




Speech By
Sam Cox

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr COX** (Thuringowa—LNP) (7.53 pm): Tonight many members have spoken in opposition to this bill and I am absolutely bemused but possibly not surprised that most of the focus has been on the fact that this bill in part is directed at youth offenders. However, I do not think the likes of the member for Rockhampton once mentioned the victims, and this bill is about the victims—the victims of the crimes that the people of Thuringowa every night and every day have to deal with. The chair's foreword in the report states—

The Committee's task was to consider the policy outcomes to be achieved by the legislation, as well as the application of fundamental legislative principles—that is, to consider whether the Bill had sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals, and to the institution of Parliament.

I commend the committee and the committee process for achieving that record. Before I go any further, I want to personally thank the Attorney-General for all that he has done for the people of Townsville with not only this bill but other work, visits and attention he has given our city. My job is to be the ear of the people of Thuringowa and to present those views to ministers. This minister has listened and I thank him for it and the people of Townsville thank him for it. When this bill was first introduced, Torhild Parkinson, who is a member of Townsville Crime Alerts and Discussions, personally came to Brisbane to thank not only the Attorney-General but also the Premier in anticipation of this bill and this day.

I turn now to one point of clarification and one recommendation the committee made in its report which the Attorney-General is addressing, and I thank him for that. The point of clarification is that the committee requests the Attorney-General to detail in his response to this report the diversionary programs and sentencing options available to offenders by judicial officers, government agencies and other complementary organisations that may be relevant for first-time offenders. The Attorney-General already pointed out in his speech earlier today that this bill is only a small part of addressing the youth crime situation of this state. Most importantly, I point out that the committee's recommendation No. 2, which the Attorney-General has addressed, states—

The Committee recommends the proposed amendments circulated by the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice to deal with recidivist vehicle offenders in Townsville be included in the Bill and that amendments be made in the consideration in detail stage of the Bill's progression through the Legislative Assembly.

That is a very important part of this bill from a recommendation by the committee, and I again thank all of those on the committee and the Attorney-General for taking that on board. I also want to thank the policemen and women who are out there every day in my city who deal with youth offenders. Many hours are taken with these offenders when those officers should be out undertaking other duties rather than just dealing with young offenders who, in the main, are repeat offenders. There is a small group in Townsville who are known repeat offenders and some 35 per cent of the population of the Cleveland Detention Centre have been there five times.

As part of the government's six-month action plan, in January last year the government delivered the first step in this process—that is, boot camps. Townsville and Cairns have now received

a sentenced boot camp, which is different to those in other parts of the state which are early intervention. It is important that we remember that that was the first step we took after coming to government. It was a commitment that we made at the election. We have done it. We stuck by it and, again, we got full support from the people of Townsville and Thuringowa who presented a petition at the first regional cabinet to the Premier. While that petition was not in a format that could be presented to parliament, I thank the Premier for presenting that petition through other means at the time. With regard to consultation of this bill, it is said that we have not listened to the so-called professionals.

Mr Costigan interjected.

Mr COX: It is a big club, member for Whitsunday. It must be a huge club, but it is a very secret club because I do not know where they have been for 20 years. When Labor was in power, where were all of the experts then? Today I have not heard one actual solution from those sitting opposite in the ALP, from those sitting beside me in the PUP or any other member opposing the bill, and I am sure there is a speaker behind me who will soon get up and no doubt not support the bill, and I note that there are dissenting reports from the member for Nicklin and the member for Rockhampton, whom we have already heard speak. I personally have received a letter from Amnesty International, as did the Premier of this state, which I have here with me. That letter mentions lots of issues but points out very early on—

Our concerns with the proposed amendments to the Youth Justice Act to be introduced next week remain that the Queensland government risks failing in its responsibilities.

Again, our responsibility is to try to curb young offenders in their ways and rehabilitate those that we can. However, our No. 1 responsibility is to protect the people of Queensland and make them feel safe in their own streets and protect the property that they have earned and worked very hard for. Again, that is something that has been addressed. Amnesty International has come to see me once since then at a listening post I held. I have since said that if it would like further talks with me it is most welcome to make an appointment with my office, but if it does take up that option I say, as I say to all of those who sit opposite, that I just do not want to hear data the likes that the member for Gaven read out; I actually want some solutions. So the people from Amnesty International have been told by me that if they wish to meet with me they need to turn up with solutions. I told them that about a month ago and I still have not had them knocking on my door.

I will not go into the objectives of this bill, because they have been referred to many times by members who have already spoken. I will finish by saying that I commend the work that has been done on this bill by the committee. As a first-time member of parliament, this bill is possibly the biggest landmark in my short time in this parliament. But something that I campaigned on and something that I stood up for was to try to do something about crime in the city of Townsville and my electorate of Thuringowa. It has been a hard slog, but I have listened to the local members representing Townsville. The Attorney-General has listened and visited Townsville several times. We have had a forum. Thanks to the Attorney-General, I have been to the juvenile prison at Cleveland several times. I have taken members of the public into that prison. We have had the public all the way along with us on this journey. This bill reeks of consultation with the public. That is exactly what it is about. In 20 years of a Labor government in this state we had absolutely no consultation. All we had was repeat juvenile offenders causing the majority of the crime. This government is about stamping that out.

This bill is a small part but will go a long way towards helping fight the juvenile crime problem in Townsville. But it is only part of a blueprint that this government said that it would do and the Attorney-General is guiding that blueprint. I am absolutely confident that, when that blueprint is rolled out, we will not only be coming down hard on crime in Townsville, Thuringowa and other areas across the state but also address other issues that Amnesty International and members opposite have raised but have not provided solutions for.

Finally, I will finish by reading a response from the department, which relates to a matter that the Attorney-General mentioned. It states—

Queensland considers that young offenders can get their lives back on track if they are held accountable for their actions and supported to make changes.

The amendments in the Bill are only one component of a broader reform strategy ultimately aimed at this goal, and focus on holding repeat offenders accountable and deter them from future offending.

The need for such strong action in relation to repeat offenders is clear. The long term trend in youth justice is for a small group of recidivist young offenders to be responsible for committing more and more serious offences. Further, in 2012-13, there was a significant increase in the number of both offenders and offences dealt with by the Childrens Court. In that year, the court dealt with more than 10% more offenders charged with 22% more offences than in the previous year. The results of the *Safer Streets Crime Action Plan Youth Justice* (Safer Streets) survey revealed broad community support for measures to hold repeat offenders more properly to account.

I would like to add that, out of the 4,000 people who responded to the action plan survey, by far the majority of them were victims. Again, it is the victims who we need to consider.

I thank the Attorney-General for his support in finally taking on reform of the Juvenile Justice Act. This reform may be unpopular in some areas, but the people of Townsville and Thuringowa thank him for it. I also thank him for the fact that we are not doing what did not work before; we are changing the culture of how we deal with our youth.