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JUSTICE, INTEGRITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr MA Hunt MP—Chair
Ms ND Marr MP
Hon. MAJ Scanlon MP
Hon. DE Farmer MP

Staff present:

Ms F Denny—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE EXPANDING ADULT CRIME, ADULT TIME AND TAKING A STRONG STANCE ON DRUGS AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AMENDMENT BILL

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Monday, 30 March 2026

Nambour

MONDAY, 30 MARCH 2026

The subcommittee met at 11.01 am.

CHAIR: I declare open this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026. My name is Marty Hunt MP; I am the member for Nicklin and chair of the committee. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today. With me here today are: the Hon. Di Farmer MP, the member for Bulimba and deputy chair; Natalie Marr MP, the member for Thuringowa; and the Hon. Meaghan Scanlon MP, the member for Gaven.

This hearing is a proceeding of the Queensland parliament and is subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. Only the committee and invited witnesses may participate in the proceedings. Witnesses are not required to give evidence under oath or affirmation, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence.

The Legislative Assembly and its committees recognise that matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts exercising a criminal jurisdiction should not be referred to from the moment a charge is made against a person until the matter is resolved in court. All witnesses are therefore reminded not to refer to matters currently before the criminal courts in their evidence. This has been an issue in the past. I really need people to understand that, if somebody has committed an offence against you and has been charged but it has not been resolved by the court yet, you are not permitted to talk about it in a public hearing, so I ask that that not be done. As chair, I also ask members and witnesses to observe standing order 117, which restricts the naming of at-risk children. Importantly, evidence today should not readily identify a child who is subject to either the Child Protection Act 1999 or the Youth Justice Act 1992.

I also remind members of the public that they may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. These proceedings are also being transcribed by Hansard. Media may be present and are subject to the committee's media rules and the chair's direction at all times. You may be filmed or photographed during the proceedings and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages.

Finally, the committee notes that today's hearing could be triggering for those who have been affected by crime. If any witnesses today require a break during proceedings, please indicate. Please approach the secretariat, Fran, if today's proceedings raise any issues for you. She can assist you in that regard. Everybody please turn mobile phones off or to silent mode. I now welcome representatives from the Sunshine Coast Council.

FIELDING, Ms Jodie, Director Community Strengthening, Sunshine Coast Council

NATOLI, Ms Rosanna, Mayor, Sunshine Coast Council

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee before we go to questions.

Ms Natoli: Thank you all for the opportunity to appear before the committee this morning. Thank you for coming to the Sunshine Coast and specifically to Nambour. This community has a lot to say and we are grateful that you are here to hear it.

I have lived and worked on the Sunshine Coast for most of my life. I know the region, its people and now, of course, the challenges. I want to say something that I say often because I really do mean this: our community deserves to feel safe. We know that the Sunshine Coast is one of the safest regions in Queensland. Our community works hard to keep it that way. It is not something we take for granted. When residents, business owners and workers tell me they are concerned because that feeling is under threat in our town centres and public spaces, that is something we need to take seriously and pay attention to, because violence and antisocial behaviour have no place in our community. That is the starting point from which we now move forward.

The Sunshine Coast is also an incredibly fast growing region. We currently have 365,000 residents. As you would be aware, that is projected to grow to more than half a million by 2041. That also adds pressure to the feeling of community safety. Growth brings so much opportunity for the Sunshine Coast but it also increases pressure on housing, infrastructure, public spaces and the

services that support people who are struggling, so setting that as part of that context is also important. The issues this bill seeks to address do not exist in isolation of those pressures in that context. Getting the implementation right is what is really vitally important. We know that is going to matter more now and into the future as growth comes our way, so focusing on that implementation for us as a community on the Sunshine Coast and also for the Sunshine Coast Council is really important.

Like many Queensland communities, the Sunshine Coast has seen a real increase in antisocial behaviour in recent years. From the council's point of view, our own staff, contractors and volunteers have also experienced a marked increase in aggressive and violent behaviour, verbal abuse and physical assaults. In the past year alone we have seen a nearly 20 per cent increase in aggression and occupational violence. That has had a real effect on their ability to do their work and feel safe at the same time.

I want to give you a practical indication of what that means for our council employees across the community and how it has changed. Council staff working in some of those high-risk public areas now wear stab vests and body worn cameras. That is standard. Let me explain to you that these are our compliance officers, our parks workers, our library staff and our community development officers. People doing everyday work across our region are wearing stab vests and body worn cameras. That protective equipment has become standard kit, and the fact that it is standard tells its own story of what impact it has had on the council and our employees. Broadly, that is a reflection of the impact on the people in our community.

Businesses across the region and in our town centres reflect a similar story. In conversations here in Nambour—but not limited to Nambour—what I hear consistently is that staff are dealing with difficult and sometimes dangerous situations. Some businesses are changing their hours of operation or struggling to retain staff, and as a council we see that impact on our people. All people going to work across the Sunshine Coast deserve to feel safe in their occupation.

Council is not waiting for others to act. I want to be specific about that, because it does matter. In terms of our local law officers, council operates seven days a week. We fund community safety partnerships, those programs that put outreach workers on the ground, specifically in Nambour and in other areas across the Sunshine Coast. We are investing in that place activation as well because we know that well-used public spaces are excellent and involve our community. That means it is a welcoming place and therefore a safer one. In Nambour council has committed nearly \$5 million to the streetscape, working with the state government to deliver wider footpaths and better lighting for Currie Street. That kind of safety activation is going to be an investment in public safety as well.

We have also led on multi-agency coordination because no single agency can solve this alone. We understand that partnering with the state is very important. In August I personally walked through Nambour with the state Minister for Housing the Hon. Sam O'Connor, the member for Nicklin and councillor David Law and into the park to see firsthand the very real implications for people experiencing homelessness in our region and the impacts more broadly on feelings of safety in our community from people dealing with antisocial behaviour. They are not cause and effect, but we understand there is a linkage. That visit led to the establishment of the Nambour homelessness response forum and from that a community working group. We were bringing together state agencies, council, QPS and community service providers to identify solutions for Nambour specifically in that group that were compassionate and practical. From that forum council established that working group, as I said. That work is ongoing. In fact, this morning we had an announcement from the minister in relation to the outcomes of some of that work for us. Council is here today as a committed partner with the state. We understand that decisions about legislation lie with the state, as they should, and our role is to share what we see on the ground in our community and to understand what the implementation might mean for our community.

The bill requires the minister to consult with local governments before declaring a DBCP. We welcome that because it recognises that council can contribute place-based knowledge. We are the level of government closest to the people and have that understanding and knowledge through our officers in place, so we would definitely want to be involved in the declaration of those places. We know that our local law officers have a distinct and valuable role on the ground in terms of working with communities and community engagement. They are complementary but not disparate roles when you talk about policing, for example, and other state agencies. That partnership is really important. We know that the boundaries and criteria for any of those precincts would be better determined with local government input. The point I want to make is that those declarations should be grounded in a demonstrated need and they need to be based on data and community and local government feedback.

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The bill includes a three-yearly review of those precinct declarations. We welcome that. We would also ask that local government be involved in the review process. It should be assessed by evidence over time, so that would also be another request. In relation to displacement, we would suggest that another consideration should be whether or not the declaration impacts surrounding areas and what that would mean for vulnerable people with complex issues who are experiencing homelessness. Local governments do have that deep knowledge in relation to how precincts are identified. Our experience with the Nambour homelessness response forum taught us that coordination must be deliberately designed with nominated leads, shared data and sustained commitment. That does not happen on its own.

We would also ask that resourcing be considered. Council already carries considerable costs in this space, and if displacement puts extra pressure on our own resources—because people are gathering in other public spaces—then those costs will grow for council. We would ask that that be a consideration of this committee as well going forward—those resourcing implications for local government—and that there is a measure of success. Enforcement activity alone is not a measure of success. What we need to see is genuine sustained improvement.

Our community is made up of all kinds of people—families, workers, business owners, visitors. Some of those people are doing it tough and our job is to serve all of them. The Sunshine Coast is a remarkable place where people choose to build their lives, and serving those people drives everything that council does. Thank you, and I welcome your questions.

CHAIR: Thank you, Mayor, for that fulsome opening statement. It actually answered a lot of questions I was going to ask which is why I let you keep going for quite a while because you covered it comprehensively in terms of council's role. Prior to your election as mayor in 2021-22, I think it was, the council funded the University of the Sunshine Coast to do a Nambour safety review and they produced a report with some key findings, and I will read a couple of them quickly. The key findings were: people feel Nambour is becoming less safe and feel unsafe at night; young people feel less safe than other age groups in Nambour; disorder is concentrated in Nambour's CBD, which is an important one I want to bring to you; and loitering, substance abuse and homelessness are key concerns of the community. I think you outlined in your evidence that feedback is still coming into council. Do you think the measures in this bill go some way to responding to those community concerns that have been expressed?

Ms Natoli: There are most definitely concerns that are raised with council. Our annual residents' survey has shown a 10 percentage point decrease over recent years in the proportion of residents who say they feel safe all the time, so we know there is a decrease in people feeling safe. That survey—which you rightly point out was in 2021-22, before my election—looked at safety and that perception of safety.

What has happened since then is the complexity of the housing situation. Since 2021-22, we have seen affordability issues increase markedly, not just on the Sunshine Coast. That housing component plays into what we see here in Nambour and in other areas across the Sunshine Coast. That housing affordability and the complexity of that is what we are seeing play out. We know that homelessness and antisocial behaviour are not the same thing. If the bill is looking at the antisocial behaviour, that is where we want to focus. No-one wants to see antisocial behaviour or violence in their communities. In that sense, if that is their focus, we need to make sure those issues are separated.

Ms FARMER: Mayor, it is lovely to see you today and thank you for such a broad-ranging submission. The chair is right: you basically covered almost all of the questions I was going to ask you. I think what you have described is a template for managing a situation about a shared understanding and consultation with council over where the key areas are, making sure you have good data and making sure you are not moving problems elsewhere. I want to ask you about some of those but I also note what you said about people needing to feel safe and not just be safe.

I want to talk about resourcing, which you raised a couple of times. If these precincts are declared, then the people exhibiting antisocial behaviour, as you have suggested, have to go somewhere else, don't they, and you have a very widespread council area. There is a resourcing issue there—and I am not familiar with what your precincts might be on the Sunshine Coast—that if they are moved from X and they go to Y then presumably there needs to be attention given in those areas as well. I am concerned about that.

Also, one of the other aspects of this bill is the change to the drug diversion program. It was suggested, prior to the current program being in place, by five different police commissioners that the current program significantly saved policing time. There has been concern expressed that under the program proposed under this bill—

CHAIR: Member, if I can get you to get to the question, please.

Ms FARMER: Under the program proposed under this bill, it will take up significantly more police time to police minor drug offences, so there is a potential for huge resourcing impacts from this bill. I am wondering what commitments you would like to see from the government. Presumably you do not want less police time in this space.

Ms Natoli: Thank you for that question. It was quite broad, so I will try to work out what the answer to that is. I guess from the council's perspective, we want to ensure there is not a greater impact on our staffing and resources from the displacement. The size of the precinct will also make a large difference—that is, if it is a large precinct where people are moving, although, from my understanding, they would mostly be small areas. Obviously, the community broadly always likes to see an increase in police resourcing and services, so there is that. I will hand over to Jodie, as the director of communities, who might have some of the operational aspects.

Ms Fielding: In relation to Mr Hunt's recent push to have a police beat in Nambour, we have seen a positive sentiment increase from that increased presence, which is fantastic. One of the things we are cautious of is the displacement and what that will mean as people are potentially relocated to other areas, in terms of the additional resourcing that is required from not just council but other services. We probably cannot comment on the QPS's view, but from a community sentiment perspective we can definitely say that more police presence seems to be very welcomed and gives that sense of safety across the community. It is early days for the police beat here in Nambour, but I think I have heard positive sentiment from that. If a potential zone is set up, it is how people are relocated or moved to other areas and the resourcing required to manage that across all services, not just council.

CHAIR: Thank you for your appearance today. That ends the time allocated for your appearance. I appreciate you coming along.

Ms Natoli: Thank you for the opportunity and it is lovely to see you all.

CHAIR: And a shout-out to our police beat officer who is just up the back.

Ms Natoli: A shout-out to the police beat officer, indeed, and to the community members who are also here.

CLARK, Mr Peter, Director and Vice-President, Nambour Tramway Company

ROGERSON, Mr Greg, Chairman, Nambour Tramway Company

CHAIR: I welcome representatives from the Nambour Tramway Company. I have to disclose a possible conflict of interest in that Peter is a member of the LNP and has made donations to the party on occasions. I invite you to make an opening statement before we move to questions.

Mr Clark: I thank the committee for the opportunity to speak today on the issue of antisocial behaviour in Nambour. I also wish to acknowledge and commend the efforts of the state government in bringing forward legislation that directly addresses issues that many regional communities have been grappling with for years. My name is Peter Clark. I have lived in Nambour for 62 of my 68 years. My wife and I are long-term residents and former business owners, and we are deeply invested in the future of this town. Today I am speaking as a director and vice-president of the Nambour Tramway Company.

Our organisation was established 13 years ago with a clear purpose: to help revitalise the Nambour CBD by restoring and activating the heritage listed tram line that runs through the town. Since its inception I have been proud to be part of that journey. We believe that rail-based attractions create something special. They bring people into a town, they create curiosity and they stimulate local trade. Across Australia and internationally, towns with these types of attractions often experience renewed economic activity and community pride. That is our vision for Nambour.

With the support of the Sunshine Coast Council, the federal government, philanthropic contributors and local donors, we have raised and invested over \$3 million into this project. We are now on the cusp of delivering the final piece: a unique bespoke electric tram that will, we hope, put Nambour back on the map as a destination. I seek leave to table this photograph.

CHAIR: Is leave granted? Leave is granted to table that.

Mr Clark: It is an external and internal rendered view of what we are proposing. I am here today to speak about a challenge that threatens the vision that we have. Nambour has always been a compassionate town. We have a strong history of supporting people, whether through aged care, disability services or simply helping those who need to get back on their feet. I firmly believe that every person has hopes and dreams and that as a community we should nurture that. However, we are also dealing with a growing reality: a level of antisocial behaviour that undermines the efforts of those who are working hard to rebuild and improve this town.

A few years ago Nambour reached what I would describe as its low point. With the movement of business, health services and government functions towards the coastal areas, our CBD lost its daily foot traffic. That loss of activity created a vacuum. Unfortunately, that vacuum was filled by individuals whose behaviour does not align with that of the broader community. Antisocial and at times intimidating behaviour became more visible. It discouraged families, deterred visitors and made the jobs of local businesses so much harder.

Some time ago I witnessed firsthand an elderly woman who was trying to load her groceries into her car being verbally abused by a woman just walking past her. I do not believe that poor lady will ever shop in our town again. Our own organisation has also borne the brunt of vandalism, with a large glass door smashed by four youths. It was all caught on CCTV, but unfortunately they were not able to be prosecuted. With incidents like these in the town, we suffer.

We are now beginning to see the signs of recovery—more activity, renewed investment and a sense that Nambour can move forward again—but we are not there yet. This is where I see the importance of this legislation. The proposed laws—particularly the ability for police to act early, to issue move on directions and to manage behaviour in key precincts—will give law enforcement the tools they need to maintain a safe and welcome environment. Importantly, this is not about punishing people unnecessarily; it is about setting clear boundaries and ensuring that behaviour which threatens, intimidates and disrupts others does not go unchecked. For a town like Nambour, this matters greatly. If we are to succeed in revitalising our CBD, if we are to attract visitors, support local business and create opportunities for our young people, then people must feel safe.

When our tram is running through the streets, when families come to experience something unique and when tourists visit for the day, we want them to leave with a positive impression—not one of unease, not one of concern. We want a safe environment. It is not just desirable; it is essential for economic and social recovery.

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I also want to acknowledge that many of the individuals involved in antisocial behaviour are themselves vulnerable. This legislation must be balanced in a way that helps people improve their circumstances, but without a baseline of safety and order these supports become much harder to deliver.

In closing, I commend the government for recognising the challenges faced by regional communities like Nambour and for taking steps to address them. These reforms send a clear message that community safety matters, that public spaces should be respected and that towns like ours deserve the opportunity to rebuild and thrive. For Nambour, these changes cannot come soon enough. I sincerely thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you for that presentation. Do you have an opening statement, too, Greg?

Mr Rogerson: If you do not mind, yes. Firstly, I would like to thank the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee for the opportunity to address this hearing. My name is Greg Rogerson. I am 73 years old and I have called Nambour home with great pride for the past 52 years, which, by the way, is my entire married life. Whilst being born in Toowoomba, our family moved to the Sunshine Coast, which was then known as the 'near north coast', when I was eight years old and my parents started a waterski school at the Cod Hole, Maroochydore. I attended Maroochydore primary and high schools and was fortunate enough to gain a motor mechanic apprenticeship at Walton Motors in Nambour at the age of 18 after completing grade 12. I later joined TAFE Queensland and spent 25 years teaching automotive apprentices and advanced trade courses at the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE Nambour campus. I finished my working career in 2020 as the Sunshine Coast local government councillor, having first represented division 1 in the Maroochy shire council and then division 10 in the newly formed Sunshine Coast Regional Council—12 years in total. I am currently the chairman of the Nambour Tramway Company Ltd, a not-for-profit community-based organisation trying our hardest to reinvigorate this great town of Nambour by helping businesses and restoring community pride.

My apology for the long-winded personal introduction, but I wanted to demonstrate and emphasise the buy-in I have developed in serving this wonderful town and community of Nambour. Nambour is blessed to have certain attributes that make it stand out such as excellent state and private educational facilities, an acclaimed public hospital, a heavy rail line connected directly to Brisbane and a raft of well-meaning, giving, caring individuals and community-based organisations who provide food, clothing, washing facilities and to a minor extent limited housing for those less fortunate and struggling to make ends meet.

In my opinion, this makes Nambour a highly sought after destination for the disadvantaged and less fortunate. In these cohorts of people there appears to be a larger percentage of people with illicit drug and alcohol problems/dependencies which is a cause for alarm for the mainstream community, especially the mature age persons within the local community—persons yelling, screaming obscenities, fighting in the streets and blackmailing shoppers and local and imported youth running amok at all hours of the night causing wilful damage, break-ins and car thefts.

I applaud the present state government for having the courage to endeavour to calm the blatant misbehaviour and disregard for the law which seems to have perpetuated over the past many years. In my view, there needs to be a huge awakening and shake-up within the present judicial system and a need for adequate sentencing powers instead of the slap-on-the-wrist penalties often given over and over again. I acknowledge that with increased policing and a tougher stance within the court system there should be increased mandatory alternative programs implemented, especially for the youth, in order to make positive change before individuals are entrenched in a pattern of uncontrolled misbehaviour which, without doubt, leads to increased serious crime. Thank you once again for the opportunity. I am prepared to answer any questions.

CHAIR: Thank you both for your attendance today and for the great work you are doing in the community to revitalise it. If we do not act in this space, what are the risks to Nambour? Do you see a positive future for Nambour if these matters are addressed, and does the bill go some way towards doing that?

Mr Clark: I believe that if these issues are not addressed we have probably just wasted \$3 million, because why bring people to town when they leave feeling unsafe, when they feel concerned for their wellbeing in this town, where a visitor comes here and wants to get the heck out of this place? I think it is imperative that we implement something that redirects this antisocial behaviour and calms it. We can spend our \$3 million and make our town a destination people want to come to.

Ms SCANLON: Thank you, Mr Clark. I acknowledge that in your opening statement you talked about the fact that we should nurture and make sure there is a balance not only in terms of the criminal response but also in those support services. The peak housing body Q Shelter in their submission has Nambour

asked for a housing summit and others have called for more support services. Would you support KPIs or targets on more supportive housing with wraparound services to ensure nurturing and support is provided to vulnerable people in this community?

Mr Clark: I think I need to make a distinction with regard to people who genuinely need support to be housed who are suffering real stress—my heart goes out to them, it truly does—but I see others who do not want the rules, who do not want to live in a home that has been provided for them, who will maintain that home in a reasonable and fit state. They want to live outside of our community rules. I think that is where we are heading with this bill. I think there are two separate issues. Yes, they are interlinked in some ways. Community housing for those who are vulnerable: yes, definitely, but I believe this legislation is targeting those who do not want to live within the rules so we cannot lump them all together. We just cannot.

Ms SCANLON: I appreciate the point that you have made but I want to be really clear: do you support targets and a housing summit? Acknowledging what you have said about your support for the other elements of this bill, do you support a summit and those targets?

Mr Clark: I suppose my question is: is it relevant? In essence, yes, I do, but I do not know whether it is that relevant to what we are talking about here. I do not think increased public housing will address this problem, because the people I see who are the main perpetrators in our town are not going to be suitably housed.

CHAIR: You will be pleased to see on the news tonight some announcements we made around housing in Nambour today.

Ms MARR: Thank you, Peter. I am from Townsville and, similarly, we have seen our city centre becoming empty. You are right: once you lose that foot traffic in an area, that is where the antisocial behaviour tends to go—

Mr Clark: It sure does.

Ms MARR:—but there is a lot to do to give people the security and safety to want to return to those areas. Let's face it: a lot of them are told, 'Don't go there. It's not safe to go there,' and your investment is relying on the community getting back there. What part of this bill is crucial for us to be able to get you the assistance you need to bring people back into that area and to feel safe again?

Mr Clark: I will happily answer that. I believe the move-on powers are a crucial part of this bill. I have read through the entire proposal. There is nothing there that offends me. I think the whole bill really does address the issues. Those move-on powers to say, 'We don't want you in this community for 24 hours or an extended period,' breaks that cycle of day-after-day antisocial behaviour. I know that Mayor Rosanna spoke about the issue of where they move on to, but I believe we have a centralised issue in this town and I do not believe a move-on power will take that whole group and move it to one place. I think it will disperse that group. By dispersing it, it reduces their power over the community.

Ms FARMER: Thank you both for your excellent submissions. This precinct model is based on the safe night precincts that are already in place in Brisbane, and part of that is a mandatory set of services. Mr Rogerson, you spoke about it being not just moving people on but also providing the services so they are just not doing that behaviour anymore. Would you like to see those same mandatory services applied to this new precinct model as well, so you are not only moving on but also trying to make the problem go away altogether?

Mr Rogerson: Most definitely. One of the programs that is really welcomed in this town is at the local high school, Nambour Community College. They have an ex-policeman who is running a course on a part-time basis.

Ms FARMER: I have been there.

Mr Rogerson: It starts out at misbehaviour. If you can nip the misbehaviour in the bud and give a mentor for those people—girls and boys—and a good prospect going forward, I think we are doing them a service for their career and their adulthood.

Ms FARMER: So introduce those services as well with this model?

Mr Rogerson: Most definitely. I think it is mandatory.

CHAIR: Acknowledging that Nambour has many great community wraparound services, some of which we will hear from today.

Mr Rogerson: Most definitely.

CHAIR: That ends the time we have allocated for you. Thank you very much for appearing before us.

TAGG, Ms Helen, Nambour Now

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee after which we will go to some questions.

Ms Tagg: Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Helen Tagg. I live in Nambour. I have a background in youth and community work and I am the founder of Nambour Now, a local advocacy group that formed in response to the escalating issues in our parks and public spaces. I first want to preface this with saying: this is an incredibly large and complex bill and within the time available it is not possible to address every aspect. I will personally focus on the antisocial behaviour and the drug issues because this has been the ongoing and significant issue in our town.

What we are seeing on the ground is a pattern of antisocial behaviour in our public spaces, particularly in our parks and in the CBD. This includes and is not limited to repeated drug use, fighting, intimidation and situations where vulnerable people are preyed upon. We have seen fires being lit in public spaces and repeated incidents that have led to areas—like our local barbecue in Quota park across the road—being closed and cordoned off because of a fire.

This issue is deeply entrenched and the cycle is ongoing. The impact is becoming clear in our community. Many families are no longer using parks, including my own. Some people who have lived here their whole lives tell me that they do not feel safe in the CBD and businesses are dealing with ongoing disruption. Speaking as a mother of young children, it changes how I personally use my community spaces and how safe my children feel.

It is also important to say that antisocial behaviour is not limited to any one group within our community, but we do see these behaviours intersecting with people sleeping rough as well as people with serious addictions. Right now what we are seeing is that the system is broken and dysfunctional. Police are unable to act until a situation has already escalated. From our experience, this is not working for the community or for the people in these environments.

I do believe that early intervention is part of a long-term solution and that is where lasting change will come from, but we are not there yet. I have read many of the submissions and concerns from organisations and community groups and I acknowledge the strong focus on support services, housing and long-term reform. As a qualified community service worker, I agree with that direction. It aligns with my educational background. But my concern is this: what do we do in the meantime? Even in the best case scenario, these systems take time to build and right now I am not seeing in my community that gap being effectively filled. How do we respond to behaviour in the interim? How do we support the broader community? How do we ensure our public spaces remain safe and useable for all? At the moment, I cannot see a clear mechanism that addresses that.

Whether we are comfortable with this idea or not, enforcement is part of that gap. We need to maintain a baseline standard of behaviour in public spaces because, if harmful behaviour becomes normalised or overlooked, what we will continue to see is what is already happening in Nambour. People feel unsafe, people withdraw from our public shared spaces and we see a gradual erosion of our community. I want to be clear on this statement: long-term change comes from stronger support systems, from housing, health care, early intervention and better policies that strength families and reduce cost-of-living pressure. I see this all being foundational.

Alongside of that, there is also a level of personal responsibility that cannot be removed entirely from this conversation. We all must remain accountable for our actions. The primary purpose of law is to maintain social order, ensure fairness and protect individual rights and liberties. If we avoid acknowledging that then both vulnerable people and the broader community risk being left without that protection. This is where I see this bill as having a role and in good faith I do see this bill as an attempt to bridge that gap. However, I do have concerns about how it is applied in practice.

My initial concerns were ensuring that those who are vulnerable, such as rough sleepers and people experiencing homelessness, could still access support, health care and food. I am pleased that these protections are included and I feel they are essential. However, I also believe antisocial behaviour needs to be clearly defined. It cannot be left open to subjective interpretation or risk becoming a mechanism to move people on simply for being outside of social norms. We like our eccentrics here and that is Nambour's heart. If that line is not clear, it risks undermining trust in policing and creating outcomes that do more harm than good so those safeguards matter.

At the same time, the ability to respond early to antisocial behaviour before situations escalate is something that I do believe is needed now. This cannot be about enforcement alone; it needs to be balanced. At the moment, the balance does not appear to be there in my community. If we do not get this right, we risk causing further harm to people who need the most protection and, at the end of the

day, early intervention is the goal. While those systems continue to be built, our community cannot wait. We have been patient, we have been extremely compassionate but we also need to be supported and cared for ourselves so that we can support others. Our community deserves to feel safe and right now that balance is not there.

CHAIR: Helen, I personally thank you for your advocacy in the community. The work that you have done, at great personal sacrifice, is making a difference. Your regular contact with me has made it to the highest offices in this state and some of the ideas—not that it will solve everything—are presented in this bill. Thank you for your work. I want to ask you about a recent community forum that you held. What were some of the key outcomes in relation to community safety and the feedback that you had from people in relation to Nambour and some of the solutions?

Ms Tagg: What I found with this issue is that there is polarisation and there is political interference. I feel that the ideology on either side can create pendulum swings. What the community is asking for is to feel safe. What businesses are asking for is to feel safe. They have told me they do not feel safe. That was yelled out from the back of the room. The most heated, highest tension point is people feeling like they are at their wit's end so that they have to yell. They cannot even go up the front and share how they feel because they get labelled a certain way. They get labelled that they do not care or they are not compassionate enough.

This community is so compassionate. There is a frustration that I hear from people every day that came through the forum. There is also a type of gaslighting that comes out because people try to polarise the subject and make it an 'either or the other'. It is not either; it is both. People deserve to be supported and people deserve to feel safe. We do not need to choose sides. That is the political nature of this thing that I am continuing to try to breakthrough. The balance needs to be there and that is what the community wants. They want a balanced perspective. They want to see things weighed and measured. That is missing in our town. I do not want to see vulnerable people being used as a shield for bad behaviour and I feel that that has happened.

Ms SCANLON: Helen, I acknowledge the point that you have made. We are obviously examining the laws that are before us at the moment. There are existing laws around good-order offences, including public nuisance. I think it is really important that we ensure that laws that are passed through the parliament work in effect on the ground. Can you outline some of those safeguards that you mentioned? Some of the advice we have received from organisations—the statewide community legal services, Basic Rights Queensland—is that there are not sufficient safeguards in place and, in fact, there is quite significant discretion. I am curious as to what safeguards you think are in the bill and whether you think they are sufficient to protect the very individuals you talked about and no doubt represented in the work that you did.

Ms Tagg: My initial concerns were access to food and access to support services and I was assured by reading it that that they were written within the bill. When we look at advocacy groups, I know Basic Rights themselves have a particular lens and it is for supporting homelessness. For me, I do not get tunnel vision in the way that I see things. I find that with that particular case in Moreton Bay, they are zeroed in on that one perspective.

Is this about creating more barriers for people experiencing homelessness? I guess that is the question in my mind. I would say that the behaviour and not the homelessness is being targeted. That is the difference. There are people I am speaking to who are homeless and they are scared by the other people who are preying upon them. We look at people who are vulnerable. People do exploit other vulnerable people and they can be higher up in structures that exist within these communities that are actually quite unsafe. When we look at things like long-term encampments and long-term entrenched living, these are not benevolent safe communities. They do provide access to a level of camaraderie and support, but alongside that are very dangerous implications that can come out of that for all.

It is very important that we are clear on who is vulnerable. When we look at the scale of that, there are people experiencing homelessness, and they can both exist together, but then there are also people who prey upon people experiencing homelessness and they exhibit antisocial behaviours. For me, it is not about whether or not you are homeless; it is about the behaviour. I hope that answers your question.

Ms MARR: Helen, I would like to acknowledge that you have invested a lot of time in and you know about your community so thank you for being here today. It is people like you we really need to listen to make sure that we get it right. In relation to the current drug diversion program, you stated in your submission—

The current system has not always led to change. Repeated opportunities without meaningful consequence do not help individuals or the broader community.

Do you believe that the new drug diversion system proposed in this bill offers a more balanced approach?

Ms Tagg: I am hopeful. Based on my understanding of talking to businesses throughout my community, they are dealing with people continually using drugs openly in front of their businesses. What we are seeing is that whatever is happening right now does not work. I am not ever going to stand here and claim that I am an expert on understanding all of the different aspects. What I can say is that currently whatever is going on does not work on the ground.

There are many more intelligent people than me who are versed in how we deal with addiction and how we help people, but I will say that on the ground businesses are daily affected by people using. We have people in our parks using in front of kids, shooting up, right near the school. I do not know if anyone knows Nambour well, but we have Nambour State High School right there, Quota Park and our large playground, and we have people continually coming into our parks and using in front of children. When we talk about early intervention and breaking cycles, for myself as a community worker we need to look at who we also need to protect, which is children. They are vulnerable. Whether this bill fully addresses that, I do not know. I am not an expert on drugs. I will say it is not working and this is a possibility that we could see some change.

Ms MARR: I think it goes back to one of your points of identifying the antisocial behaviour. In Townsville we have heard that most of the store owners in these areas are concerned about the drug abuse and the violence that comes with that. You are right: it is not about homelessness; it is about the behaviour and who is causing that antisocial behaviour for businesses.

Ms FARMER: Helen, I read your written submission and you have made an excellent statement so congratulations on your initiative to do something. There is obviously a continuum between being homeless and then do we see antisocial behaviour being related to that. It sounds to me, from what you are saying, that regardless of whether there is a new bill there simply are not enough services here and there has not been an overall coordination of services to go deeper. These are incredibly complex problems to actually sit down and ask what we actually need here, whether it is a health-based response or services or deterrents. Would you like to see that really concentrated look by getting in the experts and having the community involved? What do we actually need to put in here to make sure this behaviour is addressed and for the longer term as well? I guess that is the thing because we all want it to go away.

Ms Tagg: For the past eight months I have been asking for a place-based plan in Nambour and that essentially means everyone does get together and does that. I have not been given the permission or authority yet, in that space, to move that forward. We do have a Homelessness Response group that focuses predominantly on housing alone, which I do not believe addresses all the other issues. In saying that, I do believe that this bill is, in essence, a response to the community's desire to see change. While I support moving this bill more forward, I also do believe that that still needs to happen.

Our community is not quiet. We have been quite vocal about what we would like to see but it is whether people actually want to listen to us and work with us and whether there will be an actual desire to support us because I know there are so many amazing services in Nambour. When you look at how much Nambour gives, sometimes it feels like there is an expectation that we are to give more without the structures that support us. I am not just talking about financially; I am talking about policing as well and all the other things that we have been working towards for years. It is a balance. It is not 'either or'.

Yes, I would love that if that was to be set up tomorrow. I have been, quite frankly, spending a significant amount of time asking for that to happen because I believe this community knows how to solve this problem and policing is one aspect of that. I would love to see it.

CHAIR: Helen, going specifically to the bill, as you know it will enable the minister to declare a designated business and community precinct. That means declare an area of safety where police powers are increased to deal with things. What areas around Nambour would you like to see declared as community safety areas?

Ms Tagg: Specifically, child safe areas but I think that does not capture enough. I mentioned Quota Park. The areas next to the school have entrenchment issues. We have Petrie Park and then we also have the dog park. All of those areas have had continued antisocial behaviour issues to the point where people do not feel comfortable a lot of the time using them. As a part of my Nambour Now committee, which is only newly established, we have members who walk those parks two times a day and know exactly what goes on there. In saying that, I feel that there need to be fresh holds and triggers because I do not feel like we can blanket say, 'If you're homeless and alone then you are not allowed in our community.' That is not what we have asked for. There does need to be a level of balance there, which is what I have been asking for. I am not asking for anyone to be excluded from Nambour, whether

they are homeless or not. It does not matter to me. The behaviour is what matters to me. There needs to be a little bit of give and take. I feel like we are at the point where all we do as a community is give and we are expected to take the negative consequences. I do not think that is fair. I want to raise my kids in this community, in a healthy community.

It is Quota Park, at the very least next to kids' schools and then we talk about businesses, which is a big part of what is extending out of my committee. I believe they have the right to trade and to have some pride in their environment, which I feel has been taken from them through repeated offenders who exhibit these behaviours. The CBD does encapsulate that, but specifically outside of that I do not want to see people moved out into another park or another area. I do not want people moving on from there because the CBD is not the only space. We need to look at other things such as who is vulnerable and what is the purpose of our public spaces. I would say, for one, when we look at child specific spaces such as playgrounds, schools, childcare centres and stuff, they all need to be included in it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Helen. That ends the time allocated for your evidence. We really appreciate the work that you have done. Congratulations. It is great to chat again.

DOWLER, Mr Dale, Pastor, The Shack Community Centre

CHAIR: Thanks for coming along. It is important to hear from community service providers like you. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee and then we will have some questions for you.

Mr Dowler: I appreciate your time. My contribution is going to be short and sweet. I am punching above my weight today. In the context of community safety, we see it every day; we have that privilege. I will read what I have and we will take it from there.

I write in support of the bill in principle. However, I respectfully submit that legislation alone will not resolve the complex and growing challenges facing our communities. Over 25 years of service within the community, I have witnessed a clear and concerning decline in behaviour, respect and social cohesion. While there have been periods of progress, the overall trend is undeniable. The task of addressing this decline is becoming increasingly difficult and at times it feels almost like you are painting the harbour bridge.

While additional policing resources are welcomed, I am not convinced that enforcement alone will deliver the long-term change we seek. A sustainable solution must be grounded in a stronger and more deliberate commitment to community values, personal responsibility, which has been mentioned quite a few times this morning, respect for heritage and pride in place. These are not abstract ideals; they are foundational for safe and functioning communities and they must be actively promoted and reinforced.

It is also critical that in addressing crime we do not lose sight of fairness and proportionality. We must avoid broad generalisations that unfairly stigmatise vulnerable groups. Not all individuals experiencing homelessness engage in antisocial behaviour and not all those living with mental health challenges pose a risk to public safety. Effective policy must recognise these distinctions to ensure responses are both just and targeted.

Substance abuse, particularly drugs and alcohol, remains a significant driver of antisocial behaviour and crime, yet there appears to be a disconnect in how these issues are addressed. In many cases individuals are able to access substances with relative ease and consume them openly in public places with limited consequence to either the individual or the supplier. This raises a critical question: are we focusing our efforts on the symptoms rather than on the source of the problem?

I acknowledge the efforts of the police, healthcare professionals, mental health services and social support agencies. Each plays an essential role yet each operates within limits. No single system can resolve this issue in isolation. Real and lasting change will require a coordinated whole-of-community response, one that combines enforcement with prevention, accountability with support, and policy with cultural change.

As a longstanding member of this community, I feel deep concern and a strong sense of responsibility. We cannot afford to approach this challenge in a fragmented way. If we are to restore safety, confidence and pride in our communities, we must act collectively, decisively and with a shared commitment to solutions that address both cause and consequence.

CHAIR: Thank you, Dale. You and I have known each other for many years, when I was a police officer working with you. Your standing in the community and the service that you and your volunteers provide to our most vulnerable are well known. There are submissions that have stated concerns if people are excluded from a certain area that is a designated space; there is a need for wraparound services et cetera. How do you see yourself and other organisations working with the police in this regard if somebody is banned from a particular area? How can The Shack and other services that you work with assist those people?

Mr Dowler: I do not want to simplify it too much in the context of what it is. If we reference those days that have gone by, it was really a simple process where a phone call could be made or a simple conversation could be had and then often we would go into action. We have seen a lot of changes in that time. I still think it can be as simple as that. We work collaboratively, anyway. We work together very closely. Conversations between all those social groups and social services are always happening. If there is a move-on order or something like that and we need to engage that person to have those wraparound programs, it can be just a simple consultation to say, 'Listen, Dale, is there anyone from your team or the Salvation Army or any of those guys?', and we can then be motivated and moved into that space and make it work.

CHAIR: That happens in Nambour already, doesn't it?

Mr Dowler: Yes, and it has been happening for many years. As with growth, we have seen some of those growing pains and some things have been fragmented over that. In general, it is still happening very well today. It happened with us yesterday. Someone clearly spoke to us yesterday at a function. We were able to engage with that young person straight after that time and today's outcome was great. Again, without oversimplifying it, it can be that simple.

Ms SCANLON: Obviously laws need to be enforced and that is done by police. As has been mentioned, this bill is quite significant and it deals with different areas, the first being drug diversion laws. I would note that five former police commissioners have actually backed the laws we currently have around the health-based response, partly because it saved around 250,000 police hours per year. We then also have the section around antisocial behaviour. It is interesting to note that the data in Nambour shows that good order offences are actually down in 2025, which includes public nuisance. Are you concerned that one aspect of this bill will mean that police now have to spend more time going out and enforcing minor possession charges, which will no doubt mean they cannot be diverted from other serious crimes, which may include good order offences, for example?

Mr Dowler: I think it is always going to be a concern when you take from Peter to pay Paul. I want to echo what Helen was saying. Over the years with the diversionary programs I have seen in place, I have not really seen any of them work effectively in the context of my work and also for the other 12 people who are also going into that program. I just do not think there is enough solidness around it or enough wraparound in it to see it work effectively.

Sometimes 30 years ago you could get a mandatory order to actually put people into rehab. That is no longer in place. A lot of it is voluntary in terms of going into rehab centres. I am sure there are cases where an order could be made, but most of it is voluntary. That is a very difficult environment, particularly those programs that are based on 12 months; 76 to 78 per cent of 12 month rehab programs work effectively to help people move away from drug use. The shorter term ones, particularly the HADS and places like that, do not have any effect. It is a case of going in the front door and straight out the back door. I think it needs to be looked at in that context. Can there be a part placed in that?

Ms SCANLON: Do you think that bill does any of that?

Mr Dowler: I have not read it in its entirety. If the diversionary programs are to continue and to be more effective I think they need to have a lot more added to them and rehab needs to be a part of that. I know it is encouraged, but sometimes it may have to be mandatory.

Ms MARR: On your website you talk about the assistance that you offer drug dependent individuals in your local area, the topic of conversation we are having now. Can you explain to the committee the impact you have seen from drug use on the local community but also on the individuals you are helping in your local community?

Mr Dowler: Absolutely. Without a doubt we have seen dramatic changes in the individuals. We had an interesting encounter. We used to get a lot of people sent to us from the courts but when they had some court district changes here things started to slow up a little bit. Nambour court took on a whole different system as opposed to Maroochydore and we lost there. In recent times we have found the most effectiveness with the ongoing support. It is not just the group, it is not just sitting down and having the conversation; but it is those after-hours connections, it is accommodation—it is those total wraparound services—connecting with local GPs, connecting with psychologists or counsellors and always working together in that total wraparound environment. It is the 2 am and 3 am phone calls that as a community we probably need to be prepared to do. We are quite happy to do that and I know a lot of other community groups do that. That is probably what has been part of the success.

Ms MARR: How has it impacted the local community and individuals?

Mr Dowler: For a local community it has created a positive in a sense because we have seen people become drug free. That speaks for itself. For the individual, being drug free is a great thing. That could be going into rehab and finding those programs and housing but also reconnecting with the families they have been ostracised from because of their drug use. It has obviously limited their crime, if not completely taken away their crime. Because they are no longer using; they are no longer using crime to fund that. We have seen that impact to the point we then see them go on to do volunteering and full-time and part-time work. It has been quite effective.

Ms FARMER: Dale, thank you. I am familiar with the work of The Shack.

Mr Dowler: Yes, you came and gave us a visit. It was lovely, thank you.

Ms FARMER: We did. You started off saying you feel like you are punching above your weight. I feel like it is the other way around, so please never say that.

CHAIR: We are in furious agreement, member for Bulimba.

Ms FARMER: Yes. Dale, you were describing social dysfunction and, of course, the outcome of that is often law and order issues in the community. Homelessness is often the root of all of that. I have to say the feelings you are expressing are being expressed by many communities across Queensland. We talked before with Helen about the need to just have a plan. Would you like to see some kind of housing—some at Q Shelter, for instance, have submitted they would like to see a housing summit so we have all the experts but communities looking together and saying, 'How do we solve this complex problem? What is the plan?', so it is not only a statewide plan but it is a plan for communities as well. Would you like to see that really coordinated—

Mr Dowler: I would love to see that—and it is a great question—but I do not want to see another talkfest.

CHAIR: Amen to that.

Mr Dowler: We have seen too many talkfests. We have seen too many things come across the table that look fabulous on paper but then have no outcome. I think we need to be definite in our approach. We need to be definite in our vision and we need to have a lot of clarity around it. Talkfests are achieving nothing. All they are is that: it is a conversation. Let us put some skin on the bones and make it happen. I know I have had the conversation.

We have a housing program in place—I think you popped over and had a look at it too—which has been extremely successful. The greatest compliment we had was from QPS. I was actually, funnily enough, going in to preach at a church one day and a couple of policemen pulled me out from the pulpit and said, 'Can we chat with you, Dale?' I didn't know what was going on. They said they just wanted to compliment us on the fact that they have never been called to our housing, which I thought was probably one of the greatest compliments we could have got.

If I went to the forum—I am sure one day I might get an invite to one of those forums—I would say that I am very much for boutique processes. I think if we bring our housing down to smaller organised groups where we have maybe six, 10 or 15 people living in a village environment you can have greater impact than you can when you have 50 or 60 or 100 people living in that environment, because you just cannot reach the heart of the person.

Ms FARMER: What you do is supportive housing. If we could have those targets for supported housing across communities, would you be happy to see that?

Mr Dowler: Absolutely willing, but I would love to see it shrunk from here to there and maybe have satellites all over. It would make a massive difference.

Ms FARMER: It would be lovely if everyone in the audience had an opportunity to hear the details, but there is not that time. It is great work, that supported housing that you do.

CHAIR: We made an announcement of 20 supportive housing units in Nambour this morning. We are making progress. It is great. I want to ask you about some of the evidence that Peter and Greg gave with respect to people sleeping rough and the refusal of some to engage. You deal with these people daily in terms of assisting them without judgement. Can you maybe comment on some of the reasons somebody might refuse engagement with housing, for example, and what your experience is in that regard?

Mr Dowler: Probably No. 1 on the list is trust. That is at the top of the list. There is the census coming up this year. It is difficult to get a homelessness census done because there is a trust issue. That sits right up there. They have been let down over a period of time. Is this just going to be another moment in that context? Rejection is very much a part of it. We have the benefit of the back stories. We get to hear where they have come from and hopefully help them with the direction of where they are going. We certainly are not bleeding hearts. You only have to hang with us for an hour to find that out, but the reality is that we need to hear their stories and we need to have the stats. Trust is probably the big issue. They are not sure what is going to be happening with that information that they are giving out.

The other one is being familiar. When you are familiar with something that you are working with, it makes life a lot easier. I have to commend IFYS, for example. Their outreach programs are in place now. They are becoming familiar with the community and that is building trust and things are happening.

Things are starting to move, from our hotel accommodation to the hub. We are hearing great stories coming back where people are being placed in housing. It has taken a while. It has not been a five-minute thing. IFYS have been around a while, but since their outreach has built that trust it has made a massive difference.

CHAIR: You will be pleased to hear we announced another \$1 million for them today to extend their outreach to five days a week from one day a week. It is good to hear that the work they are doing in town will be extended.

Mr Dowler: It is. We have our friendly pink shirts now out and about from Queensland Housing, affectionately known as the pink army. Again, they are building that trust from that outreach perspective. I think that has played a massive part. The one thing we cannot avoid is migration. We were really excited the Shack went into the 21st century this year and we are doing everything electronically. It has always been pen and paper. The amazing thing is that we are finding anywhere between 33 and 50 per cent of people we are dealing with every day are coming from other locations. A real issue that we are confronted with here in Nambour is the migration side of things. When I hear about the move-on—and I know it has been brought up eloquently already this morning—I do not want to see us doing to other communities what we are seeing other communities doing to us. There needs to be a greater thought around that, without a doubt.

CHAIR: We appreciate you appearing before the committee today, giving your important insights—not batting above your weight. Thank you for the wonderful work you and your organisation and volunteers do.

BILLETT, Ms Rhonda, Chairperson, I am Nambour

CHAIR: Good afternoon. I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Billett: I hope I do not repeat too much of what your other presenters have said this morning. I do have an opening statement to make. Good afternoon, members of the committee. Thank you for the invitation to share with you some business community feedback for the Expanding Adult Crime, Adult Time and Taking a Strong Stance on Drugs and Anti-Social Behaviour Amendment Bill 2026. My name is Rhonda Billett. I am the chairperson of I am Nambour. I also head up the Nambour business group bi-monthly meetings for the improvement and betterment of the Nambour CBD. Most importantly, I am a business owner of Nambour for 27 years—so I started young. Firstly, thank you for giving me the opportunity to voice the following information. My hope is that you walk away with an on-the-ground understanding of how much laws like this will help communities just like ours across this great state of Queensland.

Nambour is the hub: we recently branded as the gateway to the Sunshine Coast Hinterland region. It serves many purposes for many locals and travellers, as well as being highlighted as one of the three CBD hubs under the Sunshine Coast Planning Scheme. Nambour and its surrounds has a proud agriculturally rich past and it is the original CBD of the Sunshine Coast. However, due to coastal urban sprawl, as well as the loss of many agricultural industries, including the loss of the Moreton Central Sugar Mill to this location and region back in 2023, the town has endured a huge economic hit spanning over the last approximately 20 years. The town's identity even today remains a work in progress. We are still feeling the economic effects of these losses in our town. Nambour and its CBD has been searching for a fresh identity and purpose and where it fits into the future of the Sunshine Coast economic tapestry.

I am pleased to share here that there are very exciting times ahead for our Nambour CBD. I publicly launched back in October 2025, after doing some much needed reckoning with our town's development applications and approvals, that the town had secured strong investor interest, and to date that is now sitting at approximately \$150 million worth of economic investment. I can report that there is actually even more coming for our little past sugarcane town. To be quite honest with you, we have actually not had this much economic interest and investor interest since the 1980s so, whilst we have all this stuff going on with our town, we are on the precipice of something unique and very changing for our CBD.

Our investors plan on bringing much needed industry with their investment to the Nambour CBD, securing jobs, creating places for our community to gather and hopefully live, work and play with vibrancy again. However, there are challenges that we face as we breathe life back into the Nambour CBD. In recent years Nambour has become a major service centre, mostly due to its geographical location, for health services, both public and private, as well as proximity to heavy rail and fantastic public transport options. However, Nambour also houses countless employment agencies that line the streets where retailers once were. Disability and NDIS agencies continue to grow, as well as the Queensland Health Nambour Community and Mental Health hub in the centre of the Nambour CBD which provides access to addiction services and mental health services, including case management, treatment and cultural support. The town certainly does more than its fair share of heavy lifting for the Sunshine Coast in this area of service.

With the high amount of community services jam-packed into one central CBD, it brings the constant flow-on effect of antisocial behaviour that consistently flows into the town's streets. Graffiti, alcoholic intoxication, multiple addiction issues, homeless drug addicts by choice, stealing from business owners, humans that take their drug and alcohol use onto the streets, living on a high, followed by verbally abusive behaviours on the streets and more. This happens daily in the Nambour CBD and it is a problem because we are trying to economically revitalise without jeopardising the hundreds of millions of dollars of private investment that is set for the community ahead of us.

As a result, our past, present and future economic plans for growth and a thriving business community suffer, and it is somewhat stunted as a result, and our community needs that to stop—particularly our business community and locals who shop in Nambour. A lot of people who live and work here do not want to engage with the CBD at times, deeming it very hard to engage with. I want to share with you some whispers that I have heard from the community and business community regarding this. These are conversations that I have had with people probably in the last three months so they are quite current and informative. They are things like—

It's too dangerous to work in Nambour. I will work from home instead as much as possible. That same street group are always hanging around my workplace and I hate it.

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Other conversations—

I'm not going out in my lunch break today. There are too many out the front of our business again today and I don't want to go outside.

This one is a heartbreaking one—

I've moved my business out of Nambour. I do still live here, but I cannot successfully operate my business here. Every time I would have corporate key national customers come to my premises in Nambour they are greeted regularly by antisocial behaviour around my business and it is no good for my business longevity.

That business decided to leave. Another comment—

I don't feel safe doing my banking in Nambour anymore. That girl or guy always hangs around the ATMs and asks me for money so I go elsewhere on the Sunshine Coast to do my banking where I feel safer.

Another whisper—

I will go into Nambour only when my husband is available to come with me. I don't feel safe. It's the same people there all the time ruining it for us.

Another one—

I hate having to walk through the constant riffraff to get to the shops. I will shop elsewhere. Bugger going to Nambour.

I want to support Nambour business but I won't go into town until they do something and make it safe for us to go back and support those businesses.

Committee, this is our Nambour business reality. Whilst my Nambour and surrounds working group teams—from the Sunshine Coast Council's economic development department to my Nambour business groups such as Tram Co, who have presented today, I am Nambour, which I am a part of, and the Nambour Chamber of Commerce—are trying very hard to rebrand Nambour as a great place to live, work and play, the repetitive antisocial matters are creating an ongoing obstacle for the CBD to economically thrive. Given the amount of private investment that we have coming to the town in the next six to 12 months, we desperately need a solution. I want to thank you for your time, and if you have any questions please feel free to ask.

CHAIR: Thank you, Rhonda. You and I met about 20 years ago through our work with the Nambour chamber or alliance as it was called then. I have always found you to be a positive person about Nambour. You always like to speak positively about Nambour, as we all do, and it is important that we get that brand right. You have personal contact with some of these large investors that are optimistic about bringing their business into Nambour. What risks do we face if we do not do something about this antisocial behaviour, and do you believe that this bill goes some way towards addressing some of those concerns?

Ms Billett: I think the bill has to happen. I do not know how it has not happened. I was talking to a customer only this morning about this. Apparently this type of bill used to exist back in the 1990s, maybe 1980s. Her husband was a police officer in Brisbane. Maybe we are revisiting the past to get to where the future needs to be. I think it is good that we have the private investors at the table. It is good that they are opening up their wallets and they are investing. That is a really good, strong, positive thing. We walked Nambour with one of our key investors. He flew up last Thursday. We walked the town because he is trying to work out his marketing strategy for his \$25 million investment. When we were walking through trying to identify what Nambour needed and what the needs are and things like that, I felt a bit of pressure on my shoulders because I thought, 'Right, we want this investor to succeed. The last thing we need, as a town, given how long it has taken to attract this investment, is to have them invest and then have their buildings empty.' If I was spending \$25 million I would want tenants. We have different places in Nambour that are under development application at the moment, and if these are going to go through we do not want antisocial behaviour and things like that to ruin it for the people who really want it, because at the end of the day we have a community out there that is screaming for more shops and fun places to go and things to do, but sometimes incidents that arise can kill that.

Ms SCANLON: I think we are all in furious agreement that we want our communities to be kept safe. My dad was a former police officer. We want to make sure that the laws we have work and are successful in achieving community outcomes. You would be aware there are obviously existing good order offences and public nuisance offences in place. This bill proposes to essentially allow officers to issue move-on directions.

Ms Billett: Yes.

Ms SCANLON: Given that effectively it is just moving someone from one area to another, do you have any views around the need for more support services and supportive housing targets to ensure that the actual cause of the problem is addressed and that we are not just displacing people and moving people around?

Ms Billett: That is a great question. Like Dale, I know a couple of the people in question here. Let's not sugar-coat this. I talk to them every now and again. They walk past my business and I ask, 'How's it going? Let's get you some help. How's your journey going?' I think this particular person I will use as an example is a drug addict. This guy's story is very sad. He is in his late forties. He was a multimillionaire who was going in all the right directions, but unfortunately he discovered drugs and pretty much lost everything. When he first presented to me I said to him, 'Why don't you go get some help?' I rang his parents. They said, 'We've not heard from him for seven months.' I said, 'He's turned up in Nambour and this is what's going on.' Then I proceeded to do a bit more digging and found out that he was happy just to live light. The next time I saw him in town I said, 'How about we get you some help? There are lots of services here in Nambour.' There are a lot of services. We definitely do our fair share of heavy lifting here in Nambour for these types of people. He said, 'Not interested, Rhonda. Don't want to do anything. I'm happy just living light.' He bounces between Nambour and Mooloolaba beach.

I appreciate the need for social housing, but this guy could go back and live with his parents or his brother. There are so many places he could go, but it is his choice. He is not interested. I think you will probably find there are quite a few out there like that. They know we have services here. Sometimes they will deliberately catch the 50-cent train to Nambour because they know they are going to get fed and they know they are going to get their washing done, but then they will get on the train and go somewhere else. I really do not even think that in this case housing is the issue. From a personal point of view, there are a lot of options out there for these troubled people but they have to want to do it. Until they want to do it, I think we are always going to be fighting a battle. Are we moving people on? Maybe we are to a degree. There could be some truth in that. I heard someone mention earlier about creating a CBD place of safety, is it?

CHAIR: The term is a designated business and community precinct.

Ms Billett: That interests me. There is a thing that we have here in Nambour. I have a picture of it. This is called the special entertainment precinct. It was something we were gifted ages ago. It is pretty under-utilised. However, looking at that boundary, what a great starting point that could be for something like this because this is where the principal businesses take place, this is where some of the parks are that Helen talked about. It is already a living document. It is in the system, so maybe that is something that needs to be explored. That is something that may be of help.

Ms SCANLON: Can I just really briefly follow up on that, Chair? I note that you mentioned safety and services. The designated precinct is quite different to a safe-night precinct in that it does not require the same sort of community liaison and support services attached. Would be you interested in a model similar to a safe-night precinct?

Ms Billett: Possibly we could look at that, yes, as part of it. As I said, the parameters are there. There are three different levels in the special entertainment precinct at the moment, and if you did want to create a safe zone I think it has a really good framework.

CHAIR: In terms of the suggestion that moving people on would move the problem elsewhere, would you agree that often the problem is place-based, so they are in this particular place with particular people, police have the power of arrest as well, they can deal with that situation, and then perhaps ban the person for 24 hours which will stop them going back to that situation.

Ms Billett: What a fantastic outcome that would be. Then obviously there would be other things that would follow that. I had a quick look at the bill and I thought it looked really good. For example, this gentleman who is doing our \$25 million renovation at the moment, his property is called C-Square in Nambour. Colliers International, the lessors, are the people who manage that property. I can tell you that out of the entire Sunshine Coast property portfolio that Colliers manages, that property is their most highly reported on property for crime or damage to the property and all of that kind of stuff. When we look at the Sunshine Coast as a whole and Colliers as a whole, because they are a very big organisation that really screams to me real-time data. We have been really fortunate to recently connect that property manager with Aaron, who is looking after the police beat for us. We did that last week when we were walking the streets with our developer. We are trying to build those connections there; however, to give you some real data for the whole of the Colliers portfolio, that is pretty real.

Ms FARMER: Thank you very much, Rhonda. You are obviously very passionate about Nambour. It is lovely to see.

Ms Billett: Love our CBD.

Ms FARMER: On that point in particular—I think you referred to it and a number of other speakers have—if there is a designated precinct in Nambour then those people do have to go somewhere else. I have spent a fair bit of time in Nambour, but driving around this morning I was reminded how spread out it is. There seem to be a number of business precincts around. As a person who clearly represents a lot of business interests, how does this town deal with that? If those people are then moved on to some other business district, then how are those people protected? Does that concern you? Would you like to see some modelling around how policing is going to work to make sure those people are not impacted as well?

Ms Billett: Do you mean moving them out of the CBD but having them on the fringes of the town?

Ms FARMER: They have to go somewhere. Would you like to see a plan? How do those little hubs get policed as well? Because those people are not just going to disappear.

Ms Billett: No, and they are not. That is the thing. Going back to what Dale said, we are talking case by case here. It is individual by individual. Some individuals, when they are ready to have help, they will be ready to have help.

Ms FARMER: This will not be help though. This will be people who are committing antisocial behaviour.

Ms Billett: Yes, and then being moved.

Ms FARMER: They are specifically not homeless people. They are specifically exhibiting antisocial behaviour and they are to be moved on by police—not helped but moved on. They have to be moved on to somewhere else where they could also be exhibiting that behaviour.

Ms Billett: That comes back to there being some sort of ramification for them, doesn't it? It depends what the trigger for the antisocial behaviour is too. Is it drugs? Is it alcohol? Is it just that they are having a bad day? Is it that they are fighting with their boyfriend in the middle of the street? You are opening up Pandora's box when you go there, to be honest. However, if we treat them as humans, as individuals on a case-by-case basis, find out the whys, the hows, do they have somewhere to go, don't they have somewhere to go? They are just humans at the end of the day, aren't they? I think it is a very big problem. It is not going to be a one-solution-fits-all situation. That is what I think may be the reality in this situation.

Ms FARMER: I think you have got to the crux of it. Currently there are no services associated with this proposal.

Ms Billett: The follow-up, that is right.

Ms FARMER: You actually have to consider those if you are going to proceed.

Ms Billett: Some of these people are already in public and social housing. Some of them are, but then some of them might just live in a normal house and have a normal life too. It is accountability, I think. It is about if you are going to be a full-on human at this point in your life, there have to be consequences for that. Especially if it is starting to feed into communities and making communities stunted in their growth or having people not wanting to come and engage with the business community and stuff like that. That is no good for anyone.

CHAIR: Thank you, Rhonda. That ends the time allocated for your evidence today. Thanks for coming along.

ALLAN, Ms Katherine, Henzells Agency

BUGENHAGEN, Mr Brian, Vice-President, Nambour Chamber of Commerce

CHAIR: Thank you for your attendance here today. I invite you both to make an opening statement to the committee and then we will have some questions after that.

Mr Bugenhagen: Thank you so much, committee, for the opportunity to address this matter. I speak today on behalf of the Nambour Chamber of Commerce and the many small businesses operating in the Nambour CBD. Firstly, the chamber would like to thank and publicly acknowledge Marty Hunt MP for being instrumental in bringing the police beat to the CBD. Thank you.

Right now in Nambour some workers are afraid to go to work and some customers are afraid to come into our town centre. That is why these stronger police powers matter. For a number of years now businesses in our town centre have been dealing with increasingly confrontational, aggressive and substance-affected behaviour in public spaces. This behaviour is not occasional; it has become a regular experience for many businesses, their staff and their customers.

Retail workers are frequently exposed to verbal abuse and intimidation. Business owners report incidents occurring outside their premises that make it difficult for them to operate normally. Customers have told us they feel uncomfortable or unsafe visiting the town centre. Unfortunately, this situation has reached a point where some people actively avoid coming to Nambour because of these experiences. That is damaging for the entire community. It affects local jobs, local businesses and the confidence people have in our town centre.

It is important to say the business community understands that many of the individuals involved in this behaviour are dealing with complex social and health issues, including substance abuse and mental health challenges. Support services and community programs are essential and must continue to play a role; however, there must also be a clear ability to maintain safety and order in public spaces.

For too long many businesses have felt that police officers responding to incidents have not always had the practical powers needed to intervene early enough to prevent situations from escalating. The enhanced powers proposed in this legislation give police the greater ability to respond quickly and effectively when behaviour becomes threatening, aggressive or unsafe. From the perspective of the Nambour business community, these powers will help ensure that public spaces remain safe for workers, customers, visitors and residents. Workers should feel safe coming to work, customers should feel safe and comfortable bringing their families into the town centre, and businesses should not have to manage behaviour that would not be tolerated in any other workplace. The Nambour Chamber of Commerce therefore supports the passage of this legislation and the strengthening of police powers to deal with violent, threatening and substance-affected behaviour in public areas. We believe this will assist police in maintaining safer public spaces and restoring confidence in our CBD.

Nambour is a resilient town with a strong community spirit, and local businesses are committed to its revitalisation and growth. Ensuring that people feel safe in our town centre is a critical step in achieving that goal. A safe Nambour CBD is not just good policing policy; it is essential economic policy for the future of our town. Thank you.

CHAIR: Katherine, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Allan: I would like to say that Brian and I have not conferred but what I am about to say is pretty much the same. Good morning and thank you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Katherine Allan and I am the general manager at Henzells Agency in Caloundra. I am here today to represent the voices of small business owners in the Caloundra town centre, many of whom, like Henzells Agency, have been part of this community for decades and are now facing a level of disruption and risk that is simply unacceptable.

At the heart of this issue is community safety. After speaking with several business owners over the past week, it is clear that many are dealing with daily exposure to aggressive, unpredictable and often drug affected behaviour, particularly around key public infrastructure such as Telstra phone boxes, publicly accessible power points and surrounding community spaces. Staff are regularly subjected to loud yelling, verbal abuse, threats of violence, individuals under the influence of drugs behaving unpredictably, intimidating groups entering stores and refusing to leave, people sleeping in doorways and blocking access to businesses, public drug use, vandalism and unsanitary behaviour. This is not occasional; this is consistent, visible and escalating. Many of these workplaces are staffed entirely by women, and staff no longer feel safe. Businesses have been forced to lock their doors even while staff are inside just to feel secure. This is not a safe working environment.

The impact, however, extends beyond staff. Customers, particularly elderly members of our community, are choosing not to come into the town centre. They feel unsafe walking between services like the IGA and the library due to aggressive behaviour, groups congregating and e-scooters and e-bikes travelling at speed on footpaths without enforcement. We are not just losing foot traffic; we are losing community confidence. There are also serious safety concerns in surrounding infrastructure. Staff leaving work in the evening must walk through poorly lit car parks and laneways where drug use, human waste and threatening behaviour are frequently encountered. Despite repeated calls to police, business owners report little to no lasting resolution. While there was a temporary increase in police presence following earlier discussions, that presence has declined and with it the sense of safety in the area.

In response, private landlords, including Henzells Agency, have installed CCTV systems on their buildings and the QPS regularly rely on this footage to identify and track offenders. This should not be at the expense of individual landlords; this is a community safety issue and it should be treated as such. We have seen in areas such as Nambour the implementation of back-to-base police monitored CCTV systems. Caloundra deserves the same level of protection and investment. This bill is a critical step in the right direction. It recognises that the types of behaviours we are experiencing—public disturbance, intimidation and disorder linked to drug and alcohol use—are not minor issues. They are serious community safety concerns that require stronger powers and clearer enforcement.

However, the legislation on its own is not enough. Without visible enforcement, consistent police presence and supporting infrastructure like monitored CCTV, the intent of this bill will not be realised on the ground. Right now there is a clear gap between policy and reality. Business owners are still managing these risks themselves, staff are still feeling unsafe and customers are avoiding the area. If this legislation is to be effective, it must be supported by: increased and consistent foot patrols in the town centre; government funded back-to-base CCTV coverage in high-risk areas; targeted proactive responses to drug affected behaviour in public spaces; improved lighting and safety measures in car parks and laneways; and a review and relocation of infrastructure, specifically the Telstra phone boxes in Bulcock Street which significantly contribute to antisocial behaviour.

This is the opportunity in front of us—to not only pass legislation but to ensure it delivers real and visible change in communities like ours. Safety should not depend on private businesses installing cameras, locking their doors or managing risks that belong in the public domain. This is a community safety issue and it requires a coordinated, visible and properly resourced response. This legislation sets the direction; now it must be backed by action. We ask that you act so that our town centre is once again a place where people feel safe to work, visit and belong—because a safe community should never rely on private businesses to do the job of public safety.

CHAIR: Thank you, Katherine, for bringing a voice from Caloundra today. We are heavily Nambour focused today, but your community is having similar issues that this bill seeks to deal with in some way so I appreciate you coming up and giving that perspective. Brian, I have never seen the Nambour chamber so active and optimistic, to be honest with you. What are the risks if we ignore this issue and do not bring in bills like this and police beats and powers to deal with this sort of behaviour? What risks are businesses facing?

Mr Bugenhagen: I would clearly say it is the key concern of most businesses in Nambour. In the CBD definitely, it is certainly the thing that comes up regularly. I think the biggest problem that we will have and that is starting to show is the reluctance of people to move to Nambour to open up a business. I think there is a bit of step back there. They think the history and culture of Nambour is having a bit of a negative on their decision-making. That would be the biggest problem: the perception amongst new businesses. If they wish to come into Nambour and set up, they feel a little bit cautious.

CHAIR: Katherine, do you have any input into that in terms of the risks associated with not doing anything about this issue?

Ms Allan: Similar to Brian, there is a lot of investment coming into Caloundra at the moment in regards to new developments in Bulcock Street, plans for hotels. Similar to the previous speaker, people just will not come into town and they will not bring their business. They will go to Maroochydore or other places and then the investment does not happen, people do not have customers and the shops end up empty. That is a big concern.

Ms SCANLON: There are two parts to my question. Brian, thank you for appearing. Are you aware that in 2025 unlawful entry was up, unlawful use of motor vehicle offences are up, shop stealing is up but drug possession and good order offences are down?

Mr Bugenhagen: No, I was not aware of that.

CHAIR: That is because no-one is getting charged with drug offences. They are getting diverted.

Ms SCANLON: Well, they are, as has just been evidenced that they are down.

CHAIR: A lot less.

Ms SCANLON: Brian, are you concerned about the fact that part of this bill will go contrary to the advice of five former police commissioners, who called for drug diversion laws to ensure that police resources were going towards serious crimes and that we were treating health issues as a health response in the first instance, rather than a criminal response? We have not heard yet the views of the current commissioner on these laws, but five former police commissioners have supported the laws we currently have in place and these laws would wind that back.

Mr Bugenhagen: Effectively, we need more policing in general across the board. Clearly we do not have sufficient police to do everything. You cannot be everywhere, and there are only certain resources currently available. Maybe that needs to be addressed.

Ms SCANLON: The previous bill that went through the parliament identified that the drug diversion laws would save 258,000 police hours. If we are winding those back, we are going to need to find those hours from somewhere else. Would you support that being replicated then and investment with this bill?

Mr Bugenhagen: Obviously, the police can only do a certain amount in a certain amount of time, so either you give them more jobs to do or you need more policemen.

Ms MARR: Brian, I want you to know that what you are experiencing is not isolated to Nambour and that is proof that we have had very weak laws that have never accommodated the needs of our business community. This has continued over a long period of time and that is where we are today. Rhonda was talking about rebranding Nambour, and you spoke about the perception that people have. I want to read something from the *Sunshine Valley Gazette* from 2025 where one user wrote, 'I was there yesterday morning and honestly it felt like walking through a ghetto.' Could you elaborate on what the business community have had to endure? Also, how will the measures in this bill help with the community perception that you are doing something to help businesses to bring the community back?

Mr Bugenhagen: It is such a regular occurrence so you do not have to spend too much time around the CBD to actually experience some of this poor behaviour. With the move-on laws specifically to deal with these situations on a more immediate basis, I do not think it would take long before people would see a notable difference.

Ms MARR: I have heard a lot in this room about people who have been proactive in your community trying to solve these issues yourselves, so congratulations to all of you. How will your organisations work with your business community once this bill is passed to promote the changes that will bring people back? What can you do as a community to do that for your businesses?

Ms Allan: I discovered over the weekend—because my husband is a serving member of the QPS—that the business owners need to be educated as to what their rights are when it comes to a homeless man lying across your doorway so you cannot get in of a morning. As I discovered, and correct me if I am wrong, they can be moved on for obstructing that business. There is one specific business I spoke to and he has that every morning but he does not know what his rights are. I think it is really important for us—as an agency that manages 80 per cent of the businesses in Bulcock Street—that we educate our owners as to what they can actually do because they do not know.

Ms MARR: It is also the fear of the aggressive behaviour that most of those shop owners are concerned about.

Ms Allan: One of them filmed someone. The phone box is at his door and this guy was screaming. I do not know who it was but they had to shut the door and lock it. They are facing this every day and it is not the same people. This week will be one group, and next week will be the other. I encourage my staff to get out of the office and go to Felicity Park. Three of the girls told me last week they were approached in one way or another and abused by someone asking for money or 'Give us your phone,' so now they will not go out. Education is a really big part of what we need to do for our business owners so they know what they can do to protect themselves.

Ms FARMER: Brian, you have an excellent chamber of commerce. I visited several times as small business minister.

Mr Bugenhagen: I still have that 'I love Nambour' T-shirt for you.

Ms FARMER: Beautiful, thank you, I will collect that. If I can comment on something the member for Thuringowa said before I ask a question in relation to weak laws: those three offences which my colleague the member for Gaven said where offences have gone up are actually offences that were introduced as Adult Crime, Adult Time laws by this government, and crime has gone up for those offences. I just needed to follow that up.

CHAIR: There is some cherrypicking right there.

Ms FARMER: It is Nambour police district figures.

CHAIR: Go ahead with the question.

Ms FARMER: Can I talk about something that we have raised a bit today, which is that if people are moved on from these precincts they have to go somewhere else. The Sunshine Coast is obviously a very big region with a number of really vibrant CBDs, for want of a better term. Does it concern you that if a precinct is designated for Maroochydore then people might head off to Caloundra? They actually have to go somewhere—maybe not in the centres that you are representing but they will have to go somewhere. Would you like to see a bit of modelling for that on the Sunshine Coast, such as how many more police do we need and where do they need to go? Would you like to see a bit of a coordinated plan about that?

Mr Bugenhagen: Absolutely. If we are going to move these people on, we need to have somewhere to move them on safely.

Ms FARMER: So no-one else suffers in the way you have described.

Mr Bugenhagen: Of course. You cannot just transfer the problem. As you have probably heard today, we have some amazing resources in Nambour. We have a lot of support systems and a lot of great facilities for people who are struggling with various problems. Whether there is something that needs to be expanded within that framework, I am not too sure. In terms of dealing with some of these people and the state they are in and their behaviours, it is not my area of expertise.

Ms FARMER: You have to solve the problem. You cannot just move them somewhere else for someone else to deal with; you have to solve the problem with the right services.

Mr Bugenhagen: I think Nambour has experienced being at the tail end of moving people, and I think Nambour has taken on a lot more people in those situations than other areas. We seem to be at the end of the line.

CHAIR: Before we finish, I wanted to touch on those drug offences. There are fewer charges for drugs, which goes with the last government's soft-on-drugs approach. Are you concerned that being soft on drugs and police not enforcing drug possession has led to increased drug use in our town?

Mr Bugenhagen: I could not answer that.

CHAIR: Fair enough. We have run out of time, Brian and Katherine. I really appreciate your coming along and giving evidence before the committee today. Katherine, thank you for coming up from Caloundra. It has been invaluable to hear from you as well. Thank you very much.

GREENFIELD, Ms Ana, Manager, Nambour Community Centre

HOGG, Mr Peter, Community Development Coordinator, Nambour Community Centre

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make an opening statement to the committee, and then we will ask some questions.

Ms Greenfield: At Nambour Community Centre, all people are welcome but not all behaviours. We have hosted a drop-in space since 2017. Over that time, we have placed seven people on permanent bans for multiple instances of extreme behaviour. We use a trauma informed approach, enforced by training and compassion. When anyone is asked to leave our centre, our concern is for their safety, our community's safety, their mental and physical health, trauma escalation and so on.

We know that exclusion does not resolve the underlying issue. We know that when we work with people slowly over time we see many positive changes in behaviour. When we exclude people, as we are unable to meet their complex needs through our centre, our slow work with them stops and the problem is moved on to another community. Safety is a primary concern for people. We know that boundaries are important and also know the impact that challenging behaviours can have on individuals and the broader community.

We support the goal of safer public spaces and recognise the importance of responding when behaviour becomes unsafe or disruptive. With regard to the designated business and community precincts part of the bill and the increased police enforcement powers, we have the following concerns. These powers are likely to have the greatest impact on people who are already experiencing disadvantage. Being required to provide a name and fixed address will present challenges for some vulnerable people. Increased discretionary powers raise the risk that these individuals will be moved on, searched or escalated unnecessarily rather than supported. For some members of our community, public space is not optional; it is where daily life happens.

Second—shifting the issue rather than resolving it—without clear pathways to assistance, these measures may shift people around rather than address the underlying issues driving the harmful behaviour. When a person is excluded from a precinct, where do they go and what support is available to them?

Third—experience and consistency in policing—frontline decisions will often fall to younger or less experienced officers operating in high-pressure environments. With expanded discretionary powers, there is a real risk of inconsistent application or overreach. Safeguards such as review mechanisms and limits on powers operate after the fact and do not require support to be provided at the time of intervention. The subjective nature of behavioural thresholds—what constitutes disruption or causes anxiety are inherently subjective—may lead to practices being inconsistently applied.

Fourth—potential overreach and impacts on civil liberties—stronger move-on directions and expanded search powers raise concerns about lawful activities such as peaceful protest or public assembly. There is also the risk of normalising expanded policing over time.

Fifth—clarity around designated business and community precincts—we seek more information about how these precincts are defined and applied. Are they limited to specific locations or can they be declared more broadly across towns or regions? What is the criteria used to determine when and where a precinct is designated? How consistently will these criteria be applied in practice?

Sixth—community consultation and support—how will communities be consulted beyond local government? How will support services be provided alongside enforcement?

We have some suggested improvements. Enforcement powers should be paired with increased investment in outreach services, mental health supports, housing responses and alcohol and other drug services. Referral pathways should be strengthened so enforcement is directly linked to support at the time of intervention. Broader powers require strong safeguards, clear guidelines, trauma informed training for police officers and oversight to ensure powers are used fairly and proportionately. We need: clear limits and accountability mechanisms to protect civil liberties and lawful public activity; transparent criteria and meaningful community input into how precincts are designated and applied; ongoing monitoring and reviewing of impacts, particularly on vulnerable and over-represented groups; and spaces like day hubs with wraparound supports to support vulnerable people implemented in areas where such precincts exist.

In closing, we support efforts to improve community safety. From our experience, a balance of clear boundaries, transparency and meaningful support create good outcomes. Thanks for listening and for considering the voices of the communities we serve.

CHAIR: Thank you, Ana. Did you want to make any statements at this point, Peter?

Mr Hogg: I am happy to just help Ana field questions. I work on the front line at the Nambour Community Centre with a lot of our displaced communities and people. I am fairly well positioned, as is Dale, to bring some insight to that, so I am happy to do that during questions.

CHAIR: Thank you for the wonderful and challenging work you do in the Nambour Community Centre. Indeed, we have had several meetings over time in terms of the challenges you are faced with there with the volume of people and their behaviours. You did mention in your opening statement that you have had to ban several people.

Ms Greenfield: Seven have been banned permanently in that whole time.

CHAIR: You have had to permanently ban seven people from the centre for behaviour reasons. Do you accept that the community is entitled to feel just as safe as your workers in the Nambour Community Centre? People need to be removed from an area if they are causing a safety issue. Would you agree with that?

Ms Greenfield: I do agree with that. I also expressed how we are concerned about people's mental health and the impact it has on the broader community, including the town. When we ban somebody from the centre because they have escalated and we have tried to call the police and/or the ambulance, or whoever needs to be contacted but that person is out—it has to be extreme for us to ask people to leave—we are just sending them out into the wild blue yonder without any support. It has its own set of risks and implications.

Ms SCANLON: Thank you very much for the work that you do. It is really important. Some submitters have suggested that housing and support services are not necessarily a barrier. Being mindful of the work you do, do you think that is a fair assessment? Do you think we have enough affordable housing and support services?

Mr Hogg: It is not a fair assessment, in my opinion. I work with people every single day who have been waiting for housing for years. I heard a story today about a gentleman who was living rough by choice. That happens in a very small number of cases. I can tell you dozens of stories. I can tell you a story about a single mother with three children who turned up at our centre and we spent six hours trying to secure some sort of accommodation for her. The best we could do for her at the end of the day was to give her a tent and send her out onto the streets of Nambour because every service contracted to provide that support was beyond capacity. The same is true of our alcohol and other drugs services. The same is true of our domestic violence services.

We have no issue with wanting and providing a safe community, but hand in hand with the responsibility to do that is the responsibility to provide people with the supports they need and are not currently able to access so they can have the opportunity to live a meaningful and socially acceptable life. Those supports are so grossly overstretched where they do exist. I was very heartened to hear the lady from Caloundra. It is very easy to call this a Nambour issue. If you go to most towns around the place you will be hearing the same thing. That says to me that this is a societal issue. It is not a failure of weak laws and it is not a case of weak policing; it is a grassroots societal issue that we have not responded to in a caring and supportive way. These people have slipped through the cracks.

Ms MARR: In your opening statement you said you do not accept unsafe and disruptive behaviour. This bill is targeting specific antisocial and violent behaviour, which you spoke of. Do you agree that this bill is actually targeting those individuals who are doing something wrong and not everybody who is, say, homeless or not causing any behavioural issues?

Mr Hogg: I will jump in quickly. One part of this bill that worries me uses the word 'presence'. This bill uses the word 'presence'. The way I read that is if the relevant law enforcement officer has a reasonable belief—a very subjective term—that the presence of someone will cause antisocial behaviour then that person can be moved on. That is not saying, 'We'll wait until there is some behaviour or some signs of some behaviour.' No, I do not agree that this bill is necessarily targeting problematic individuals and not potentially targeting a cohort of people.

Ms FARMER: Thank you both for appearing today, and thank you for the great work that you do. Most people who work in homelessness know that it is caused by a range of indeterminants, and they can include reasons to cause you to exhibit antisocial behaviour. It could be mental health issues. It could be domestic violence. It could be a young person brought up in completely deprived circumstances, and often they are homeless because of that. They can often exhibit antisocial behaviour because of those things and because they are homeless. I imagine it would be very hard for an officer—as you just pointed out, Peter—because this is purely about the discretion to say, 'Okay, that is a homeless person; therefore, we are not moving them on. That is a person who is exhibiting antisocial behaviour,' and ignoring the fact that they probably have all of these other problems as well. I have a couple of questions about that.

Ana, you talked a lot about clear boundaries. Can you both comment further on how you deal with the fact that homeless people exhibit antisocial behaviour and vice versa? How do you deal with the fact that there are obviously some excellent services in Nambour but there simply are not enough? How do you deal with the fact that these designated precincts do not have associated with them the same mandatory community services that are required under a safe night precinct? You have the law and order part of it but you do not have the services that can ensure you are addressing the actual problem. I am sorry: that was a lot of things.

Ms Greenfield: I will address the first part of your question. As per my opening statement, we welcome all people but not all behaviours. We do not cast a lens on whether or not people are homeless. If they are exhibiting behaviours that are unwelcome behaviours—if there is just a bit of swearing straightaway we are out there to say, ‘Hey, we do not swear here. It is a G-rated space, no swearing.’ If they are smoking we say, ‘Can you please move on? There’s a space out there.’ If it escalates a little bit we will say, ‘Hey, you will be banned for a week if you continue,’ and on from there. But we do not differentiate—it is anybody. What was the second point?

Ms FARMER: You are moving people on but this is modelled on safe night precincts, where services are required. Here you just have the move-on powers; there are no services required. You all seem to be saying that although there are great services there are simply not enough. Do you believe there needs to be a commitment to more services being provided to deal with the problem?

Mr Hogg: I think I answered that already, but absolutely. As long as we are dealing with this as a behavioural and a criminalised issue, we are dealing with symptoms; we are not dealing with the cause. I am not saying that there is no place for a policing response and I am not saying that there is no place for upholding public standards of safety, but we are dealing with symptoms of a deeper societal problem. In our space we hold so many different things at once. We will have a playgroup with mothers and 20 children operating here and we will have a cohort of rough-sleeping people operating right beside them. We manage to hold that relatively well because we do set strong boundaries. We work relationally with people. If we do have instances where we have to have a talk with someone, if we have to ask someone to leave, our first thought is always, ‘What support can we find for that person?’—not just, ‘Let’s get them the hell out of here’.

Ms FARMER: Because you want to fix their problem—

Mr Hogg: Absolutely.

Ms FARMER:—and then it is not a problem for anyone else.

Mr Hogg: Then, if we have asked someone to leave for a period of time, when they return we sit with them and work through, ‘What’s going on with you? What support do you need? How can we work with you so that this doesn’t become an issue for you again?’ Maybe that is not scalable on the level we are talking about, but there is an intent to get to the root cause of the problem and help the person with what they are experiencing in their life rather than just problematising.

CHAIR: I agree that you cannot legislate your way out of the problem, but legislation plays a part and certainly the things you are talking about are available. Police make referrals all the time to services for people.

Mr Hogg: I know that.

CHAIR: I go back to your comment, Ana: ‘We welcome all people but not all behaviours.’ Is the community not entitled to that as well?

Ms Greenfield: Yes, I have said all through it that we believe in community safety. It is paramount. It is one of the main things for people everywhere. It is well researched; we understand that. When I took on that role, my first thing was to ban people and to put stronger boundaries in place. I had to do that for our safety and our sanity. The trauma that being abused creates for frontline workers is awful. I really feel for people and the shopkeepers who do not have the skills that we have. We have training, we have processes and procedures around all of this stuff and still it shatters me all the time. Anytime somebody abuses me, I get shattered. It is horrible.

CHAIR: In terms of broader support, you will be pleased to hear that the state government announced this morning an extra \$1 million funding for IFYS to increase their outreach services from one day a week to five days in Nambour.

Mr Hogg: I did hear that.

CHAIR: There will be 20 units of emergency supportive housing to go in Nambour as well and another social housing project, so we are moving on this. Do you welcome those measures to address homelessness?

Ms Greenfield: Of course we welcome them. The gap for us at the front line—while there is not housing on the ground, and it is such a gap—is the dignity services. We go on about a drop-in space. One critical point of conflict in our centre is the shower. We cannot be open for people to have a shower because we are under-resourced. When we say, 'Sorry, no showers,' that is a point of conflict. It escalates people who may not have had a shower for four days or over a long weekend and then they go out into the street angry and filthy dirty and walk around the street. So people are thinking, 'Look at these homeless people,' but the truth is that the services are not available in our town for them to clean themselves up. It is just not there. I cannot remember the collective number of hours that showers are available in Nambour. We are open 12 hours a week for people to have a shower. It is very limited and not all people come to us. If they turn up and they want a shower and they are filthy and we say, 'Sorry, come back in an hour,' they do not come back in an hour because it might have taken them three hours to get their mental health together to come in to want a shower. The announcement is wonderful and, yes, there are still gaps in our services.

CHAIR: I understand there are conversations happening with the minister in that regard and the Nambour Community Centre and there might be some future—

Ms Greenfield: I am not commenting on that. It is really not a good time to put that in front of me. It is very ad hoc and informal. Nothing is in writing, so let's not go there.

CHAIR: I appreciate that it has not advanced very far yet.

Mr Hogg: I want to make one comment. You asked whether the wider community should expect the same safety that we expect. Absolutely. Nobody is questioning that. What we are questioning—and I am definitely questioning—is whether the provisions of this act serve that purpose. I do not just mean the public move-on and the public exclusion zone areas. The criminalisation of very minor possession of drugs will only exacerbate these problems. As you introduce more and more people to the criminal justice system who really should not be there, it is only going to exacerbate public safety outcomes.

CHAIR: Thank you for coming along today and for providing your input to the committee. We appreciate it very much. We will now move to the community statements section of the hearing where we invite community members who have registered an interest to come and give us a short statement.

JARDINE, Ms Paula, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to address the committee.

Ms Jardine: I am a therapeutic services manager and I am drawing from 15 years of experience in alcohol, other drugs and mental health. While I support the intent of the bill, I do have some serious concerns about its likely impacts. It is positive that the bill retains diversion for first-time low-risk drug offences; however, it shifts the focus away from health-led responses. By narrowing diversion and treating repeat low-level possession as a compliance issue, it will push more people—especially those with problematic substance use—into the justice system instead of connecting them with the health supports that they need. This decision affects real people, families and communities.

In my experience, such ideological changes disproportionately harm the vulnerable: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; people living with mental illness; and those facing poverty, homelessness or family violence. These groups are already over-represented in the justice system and encounter significant barriers to accessing and staying engaged in treatment such as unstable housing, financial insecurity, trauma and systemic discrimination. Limiting diversion and removing early warnings ignores the complex nonlinear nature of substance use treatment and denies people the ongoing flexible support required to address underlying issues, raising concerns about fairness and effectiveness.

Evidence shows that cautions and warnings are more effective and less expensive, reducing reoffending. In contrast, fines and penalties will not deter drug use but will create hardship for those least able to pay, escalate justice involvement and raise overall costs. This is not a cost-saving measure; it simply shifts expenses from health to justice, worsening outcomes. Expanding police discretion and introducing complex eligibility rules could result in inconsistent decisions, unfair disparities, reduced public trust and human rights issues.

Queensland's alcohol and drug services are already overstretched. Without significant investment in treatment and harm reduction, this bill will add pressure, increase strain on police and courts and detract from community safety priorities. Community expectations have shifted. Australians support evidence-based, health-led responses. These deliver better results for all. I urge parliament to reconsider these amendments and focus on proven health-based solutions. Resources should be directed where they make the greatest difference: helping people, reducing harm and strengthening our communities.

CHAIR: Thank you, Paula. I appreciate you giving us your insights. Thank you for attending today.

BARKER, Ms Jennifer, Private capacity

CHAIR: I invite you to make a statement to the committee.

Ms Barker: I am a small business owner based on the Sunshine Coast operating a microbusiness from my home. Within the past 18 months my property has been the target of two separate incidents involving antisocial and drug related behaviour. Those occasions were distressing and left me feeling unsafe within my own community. My neighbours have also experienced similar problems and several of my friends who are local business owners in Nambour have suffered significant disruptions and financial impacts due to antisocial or drug-affected individuals. I strongly believe that firmer enforcement of the existing laws is necessary to deter such criminal activity and to restore a sense of confidence in our communities.

In response to these growing concerns I was compelled to initiate a business petition to my local councillor calling for greater support. Our town needs funding. It needs the image cleaned up. Many local operators feel increasingly vulnerable and undersupported when these incidents occur. I strongly believe that firmer and more consistent enforcement of existing laws is necessary to deter criminal and antisocial activity and to restore a sense of safety and confidence within our communities. Clear consequences and effective policing play an important role in protecting residents, small businesses and public spaces.

At the same time, where offenders are minors—we do see youth crime in our town—I believe it is important that appropriate services, early intervention and rehabilitation programs are available. Providing pathways for young people to address underlying issues and reintegrate positively into society is essential for long-term community safety. I believe the missing gaps are the outreach connections. What we hear is that we can have policing and we have the wraparound services, but there needs to be a better connection for those services to them. It is quite clear there is some sort of systemic failure going on. We really need to work to address that.

CHAIR: Thank you, Jennifer. I appreciate you addressing the committee today.

COOPER, Ms Emily, Private capacity

Ms Cooper: Thank you for letting me speak here today. I will be speaking mainly about the drug diversion part of the bill. I work as a community services and drug and alcohol support worker and have lived experience of substance dependence. I have been both a victim and offender due to the way that substance dependence is treated or criminalised in our society and the lack of diversionary options when I was in my dependence, as well.

There is a lot of rhetoric around businesses and what we deserve as a community, which is super important obviously. I do not want to diminish that but I want to also talk a little about what Peter and the folks from the Nambour community were saying about our social contract with these vulnerable people. I am seeing a whole underclass develop at the moment through the housing crisis, the drug and alcohol policy, the crackdowns and, even more than that, the attitudes around drug users in particular. That is not good.

A few people have said that housing is not the answer to the loitering and misbehaviour that has been discussed. Basically, from my perspective, until the government really addresses housing then crime will keep escalating because the bottom line is that jail offers a roof, it offers three meals a day and a form of community. This is not assured to us at the moment, despite being one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

A lot of people have described a broken system and I really echo those feelings of frustration. The system, as we have it now, is a system that criminalises substance use. The proposed laws simply strengthen the existing system, which may provide short-term relieve or a perception of safety but we know, medium and long-term, evidence shows this punitive approach harms all aspects of society and not just the offenders or people who use substances but their families, loved ones and the broader community. Most people will get out of jail, whether people like it or not. Once you are criminalised you then face even greater barriers to social inclusion, civil participation, housing, employment et cetera.

I guess the main argument I hear in favour of the changes to drug diversion is the belief that it conveys that illicit drug use is acceptable and that it weakens the deterrent effect. The reality though, as evidenced by multiple national and international studies, is that drug diversion programs do not increase drug use and simply provide the essential healthcare interventions to people who use substances. In the context of drug diversion, this overwhelmingly refers to young people who are trying substances at festivals or for the first time, people who are new to substance use or those for whom their use may have recently worsened or increased. They are all prime targets for a health-based intervention using a harm reduction approach, which is what we do where I work. It is really effective and provides education on risks of substance use, overdose prevention management and referral to those other services, knowing that substance dependence does not happen in a vacuum. Crucially, it is often a first or only chance for people to get to speak about their substance use in a safe confidential setting and often to a person like me with lived experience who can provide a road map for recovery.

My final points would be that we know deterrence does not work in regards to drug use and that in terms of drug use possession it is a victimless crime. Most young people or low-level drug users are not even aware of drug policy. I know when I was using that certainly was not a factor in deciding my use. Finally, harm reduction is not some hippy-dippy airy-fairy concept that it is often made out to be. It is a well-proven, evidence-based approach to substance use. We know it saves lives. Harm reduction is health care, and health care is a human right.

CHAIR: Thanks for submitting before us today. We appreciate it.

DAVEY, Mr Geoff, Private capacity

CHAIR: I now welcome you forward, Geoff, and invite you to address the committee.

Mr Davey: I would like to talk about drug diversion and the proposed changes, in particular, the removal of the single warning. Retention of the provision for a single warning or a single caution followed by a diversion to repeat people with low-level drug use could still fit well within the bill. It ensures first-time and low-risk cases are appropriately dealt with. Indeed, data from the Queensland Police Service on the existing police drug diversion program shows that, over an 18-month reporting period, 83 per cent of people provided with a warning or a police caution had no further contact with the program.

Implementing the new framework could introduce significant administrative complexity for police, as we have heard today. Significant QPS time and resources expended on low-level drug possession reduces the opportunity for frontline policing to address and focus on serious harm offending. As a member of the community, I would like to see frontline policing resources focused on reducing those serious harm offences. The proposed changes might also shift some burden to courts and enforcement agencies. Replacing diversion with penalty infringement notices or prosecution for repeat minor possession may increase downstream demand on courts. The use of fines to deter drug use is likely to drive people into SPER debt, licence suspensions, warrants or custody, especially for those who cannot afford to pay.

As Emily mentioned, fines have not been shown to be an efficient deterrent for drug use. This inevitably results in increasing the number of minor drug cases that police must prepare for prosecution and that courts must therefore process, counteracting some of the program's intended resource savings. Indeed, a key goal of diversion is to reduce pressure on courts and prisons by resolving minor offences outside the traditional system. Research on cannabis offences in terms of cautioning has shown that there is no difference in cannabis use for those who receive the cannabis caution compared to those who have been charged with an offence, but there is a significant difference in cost. Pursuing charges is found to be almost twice as expensive as issuing a caution.

Estimates from PricewaterhouseCoopers show each caution that prevents court proceedings saves \$2,105. Based on available QPS data on the police drug diversion program, there were 15,821 drug diversion warnings in an 18-month period. This represents around \$33.3 million in system cost savings. This is consistent with evidence from the Queensland Productivity Commission that shows simple cautions that divert first-time or infrequent low-harm offenders can generate significant savings in police and core processing costs. That is estimated to be around \$32.5 million per year in system costs. That is over \$32 million every year that could be spent on other frontline policing activities that reduce serious harm offending and help programs that effectively improve community safety and outcomes. I would not like to see that \$32 million wasted.

CHAIR: Thank you, Geoff. I appreciate you appearing before us today.

KILL, Ms Emma, Private capacity

CHAIR: Emma, I invite you to address the committee.

Ms Kill: Good afternoon, Chair and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. I am sorry to come at the end of a whole heap on drug diversions, but I am going to focus on drug diversions. I have about 30 years experience in alcohol and other drugs. I was also a part of Griffith University and QuIVAA in their first research that was done into drug diversion. More importantly, I am a member of this community and my four children go to school here so it is really nice to hear so many people passionate about the local community and community safety.

I welcome the Queensland government improving community safety. However, we are deeply concerned the proposed illicit drug enforcement and diversion framework risks moving Queensland away from an evidence-based, health focused approach towards one that increases criminalisation and harm. The current police diversion program recognises that most drug offences involve small quantities for personal use and are best addressed through health responses and not punishment. It provides multiple opportunities for diversion, connecting people with education, counselling and support without a criminal record. The proposed reforms fundamentally change this by limiting diversion to a single opportunity and introducing fines or charges for subsequent minor offences. The framework produces early intervention and increases the likelihood of people entering the criminal justice system for low-level drug use.

We know from both evidence and lived experience that behaviour change does not occur in a straight line. Substance dependence is often relapsing. Multiple opportunities for engagement are not a loophole; they are essential for meaningful change and stabilisation. It reduces pressures on courts and police, lowers long-term costs and, most importantly, improves health and social outcomes. It connects people to treatment, housing and supports—issues that often escalate into crisis. In contrast, criminalisation does not address some of the underlying drivers of drug use such as trauma, mental health and disadvantage. Instead, it increases stigma and actually discourages help seeking and entrenches the cycles of harm.

I want to address a broader contradiction. We are here today discussing tougher penalties for people found with small amounts of illicit drugs yet this hearing is taking place in a licensed venue where alcohol is served and gambling is available. Alcohol and gambling are two of the most significant drivers of harm in our community yet these substances and activities are legal, regulated and widely normalised. This raises an important question: why are we intensifying punitive responses to people who use illicit drugs while accepting environments linked to far greater population-level harm?

The proposed expansion of police enforcement powers also raises practical and ethical concerns. Police are not health professionals. Expecting them to assess patterns of substance use or determine eligibility for diversion based on reasonable belief without chemical testing risks inconsistent and potentially unjust outcomes. This is not just a policy issue; it is a human rights issue. Misclassification and discretionary enforcement may disproportionately impact vulnerable groups, as we have heard today, including young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and those experiencing poverty or trauma.

We are also concerned about the introduction of fines for minor drug and utensil offences. Fines do not reduce drug use; they compound disadvantage and increase debt and they can push people further to the criminal justice system, particularly those who are already struggling. At the same time, penalising drug utensils really undermines harm reduction efforts by discouraging safer practices and increasing health risks.

Finally, the reforms are being introduced before the completion of an independent evaluation of the current diversion program. This limits evidence-based reform and creates unnecessary policy risk. Maintaining effective diversion pathways improves community safety by reducing repeat offending, improving health outcomes and allowing police to focus on more serious crime. Thank you for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you, Emma. I also thank the Nambour community and the broader Sunshine Coast community for coming out to give evidence before the committee today. It is great to have the parliamentary committee attend my local area, which does not happen very often. I am pleased to be here to listen to locals. With that said and as no-one else is compelled to speak, I close the hearing.

The subcommittee adjourned at 1.43 pm.