



Speech by

Mr ALLAN GRICE, OAM

MEMBER FOR BROADWATER

Hansard 18 September 1998

**APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL
APPROPRIATION BILL**

Mr GRICE (Broadwater—NPA) (12.20 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, may I say that it is good to see you sitting in your position, as our system suggests that you should.

Despite all of the professed concerns of the Minister and the warm and cuddly rhetoric of this Government, all Queenslanders have every right to question this Government's real commitment to tackling drug issues. All Queenslanders have every right to question just how much of a commitment this Government has. No-one, politician or otherwise, should try to play politics with such an important issue—an issue that should be tackled through a united effort by all sides of politics.

I will touch on just one example of how this Government and the new Minister for Police have been exposed for their shallow commitment to tackling drugs and for trying to play politics purely for political gain. That is nothing short of a disgrace at a time when we see four or five narcotics-related admissions every day at the Gold Coast Hospital and at a time when, many weeks, two people on the Gold Coast die from drug overdoses and many more die from drug-related misadventure.

On 15 September during question time the Minister took the opportunity to condemn the "dob in a druggie" hotline, as he called it, which I launched in conjunction with members of the Queensland Police Service. During question time, the Minister quoted from a press release from the former head of Crimestoppers, David Muir, which alleged that the hotline launched jointly with me jeopardised the launch of the Crimestoppers number. In a press release issued on the same day, the Minister continued to make those allegations. On the following day I sought leave to make a personal explanation and I was able to inform the House that the press release issued by David Muir had in fact been retracted. I was also able to inform the House that the launch of the hotline was a joint initiative with the Queensland Police Service and had the full backing of the six Gold Coast chambers of commerce. I informed the House that I launched the hotline jointly with the support of Detective Inspector Richard Nikola. I table a copy of an article appearing in the Gold Coast Bulletin which confirmed that. It stated in part—

"Detective Inspector Nikola says that the Hotline on 5570-7856 has been set up for people to report suspicious activity. The hot-line is a strategy decided at the recent crime summit"—

not by Allan Grice but the crime summit. The article continues—

"There is also the 1800 333 000 Crime-Stoppers number."

However, that was not enough for the Minister; he was not prepared to let the issue go and admit that he had engaged in a grubby attempt to sabotage a joint police/community effort. Instead he tried to worm his way out after deciding that playing politics was far more important than supporting community efforts to tackle drug abuse.

The Minister returned to the House with statutory declarations, including one signed by Detective Inspector Richard Nikola, which made false claims. I refer to another declaration made by Assistant Commissioner Greg Early, Chief Superintendent Ken Morris, Mr Brian Swift, the Director of Media and Public Relations, and Ms Katrina Naumann, Media Officer, Gold Coast Police Service. It is apparent to me that these four service people made their declaration after receiving an affidavit from

Detective Nikola. It consists of only two sentences. On the other hand, Mr Nikola's affidavit is in considerable doubt. On one occasion he said that he did not communicate either in writing or verbally with Mr Grice until approximately 9 a.m. on Tuesday, 8 September. I will address the matter in more detail.

This is a most serious action from a person holding such a respected position within the Queensland Police Service. Anyone would agree with that. One of the claims made by Detective Inspector Nikola in his statutory declaration dated 16 September was as follows—

"I did not communicate either in writing or verbally with Mr Grice until approximately 9.00 am on Tuesday 8 September 1998 when he contacted me by telephone at my office. I had been provided with a one page document outlining a proposed media release by Mr Grice. I had no prior knowledge of the release by Mr Grice and did not consult with him prior to his press release. An invitation to attend this release was given which I refused."

At that release, Channels 7, 9, 10 and 2 were present as well as newspaper representatives. They asked whether the police were attending. I replied that Nikola certainly said that he would attend if he could and that he would most certainly be sending another detective. As a result, they asked whether we could delay the beginning of the press conference to wait for them to arrive—something we did. They did not arrive. He was invited, but he just did not turn up; the pressure was already starting to get to him.

Despite the Gold Coast Bulletin's article quoting Detective Inspector Nikola's promotion of the hotline, his statutory declaration went on to state—

"... nor was I involved in any launch or promotion of any strategy by Mr Grice."

I will recap. Mr Nikola claimed that he had no contact with me either verbally or in writing until I contacted him by phone at approximately 9 a.m. on Tuesday, 8 September. He is very clear about that in his statutory declaration. He stated that he also had no prior knowledge of the release. Mr Nikola has made a false statutory declaration and he has done so knowing that the statutory declaration could be used for political purposes. However, I will give him the opportunity to recant on that and to rethink his position after I have given the House some more details.

Most of us in this House have a pager. Entry No. 7 on mine states—

"Please phone Richard Nikola 07 55707848 or 0417 192226."

That entry was at 6.55 a.m. on 26 August 1998.

Mr Lucas: It doesn't say that on mine.

Mr GRICE: I did not put that message on myself. For the information of the House, I will table a print-out of my pager messages which shows that at 6.57—the timing is two minutes' difference—on 25 August the following message was put on my pager—

"Please phone Richard Nikola ..."

I table that for the information of the House and to prove my claim. Why would somebody put a message on a pager before 7 o'clock in the morning?

Mr MUSGROVE: I rise to a point of order. This is the debate on the Appropriation Bill. The member is making a personal explanation, because he has been caught out.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Clark): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr GRICE: The Budget impacts upon every part of our society, including the Police Service. The Budget pays for these officers. It is fair that this place is aware of what these officers do.

Mr Lucas: It was on your Budget-funded pager.

Mr GRICE: If the member for Lytton would like to continue interjecting, I can carry on for my whole 20 minutes, no problem. I am quite happy to do that. I table the print-out.

On advice from the Clerk, I advise the House further that, if necessary, I will in the future table records as they come to hand of my conversations with Mr Nikola over numerous telephones prior to the date that he states in the statutory declaration that we had contact. Out of respect for the Police Service I will do that, and I will be prepared to do what is required subsequently if that does not confine the matter.

I think the question has to be asked: what pressure did the Minister, in sheer desperation to protect himself, apply to Mr Nikola to supply this false statutory declaration? It is disgraceful that a Minister should ask a public servant in any capacity to supply a declaration that that person knows will be used for a political purpose. What sort of undue pressure does that put on a public servant trying to do a job? Regardless of pressure, no-one should sign a false statutory declaration, and I will give him the opportunity to refresh his memory before I take any further action.

I should stress that I have always found that Mr Nikola undertakes his job properly and with dedication, but this sort of action is the sort of thing that damages the credibility of our many loyal and

hardworking serving police. I tell my kids that the men in blue are their friends and I tell a lot of school kids that the men in blue are their friends. They do not become friends if they allow themselves to be forced into signing declarations that are untrue. He said also—

"No formal decision or formal acceptance of a proposal or strategy was reached at any time during this meeting."

I guess that we could argue for days about what a formal decision is. However, I should point out that I delayed the announcement of the "Dob in a druggie" hotline for seven days at the request of the four detectives present at a meeting in my office—that meeting was at their request—to enable them to, in the words of Detective Inspector Nikola, rearrange rosters.

I trust that the Minister has now exerted enough pressure on a member of the police force to make a false declaration and that he will now let up. I trust that the Minister will now demonstrate to this House and to the people of Queensland that he will support and congratulate community efforts to tackle issues relating to drugs, particularly those carried out in conjunction with and with the support of the Queensland Police Service.

The Minister stands alone in trying to politicise this issue. At no time was I involved in the launch of the "Dob in a druggie" hotline as a member of Parliament or as a member of the National Party. I partook in the launch as Allan Grice, citizen, having established a recognisable sporting identity. Politics was never to become part of the fight against drug abuse. It is appalling that the Minister has tried to denigrate the efforts of the entire community, just as it is appalling that the Minister is clearly snubbing the so-called new standards that the Premier professes to uphold.
