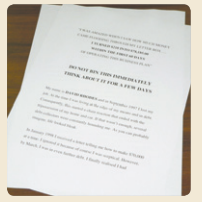


Chain Scams

A scam is only as good as its weakest link

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A mad, mad world

Scotland's cowboys

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Women go in to bat

C'mon Aussies, c'mon

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Detention centre scandal

Rape mystery sparks MPs' call for inquiry

Alyssa Betts

TWENTY-FIVE state MPs will support a call from Opposition leader Lawrence Springborg for the establishment of an independent inquiry into a Brisbane youth detention centre and the associated Heiner affair, following revelations of an apparent cover-up of the alleged pack rape of a 14-year-old girl in custody.

Five independents, One Nation and Liberal members will join the Nationals in an attempt to force the state government to establish an independent inquiry into the now-closed John Oxley Youth Detention Centre.

Mr Springborg called for an inquiry after it was revealed that statements attributed to a former Minister about the age of an alleged pack rape victim and circumstances surrounding her treatment in John Oxley had been seriously misleading.

Former Family Services Minister Craig Sherrin was quoted in a news article in March 1989 as saying a female inmate of the centre, who it was claimed had been raped by three fellow inmates during an excursion, was 17

years of age.

He also said: "I have been informed that the girl's mother was consulted and that the girl was encouraged to lay charges ... Both the mother and the girl said they preferred not to."

However, in answer to a Question on Notice from the Member for Maryborough, the Premier said the girl in question was, in fact, 14 years of age.

The Premier also said she was the same girl who "was the alleged victim in the 14 May 1988 alleged pack rape incident" – an incident which took place during an excursion to the Mount Barney National Park.

The Independent Monthly has reported extensively on the incident in recent years and documents relating to the matter show that neither the girl nor her mother had been encouraged to lay charges.

On the contrary, the documents reveal she was not encouraged to lay charges (see *What they really did to a girl in care*, Page 2).

Despite being below the age of consent, in custody, and a minor, no action has ever been taken against anyone over what happened to her.

Her claim for compensation has been

rejected by the State.

Former Minister Sherrin said he could not remember the matter.

"I'm sure whatever I said at the time ... would have been on the advice of the department," he said.

Mr Sherrin said he could not recollect who would have provided him with that advice.

The Independent Monthly began to put questions to the government about the veracity of Mr Sherrin's statements when the story quoting him came to light at the beginning of this year.

Inquiries about the age of the girl and the circumstances involved in the rape allegations were first made to Child Safety Minister eight months ago.

The questions were passed to the Communities Minister and ultimately to the Premier.

No answers were provided.

In early October, Maryborough Independent Chris Foley put a Question on Notice about the girl to the Premier.

In reply, Mr Beattie said the girl was 14 years of age and "was the same girl who was the alleged victim in the 24 May 1988 alleged

pack rape incident".

In response to these revelations Mr Springborg said he wanted "all elements of the administration of the centre" investigated.

"This simply confirms that there needs to be a full, open and independent inquiry into the operation of the John Oxley Centre, and the history behind these issues," Mr Springborg said.

"A National Party-led government ... instituted an inquiry into the John Oxley Centre but the critical evidence was shredded by the Goss Government with the support of a number of Ministers who still sit at the Beattie Cabinet table," he said.

A spokesperson for Liberal leader Bob Quinn said the Liberals were prepared to do "whatever it takes" to resolve these issues surrounding the John Oxley Centre.

The spokesperson said it was "absolutely shocking" that no one had yet been held accountable for child abuse at the centre or for the shredding of the Heiner Inquiry documents.

He said some of the people involved in the John Oxley/Heiner Inquiry matter were still working in government today.

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John Oxley victim today ... pack raped as a child, assaulted and threatened, her claim for compensation rejected. "They knew I was just 14, not 17, and that I wanted people charged ... but they didn't want that to happen." 'Kate' struggles with her life ... angry, bitter and disillusioned.