



Statement—the Hon Duncan Kerr SC MP, the Hon Roger Price MP, and Mr John Murphy MP

We do not dissent from the Report's recommendations. We believe that the Committee's recommendations, if adopted, will much improve the Bill and we want to express our appreciation for the work of the Chair and the Secretariat, who, in the very short time available, worked so well to assist members find much common ground.

However we do want to make two additional and critical observations.

First we want to strongly condemn the processes announced by the government for overseeing the selection criteria and performance criteria for the proposed Family Relationships Centres. These decisions have been given to a group of coalition marginal seat holders. We regard this as wrong in principle and as undermining our Committee's efforts.

Our Committee (as did the Committee of the last Parliament which produced the *Every picture tells a story* Report) worked hard to avoid partisan divisions. In the same way decisions on the location and performance criteria of these Centres, whose role will be central to the success or failure of the new scheme, should be made on rational, expert and non party political grounds, and, if parliamentary involvement is desired, by a bipartisan group, not by a committee of coalition marginal seat holders.

In the run up to the next federal election any partisan process is likely to see the centres being located where political advantages exists, rather than where they are most needed. Everyone's aim should be to remove such decisions, in such a heated and contested area, from the taint of improper influences. Instead the government, by appointing coalition marginal seat members to make these decisions, has opened the door to abuse. This decision should not stand.

Second, without dissenting from any of the recommendations made in the Report we want to express at least some similar reservations to those of our colleague, Nicola Roxon MP who has drawn our attention to the need to put some balance

back into the often heard (but not always justified) arguments and complaints that are made about bias in the family law area.

In particular, without elevating our concerns to the level of a dissent, we would join with her in noting that while the Committee's recommendations, if adopted, will provide increased protection when disputes arise for the legitimate interests of those parents who want to share care for their children our Report, and the Bill, leaves entirely unaddressed the even more difficult question of whether there should be any remedies available in the Family Court to assist a parent left with sole care of a child when the other parent walks away--expressing no interest in sharing the care of the child-- and not accepting any responsibility other than that forced on them by making compulsory child support payments.

Hon Duncan Kerr SC MP

Hon Roger Price MP

Mr John Murphy MP