced shortly thereafter through:

- District visits by the Measured Quality Team; and
- Provision of hospital reports to Districts on secure intranet sites accessible locally.

On June 10, 2003, Cabinet considered an Information Submission on *Measured Quality, Internal Hospital Reports* (phase 2). Because of the inclusion of more recent data and the trend analysis, the phase 2 reports allowed Queensland Health and individual hospital managers to identify areas of potential improvement and areas where performance is potentially best practice.

The communication strategy for public release of the summary report was developed jointly by Queensland Health and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and resulted in the Minister for Health publicly releasing the report, *Queensland Hospitals in the twenty-first century – leading the way* on June 18, 2003, along with a media release.

On the same day, the report was posted on the Queensland Health website at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/quality/MQ.asp>. It is still there today.

During a Parliamentary Estimates Committee debate on July 18, 2003, the Minister for Health, Ms Wendy Edmond informed the Committee of the public release of *Queensland Hospitals in the twenty-first century – leading the way* and advised the Committee that the report measured outcomes in clinical health care. In releasing the report, Queensland Health was both informing the community on aspects of health care and encouraging public debate and community participation in decisions regarding health care.

The Government has to manage change and improvements in its departments. In the case of Queensland Health, because of its size and nature, this change is not easy.

I stand by the way the Government has handled this matter as we were seeking to manage this detail to encourage systemic change without finger-pointing and blame. The strategy was to encourage change rather than to simply have the usual blame game.

The public release and posting of the summary report showed our commitment to public accountability, and the methods used to consult the 60 hospitals confirm our strategy of trying to improve the culture of health and health services.

The decision by Cabinet to establish your inquiry and its predecessor was brought about in part by a frustration that change was not occurring as quickly and effectively as we wanted.

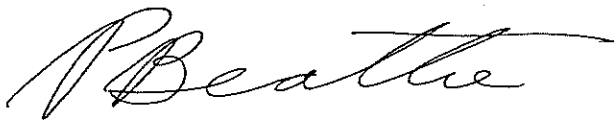
Staff have examined the original report provided to Cabinet and the report that was released. In summary, I am advised that the only significant differences are that:

- ❖ Additional information was included which more fully explains the purpose of the data, focuses on the system-wide approach to health service delivery and describes the range and mix of services and networking mechanisms that make up the health care system.
- ❖ The omission of two paragraphs which referred to hospitals with a general practitioner as the admitting physician having a much higher chance of death occurring compared to those hospitals with a cardiologist.
- ❖ A paragraph which dealt with the ageing of the nursing staff.

As you would appreciate, as Premier I deal with thousands of issues across all departments and ministers and it is impossible for me to remember every detail but the above is my best appraisal of events, supported by advice from Queensland Health, Department of Premier and Cabinet and my staff.

This information has been put together hurriedly to assist your inquiry. If you require any further information I would be pleased to supply it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "P Beattie". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Peter Beattie, MP  
Premier and Treasurer.