



Speech by

**Mr L. SPRINGBORG**

**MEMBER FOR WARWICK**

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Hansard 28 April 1999

**POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER ACTS (REGISTERS) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Warwick—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.54 p.m.): It is my pleasure to support this legislation before the Parliament. I believe that the very significant aspect of this legislation, as the Police Minister said in his second-reading speech, is that, from the time of its inception—the Police Powers Bill, which was brought to the Parliament by the honourable member for Crows Nest when he was Police Minister—it has received a large measure of bipartisan support. There was an opportunity for everyone to have an input in getting this legislation right. I understand that the legislation has a very long history in getting to this stage, and there is still some way to go yet in relation to bringing it to fruition and refinement.

We now have clearly defined powers for the police, and they know clearly what they can do. I believe that the community also knows what the police are able to do on their behalf. Also, the very essential checks and balances have been built into the system to make sure that the police are responsible; that they do not misuse their new powers and responsibilities. I believe that is something that the community would expect, and it is something that the community, by and large, supports.

One thing that is very apparent to me as I move around my electorate is that people are always wanting to make sure that the police have adequate powers and ability to do their job. This legislation provides that opportunity for the police to do their job in a proper way, without being unreasonably constrained. The only things that constrain them are the things about which the community might be legitimately concerned. I note that the honourable member for Crows Nest talked about a very important accountability measure which he put in place, namely, the public interest register.

I turn now to the issue of police resources in my electorate. It is all very well to say that we need proper police powers and responsibilities. There is no doubt about that. However, I believe that, to assist police to do their jobs further, we need to ensure that we have enough police out there on the streets to serve the community and to make the community feel secure. I raise in particular the issue of the Stanthorpe Police Station in my electorate, which currently has a full staff contingent. All positions have been filled: nine officers, including one officer for the CIB, and two civilians.

I would like to give members some idea of the difficulties facing police officers, and particularly those at the Stanthorpe Police Station. Prior to the opening of the new QGAP office in Stanthorpe, those officers were doing drivers licensing. On a number of occasions, I went to the Department of Transport about this matter—and I am sure that the Honourable Minister for Police would appreciate this—and said, "Hey, look, we have a big problem here. These officers are being confined a lot. They are dealing with drivers' licensing matters." Officers of the Department of Transport said, "There are really not enough people going in there to justify a QT office." I then went to the Minister for Rural Communities and said, "What about a QGAP office out there to provide a range of other services in the community as well?", and that came about. Lo and behold, after less than 12 months, there are something like four people in that QGAP office who are attending largely to drivers' licensing matters.

So that gives members some idea of the wonderful job that those police officers were doing in that community. At least there has been some freeing up of those officers. But to assist them with their new powers and responsibilities, ultimately we should be working towards making that particular police station a 24-hour station. That would ensure that those officers are able to get out onto the streets to utilise their new powers and responsibilities. My challenge is that we do that in a staged way. There are

nine officers there at the moment. I understand that they would need ultimately another six or seven officers to take it to a 24-hour police station. There is a reason for this.

Stanthorpe is a major community. It services a shire of 10,000 people. It is located on a national highway, the New England Highway. There are seasonal issues as well, associated with the pickers who go through that area, and this creates problems for police at certain times of the year. People from my community are continually raising concerns about the availability of police officers early in the morning. That is not the problem of the police officers. I understand that resourcing issues are difficult. They are operational matters. However, the Government needs to consider making the Stanthorpe Police Station a 24-hour station, because there is certainly a need for it. Goondiwindi, which is 200 kilometres to the west, has a 24-hour police station even though the community that it services is not quite as large as Stanthorpe.

I think we could do this in a staged way. We could move towards having a couple of officers in a year or two and then another couple after that. We could slowly build it up to a 24-hour station. This would be greatly appreciated by this large and growing community. A 24-hour station would add to the safety and security of the community. A lot of people talk to me about this subject.

The community welcomes police powers and responsibilities and it is important that things are clearly defined. The previous Minister for Police was introducing such legislation and the current Minister will bring further amending legislation before the Parliament as the matter comes to fruition. The community must have an unambiguous understanding of what the police are able to do. People write to all members of Parliament and say, "We have heard that the police can't do this and they can't do that." Sometimes there is a misunderstanding, but often there is a significant amount of truth in the concerns raised by the community.

Legislation of this type moves a long way towards addressing those concerns. It is important that we have adequate police powers and responsibilities. It is also important that we have an adequately resourced police service. We must move towards enhancing police resources. The service provided by our law enforcement officers is something that is very much appreciated by the community.

Over the last couple of years we have seen a significant improvement in police morale as we have seen more officers come on line. We can never have enough police officers. The Police Powers and Responsibilities Act as introduced by the former Minister, and as enhanced by this legislation today, has assisted significantly in improving police morale. I ask the Minister to consider the needs and requirements of the community of Stanthorpe when he is looking at the placement of additional police officers.

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