

course of his work with the ABC, especially, he became keenly aware that health was a pressing issue in the Bundaberg area. State elections were held in Queensland on 7 February 2004. Mr Messenger gained pre-selection for the National Party and he campaigned very heavily around a theme of Bundaberg needing better health services, and of a halt being brought to bullying of health providers. In the event, Mr Messenger was elected as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for the seat of Burnett. It seems that, from that time, he became something of a lightning rod for health complaints. This may be because, whereas Mr Messenger was a member of the Opposition, the other seats in the area, Bundaberg and Hervey Bay, were held by members of the Government so that people were uncertain as to whether complaints would be fully explored. Alternatively, or additionally, it may be because of the terms of his campaign. In any case, in the course of his evidence, Mr Messenger was able to set out a busy history of receiving complaints from various constituents about problems with the Base Hospital. In particular, he related concerns communicated to him about the Mental Health Unit within the hospital.

3.371 On 18 March 2005, Ms Hoffman visited the offices of Mr Messenger and provided him with a copy of her letter dated 22 October 2004. She also spoke for some two hours to Mr Messenger about her concerns and Mr Messenger recorded that conversation.

3.372 In the days that followed, Mr Messenger sought advice from his political colleagues and on that basis decided that, before progressing Ms Hoffman's complaints, he should seek some corroboration. He made a telephone call to Dr Strahan who was, of course, named in the letter as somebody who was a leader in the local medical community. Mr Messenger's evidence was that Dr Strahan told him that the local medical community was well aware of concerns about Dr Patel but they were hoping that he would go away at the end of his contract.

3.373 Mr Messenger considered this to be sufficient corroboration for Ms Hoffman's complaints which, one can readily see, would have been cogent and compelling in themselves. On 22 March 2005, Mr Messenger tabled the Hoffman letter in Parliament, and the Shadow Health Minister, Stuart Copeland, MP, asked a question without notice of the Minister for Health, Gordon Nuttall MP.⁸²⁴ He referred to 'the fact finding process conducted by Dr FitzGerald' and the serious allegations raised about Dr Patel's competence, and asked if the Dr FitzGerald's findings would be released. Mr Nuttall responded that he was not aware of the issue but would make enquiries.