



Speech by

**Mr ALLAN GRICE, OAM**

**MEMBER FOR BROADWATER**

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Hansard 30 July 1998

**MOTION OF CONFIDENCE**

**Mr GRICE** (Broadwater—NPA) (7.43 p.m.): Mr Speaker, firstly, I would like to add to my personal congratulations on your nomination by doing so publicly in the House. Congratulations. I am sure that you will do a very good job in the chair. I rise to oppose the motion moved by the Premier. I rise further to support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition and to support the amendment moved by the Leader of One Nation.

I am on the record many times in this House in speaking about the Heiner documents and that whole episode. It is a matter that the public in Queensland is very aware of and, for that reason, it should be resolved. Similarly, I have been quoted in the paper as saying that the matter with regard to Mark Le Grand and the CJC and the inquiry should be resolved, because they are matters of public record. For all the parties and all the players—and I singled out Mr Le Grand in that particular article, particularly in respect of his future and his personal life—it should be resolved. Similarly, the Heiner affair—Shreddergate and all the other names—should be resolved because it is entrenched in the public perception in Queensland. It should not go on to fester forever. It is very easy to say that it is all too old and it should be left to blow away with the wind. It is too well known publicly. It should be resolved. I support the amendment moved by the Leader of One Nation as I am sure the member for Nicklin would also because of his public comments about the Heiner affair.

I would like to point out to the House some of the record in the 27 months of coalition Government with regard to police and corrective services. Once Labor gets into power again, it produces a very well-financed, smooth machine that puts on the mud with very large trowels. It tries to bury the previous Government in all sorts of black holes and misconduct. It will probably even refer to brown paper bags, which is something that certainly precedes most of the members of this House. I even heard it today with somebody's flippant comment. Those days are gone. They are part of history. We will probably see them dragged out with the trowels of the well-oiled machine and its complaint press. However, before that happens I would like to place some facts on the record. When facts go into Hansard, they have some longevity.

When there is a change of Government, there has always been a tendency for the new team to blame the old one for everything under the sun. However, I want to go beyond that. I want to place on record something that I believe at the start of a new Parliament should be on the public record and recognised as widely as possible in the public domain. I particularly ask the newcomers to this Parliament to take careful note of what I am going to say, because if we are about good government and workable Parliament, we have to start from a foundation. I firmly believe that, in the field of law and order, the coalition Government laid that foundation. It is a message that I wish every Queenslanders could and would understand.

In the case of the previous National/Liberal Party coalition Government, it can stand proudly on its record in police and corrective services. Police generally, from the lowly ranked to the commissioner and his senior officers, can stand proud on their record and their achievements. No brand of politics can take that away from them. Of course, in the past couple of years they were helped well along by a very sympathetic Government, which saw morale boosting as one of its highest priorities. God knows the police needed it! Police morale was certainly higher than it was during any term of the previous Labor administration. Police officers could walk down the street with more pride in their steps. Kids started to look up to them again and confidence was certainly building in the community. Across-the-board, there

were more police than ever before. The budgets were bigger, the equipment supply was expedited and police were getting on with their job. The public also was paying more respect to the men in the force.

I will not say that every one of them was completely happy, particularly with the Criminal Justice Commission looking over everybody's shoulder and inhibiting rather than helping in lots of cases, but generally there was a good mood within the force and within the community about the job that they were doing. Labor cannot deny that and much of the credit for all of that will go to the Police Service itself, its commissioner and the former Police Minister, Russell Cooper.

Let us look at some straight facts. When the coalition came to power in 1996, it immediately embarked on a campaign to boost police numbers across-the-board. By the end of this year, we would have put 640 extra police into the community where people wanted to see them. Today, I would like to say to the Minister that if he continues on with those numbers—and I extrapolated some numbers he used today; I think 1,061, which is exactly our figure—if he can make that 1,061, I promise him that I will be the first one to stand in this place and support it and praise him.

**Mr Barton:** We're going to put even more in.

**Mr GRICE:** If the Minister does that, I would support him further, but I will be looking. Over the past two years, there have been some remarkable advances in policing and corrections in this State. Nobody can deny that—politicians, the political righteous or the armchair or media critics, who sometimes have great trouble giving credit where credit is due—and let us not forget the plaudits that came to the Police Service for its handling of the difficult maritime dispute.

In the coalition Government's final Budget, this year's policing budget was increased by 8.4%. That was \$698m this financial year. Our three-year \$76m staffing plan to boost strength by 800 police and 400 civilians by August 1999 was well on track, while our 10-year staffing plan was to provide a total of 2,780 extra police by the year 2005, 1,316 above Labor's previous promise. This would have ensured Queensland's best police to population ratio in 25 years.

Labor's plan for 2005 would have resulted in an appalling ratio of one to 529, compared with our plan for a ratio of one to 453. In the 27 months we were in office we delivered an average of 30 extra police a month—more than Labor managed in its entire last term. Our plan for the coalition's second term would have seen Queensland with 7,876 sworn officers.

**Mr Barton** interjected.

**Mr GRICE:** These are all official statistics. The honourable member should read the papers. This figure is 732 more than under the Labor staffing plan, which has since changed. I have said that I will support it as it comes up, if it comes up.

Labor cannot deny that the previous coalition Government was responsible for big increases in strength in all eight regions between February 1996 and April last year. In the Far North region there are 54 extra police. In the North Coast region there are 77 extra police. Labor managed a reduction of seven in that region. Metro North has 70 extra police. Metro South has an extra 86. In Labor's time the number was reduced by 24.

I was particularly pleased with the big increase in strength in my own area, the Gold Coast. I think everybody will agree that we need a strong police presence to satisfy our huge tourist industry. People do not like coming to unsafe places, and the work of the Queensland police force certainly paid off on the Gold Coast in many ways. Despite some isolated problems, our visitors always felt safe. The same principle applies in the other important tourist areas of the State—the Sunshine Coast, Cairns, Townsville, Mackay and the Barrier Reef islands.

No matter how much anybody wants to argue those figures, they represent the real situation. As I often say, if Labor catches up with our projections I will be the first to compliment them—if it happens. Nobody can deny our record; it is in fact on police files. Nobody can deny that all regions will again benefit when 182 first-year constables graduate in August from the Oxley and Townsville campuses of the Queensland Police Academy. Nobody—not the Premier nor the Minister—can deny that we established the police academy in Townsville.

The facts are also there to show that the Queensland Police Service has transformed into the most efficient, most effective and most accountable in Australia. Let us not forget that the former Police Minister, Mr Cooper, acted quickly on the 197 recommendations of the Bingham police review, the majority of which were implemented. The Government not only boosted the numbers but also provided better equipment and better facilities through a massive capital works program. Let us also not forget the level playing field we provided for the Queensland Police Service with the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act, which gives police a better chance to deal with the increasingly sophisticated criminal enemy. That is not rhetoric; that is fact.

Our Government also established the Queensland Crime Commission, headed by respected barrister Tim Carmody. This, if allowed to function, would allow a more focused, dedicated onslaught against organised and major crime and criminal paedophilia. But let us just look at the service itself.

The police became better off in terms of pay, strength and working conditions, and morale was improved dramatically. Project Renaissance was another major milestone of our Government. This was a commitment to the education, training and development capacity of the Police Service. Key components included the redevelopment of the Oxley campus, the establishment of the Institute Centre of Excellence in Policing Practice and the permanent establishment of the north Queensland campus of the institute.

One of the biggest success stories of the coalition's term in Government is the crime prevention partnerships piloted in eight centres across the State. Under CPPs, communities were encouraged to identify problems at a grassroots level and, with police and State Government, formulate strategies to counter them. Our Government intended extending that program from eight to 25 centres. Then there was the school-based constables program. This year's Budget allowed for the extension of the program from 12 police in 22 schools to 40 police in up to 80 schools.

Let us look at some of the other concrete results of these successful policies. We need only turn to the area of corrective services. The truth is that the Queensland Corrective Services Commission's budget was never higher than it was under our Government—a record \$466m, or a 45% increase. That included \$195m in the capital works infrastructure program, an increase of 113%. That is not rhetoric; that is fact.

Recently I heard the Minister promise 50 extra staff. We promised 642 extra staff over three years—all funded. The Minister promised \$1m for security upgrades and equipment such as flak jackets, handcuffs, batons, etc. We included \$22m in our budget for security upgrades.

Under Labor, criminals flaunted the law and prison was a last resort. In its last four years in Government, Labor locked up 18,045 criminals. In its short term, the coalition Government doubled Labor's rate of imprisonment, keeping serious offenders off the streets and behind bars, where the public wants them. The prisons population has more than doubled since 1993, and the coalition makes no apology for taking criminals off the streets. When Labor came to office in 1989—

**Mr Purcell:** Give us the numbers that you locked up. You can't. They were getting out the other end, as you very well know.

**Mr GRICE:** Under the previous Government, not only did you have zebra crossings out the front so that—

**Mr SPEAKER:** Order! Would the member for Broadwater please address the Chair?

**Mr GRICE:** Certainly, Mr Speaker. Under the Labor Government, not only were there zebra crossings across the road to protect the prisoners but also there was a rostered bus service to take them into town. In six years Labor provided only 226 extra prison beds, whereas the coalition provided 993 beds, with 800 to come on stream by the end of this year. In the next three years, the coalition would have provided an additional 2,072 cells to fix Labor's legacy of neglect.

Under Labor, prison security was a joke, infrastructure was run down, prison officers received poor training and morale was at an all-time low. The people of Queensland were put at risk, with 116 escapes from secure custody in six years. Under the coalition there were 18 escapes since the start of 1996. Prison security was our No. 1 priority.

The other day the Minister criticised the purchase of the Hummers. They were purchased because of the external firepower used in two break-outs, something that was previously unheard of. They were purchased for the protection of officers and to prevent such a recurrence. The Minister should be glad he has these vehicles. What would he have expected the custodial officers to do? Be targets for pot-shooting by criminals with high-powered weapons and drive around in FJ Holdens!

I repeat what I said earlier: Labor boasted that it would spend \$1m on extra security equipment. The coalition had already spent or committed \$22m for security upgrades and for buying equipment for staff, including protective gear and 13 armoured Hummers—seven for jail perimeter work and six for the transport and escort of prisoners.

Labor's strategy for controlling drugs in prison was to keep the prisoners high and happy. No action was taken to tackle the spiralling use of drugs in prisons, but we implemented the Mengler inquiry into drugs in prisons program to reduce drugs usage through proactive intelligence networks.

Last week the Minister was lauding the public exhibition of drug searches in jails. That show would have been top of the hit parade for crims—an educational tape to show them how to beat the system. That exercise was absolutely ridiculous. Can anyone imagine the police force revealing its investigative secrets? Whom are we concerned for here? The crims or the public? Then again, this Labor Government, and particularly its Premier, does love the cameras. Maybe the Minister had an

upcoming series of Blue Heelers in mind, with him in front of the cameras showing the criminals of Queensland how the searches take place.

Whilst under our Government there was a refocus on security, that was not at the expense of programs and industries for inmates. There were plans to expand programs and activities to better prepare inmates for re-entry into the community. Nobody can deny that much was achieved in the area of law and order in just over two years in Government. Honourable members should remember that that was a time when we did not even have a real majority in the Government. That is quite a change from the luxury of the majority that Labor enjoyed when it was last in Government. We see that it squandered that majority, particularly when we study its record on law and order.

Under Labor, victims of crime were given little consideration. Labor talked about helping the victims of crime but never got around to it. We did. We continually and relentlessly fought for the rights of victims of crime through vastly improved information about offenders, extended compensation payments and increased funding for victims of crime support groups and counselling services.

However, in spite of all of that, let us just ask one simple question, and therein surely lies the real answer. For whom would the police and Corrective Services officers rather be working—the former coalition Government or the present Labor administration? The answer is self-evident. In relation to law and order further, who would the people of Queensland rather have working for them? The answer is the same to both questions—a resounding vote of confidence in the coalition team and the things that it did.

The coalition acted when it was necessary. It acted when the real and legitimate expectations of the community were not being met and it acted when community safety was not being observed as the highest priority. While those opposite bleated, it was the coalition Government that took the tough action on 26 May last year and dismissed the Community Corrections Board. It let a serious offender loose. A convicted rapist was let out on unescorted leave and allegedly raped two other women, and Labor complained when the corrections board responsible for that decision was dismissed. Not only was the board dismissed; tougher guidelines for the new corrections board were introduced.

Foremost in our minds should always be the basic underlying principle that the safety of our community comes first. Our community is sick and tired of the bleatings from the so-called social justice arm of the Labor Party and its supporters. Only this morning I read in the Courier-Mail an article by former Supreme Court Judge Bill Carter. In his veiled attack on the coalition's plans to introduce truth in sentencing for serious violent offenders, Carter claimed Governments always spoke about getting tough on crime yet never looked at the issue of crime prevention. What arrant nonsense! How appallingly out of touch Mr Carter must have been with the progress and achievements of the coalition Government. In seven areas across this State we trialled community policing partnerships and we introduced the volunteers in policing program.

**Mr Swarten:** You are not denigrating a Supreme Court judge?

**Mr GRICE:** He has retired.

**Mr Swarten:** It does not matter. What a disgraceful thing to do.

**Mr GRICE:** Anybody can get it wrong, including the honourable member.

It is a well-known fact that the former Labor Government enjoyed trialling all sorts of social engineering programs and embarking on novel so-called prisoner reform agendas. It is also well known that government at all levels and of all political colours must put in place strategies to identify and tackle the causes of crime. But irrespective of the cause of the crime, a criminal must still pay for his or her wrongdoing.

The cornerstone of the coalition's law and order policy was to introduce community policing partnerships. These partnerships were trialled in seven areas across Queensland. Their purpose was to identify and target social problems that feed criminal behaviour. The pilot schemes had already begun to show positive results, and an eighth trial was organised for Woorabinda, the first Aboriginal community to be part of the program. In one area, domestic violence was identified as a predominant cause of crime, because it forced children out of the home and onto the streets.

Time expired.

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