



Speech by

**BILL FELDMAN**

**MEMBER FOR CABOOLTURE**

---

Hansard 9 March 1999

### **CRIME, GULF COUNTRY**

**Mr FELDMAN** (Caboolture—ONP) (7.25 p.m.): Crime is a major problem in Queensland, but in the Gulf Country violent crime and crime against the person is among the highest in the State. This was highlighted in the recent CJC report entitled *A Snapshot of Crime in Queensland*. In this area where rainforest and bush is the dominant feature, the Queensland Government cannot even afford a fit and proper Aboriginal tracker to hunt down criminals on the run, to seek out growers, manufacturers and producers of drugs, or to locate lost and stranded tourists and would-be adventurers.

The whole situation is a debacle of major proportions, especially for the police who are responsible for controlling crime in this area and for the local Aboriginal population who depend upon the police to crack down on crime and chase to ground those who have taken to the bush after a criminal escapade. As I understand the present situation, the police station at Laura is a one-man station. This officer must police 45 cattle stations, 280 kilometres of main highway and some 170,000 tourists who pass through the region in one year.

Quite frequently, the single policeman has to break up brawls of upwards of 10 to 20 men. As the Queensland Police Union general secretary has warned, this situation is a threat to the safety and wellbeing of Queensland police officers involved in this and similar situations. In fact, many citizens will be quite surprised to know that in Queensland there are still some 60 one-officer police stations. This poses special problems for law and order.

The Police Minister astounded many when he claimed that no further police were needed at Laura. That was news to the Laura Progress Association. What we have not been told is that there is a refusal to reinstate the prestigious position of tracker so that the residents of Laura, Lakeland and Drumduff on the gulf could see some muscle imposed upon the activities of criminals in the north. The Minister obviously does not appreciate that the position of tracker is a position of stature among these gulf communities where the Aboriginal heritage is so important.

What the Minister also does not realise is that a tracker is vital in this rugged Queensland police division of some 63,000 square kilometres. Indeed, searches for lost tourists and visitors are a regular occurrence and a tracker is essential for a successful outcome of any search in heavy bush.

The Laura Progress Association has protested strongly about the loss of a paid professional tracker, a person who is covered under an Australian Workers Union award. The filling of this position is supported strongly by the indigenous community. The Government's act in depriving this gulf community of a professional tracker is both inappropriate and morally indefensible. Steps should immediately be taken to appoint a tracker.

The media has added insult to injury by exposing the unusual situation whereby the local nurse at a Cape York community had to take over the job of the police in road accidents and murder-suicides while the officer was away on other duties in neighbouring Coen. Something is deplorably wrong up north and the Government has a duty to solve some of the problems that have shown up at Laura.

What does the local community at Laura have? The police are under undue stress. There has been no tracker for some seven months. Now it is proposed to replace a working tracker with a police liaison officer—a social worker. Recently, the community was forced to employ a 79-year-old tracker in the absence of a working tracker when a vital search operation was conducted. The progress

association complained that there was no appreciation, no recognition and no thanks given to this 79-year-old man.

The tracker did a great job, but it is the height of folly to ask a man nearing 80 years of age to risk his health trudging through the hot and steamy bush seeking out criminals for a Government which is not prepared to appreciate what he has done. The progress association also believes that the community faces a major crisis involving crime. There has been a \$10m drug raid, murder-suicides, riots, arson, common assault, domestic violence and drunk and disorderly problems. But these are only the tip of the iceberg.

Time expired.

---