



Speech by

Hon. TOM BARTON

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Hansard 17 September 1998

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Anti-drug Initiative; Schoolies Week

Hon. T. A. BARTON (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Police and Corrective Services) (9.44 a.m.), by leave: On Tuesday of this week I told the House of concerns that Queensland police officers had with the "launch" of a "dob in a druggie" hotline by the member for Broadwater last week. The member for Broadwater launched his hotline the day before Crimestoppers was due to launch its drug initiative. Senior police expressed the concern to me that the member for Broadwater's launch may have undermined the effectiveness of the Crimestoppers' launch. The founding Chair of Crimestoppers, David Muir issued a press release on 9 September 1998, which said—

"The drugs telephone hotline launched by Mr Grice undermines the Crimestoppers program and, in that sense could only serve the interests of drug dealers."

The member for Broadwater took great exception to both my statements and David Muir's. Yesterday he made a personal explanation to the House, in which he said Mr Muir had told him that—

"He"—

David Muir—

"withdrew that press release on the same day that it was issued, 9 September."

The member for Broadwater went on to say—

"I further stress that the press release issued by David Muir, which the Minister quoted from was withdrawn."

He further said that—

"I announced the line jointly with Detective Inspector Richard Nikola."

Just so he made it absolutely clear, the member for Broadwater reiterated—

"I stress again it was launched with the detective inspector—and I table that for the information of the House—and was an existing phone line."

I think the members of the House will agree that these are very clear statements indeed. It would be almost impossible to misunderstand them.

Yesterday I spoke to David Muir about the comments made by the member for Broadwater in the House yesterday. He was kind enough to provide a statutory declaration, which I table for the information of the House. In that statutory declaration, Mr Muir said he had sent the press release to several news organisations. Mr Muir goes on to say—

"On Wednesday morning, 16 September 1998, I received a call from Mr Grice. Mr Grice asked me whether or not I had withdrawn the media release. He said he had discussed the matter with the Gold Coast Bulletin. In response I told Mr Grice that I had issued the media release in response to an article that appeared in the Courier-Mail. I told him that the Gold Coast Bulletin had telephoned me to say that "I had got it wrong" and that Mr Grice was in fact supporting the Crimestoppers program and telephone hotline. I then told Mr Grice that I told the Gold Coast Bulletin that I did not want to take the matter further."

This statutory declaration clearly shows that Mr Muir did not tell Mr Grice that he had withdrawn the press release, merely he did not want to follow through with it with only one of the numerous media outlets that it was forwarded to.

The member for Broadwater has compounded his errors by stating yesterday that he had announced the line jointly with Detective Inspector Richard Nikola. To clarify this issue I also spoke to senior police from the Gold Coast—including Detective Inspector Nikola—and relevant police media people about the member for Broadwater's assertion that police were involved in the launch. I table for members information two other statutory declarations. One is co-signed by Assistant Commissioner Greg Early; Chief Superintendent Ken Morris; Mr Brian Swift, Director, Media and Public Relations; and Ms Katrina Naumann, Media Officer, Gold Coast, in which they state—

"We jointly declare that the release of information by Mr Grice regarding a so-called drug phone-in line was not in any way done in conjunction with, or the support of, the Queensland Police Service. The Queensland Police Service had held preliminary discussions with Mr Grice and others regarding a future strategy on reduction of drug abuse on the Gold Coast, but firmly state that the 'launch' announced by Mr Grice on 8 September 1998 was premature, incomplete, and not with the agreement of the Queensland Police Service."

The other statutory declaration is from Detective Inspector Richard Nikola, which includes these statements from him—

"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.

I did not attend the press conference by Mr Grice at his office on the 8th September 1998, nor was I involved in any launch or promotion of any strategy by Mr Grice."

I think it becomes crystal clear from these three statutory declarations that Mr Muir did not withdraw the press release and that no member of the Queensland Police Service, especially Detective Inspector Nikola, took part in a joint launch of any drug strategy with the member for Broadwater.

The unfortunate member for Broadwater has been caught out trying to steal other people's thunder and his statement yesterday has only dug a bigger hole for himself over this whole sorry affair. My advice to the member opposite is that, when it comes to launching drug strategies or any other worthwhile initiatives, he should leave it to people who know what they are talking about. He should leave it to those people who have done all the hard work to start with, and that is the Gold Coast police and community representatives who have been planning this anti-drug initiative since May of this year.
