



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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POLICING, BARRON RIVER ELECTORATE

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (12.20 p.m.): I am committed to keeping in touch with the views of my constituents to ensure that I remain focused on the real issues that are of concern to them. Attendance at community group meetings, taking my mobile electorate office to shopping centres and sending out community issues surveys are just some of the means that I use to do this on a regular basis. As a result, I know that the people in Barron River are most concerned about transport, education, environment, health and policing issues. It is this last issue of policing and public safety that I wish to raise in the House today.

It is a well-known fact that good news does not sell newspapers. I was not surprised, therefore, that my recent press release highlighting the 22% reduction in serious assaults in the Smithfield police division over the last year was ignored by the Cairns Post in favour of a more sensational headline "Crime Surge", which referred to some carefully selected statistics in the Cairns Police District, which includes Cairns City, the northern beaches, the Douglas Shire and the entire Cape York and Torres Strait, and which gave a totally misleading picture of what is happening in the electorates of Cairns and Barron River, where the news is good.

The Smithfield police division extends from the Barron River to Ellis Beach and covers the growth areas of the northern beaches. In the last 12 months, staffing has increased at the Smithfield Police Station with the appointment of an additional constable, a sergeant and a detective, as well as additional administrative support. I have also fulfilled an election commitment with the establishment of a Police Beat at Trinity Beach, which had suffered from considerable successive outbreaks of juvenile crime and vandalism.

While Cairns has a number of Police Beats located at shopping centres, with another currently being established at the Cairns Central Shopping Centre, the Trinity Beach Police Beat represented a first for our region, with a police officer actually living and working in his own beat. Senior Constable Russell Parker and his family have quickly become part of the Trinity Beach community, and his success has seen reduced crime in that area, particularly youth crime. Property crime has also decreased in the Smithfield police division, with a 17% drop in residential break and enter offences in the last three months. I commend Senior Sergeant Tim Nolan and his staff at the Smithfield station for their excellent results.

Other parts of my electorate which consist of the outer suburbs of Cairns City are covered by the Cairns police division, where the figures show that crime has levelled off compared to past years, with a decrease in rape. However, there was a small increase of some 4% in serious assaults. But there was a decrease in robbery and residential break and enter offences in the larger Cairns district.

The excellent work of the Cairns police and the strong partnership between the police, the community and the Cairns City Council has paid dividends—not that we can afford to become complacent, because there is always more that can be done. But that partnership between the police and the community is vitally important, and I commend the efforts of the seven Neighbourhood Watch groups in my electorate. In particular, I would like to mention the contribution of Charles Williams, who has been the mainstay of both the Holloways Beach and Machans Beach Neighbourhood Watch schemes over the past decade. He has been recognised for those contributions by both the State and Commonwealth Governments.

I was privileged to be a guest speaker at the 10th anniversary of the Holloways Beach Neighbourhood Watch scheme. I can certainly say that Charles Williams makes my two-year involvement as area coordinator of the Freshwater Neighbourhood Watch scheme pale into insignificance. Charles Williams also chairs the Marlin Coast Police Community Consultative Committee, which I helped to re-form after my election in June last year. My active involvement with that committee, which consists of people from a wide cross-section of the community, has given me the opportunity to support members in a number of positive crime prevention initiatives and informative monthly meetings.

The community has taken to heart the catchcry of the Beattie Labor Government that we should be tough on crime and also tough on the causes of crime. They really do appreciate that we need to look beyond crime statistics and work as a community at a grassroots level looking at the causes of crime. Whether they be youth recreation issues, drugs and alcohol, domestic violence or parenting issues, the community has responded well to this message of the Beattie Government, and I am looking forward to the final publication of our Crime Prevention Strategy in due course.

In addition to Charles Williams, who chairs the consultative committee, I would particularly like to recognise the contribution of Ann Mauger, Don Davis, Clare Minchen, Councillor Sno Bonneau and, of course, Senior Sergeant Tim Nolan, who attends our meetings on a regular basis. The work of that committee has enabled me to make a contribution in a number of areas, as we have particularly focused on youth issues to which, over my period of years as the member for Barron River, I have devoted considerable efforts and time.

One of the programs that we are particularly pleased with has been the Easyrider program, which has been sponsored by Sunbus Transit Australia. This scheme provides reduced fares for Smithfield State High School students who want to access recreational venues in Cairns on Saturdays. This has been an issue, because there have not been enough recreational activities on the northern beaches. Again, that is something that I am working on. That particular scheme will allow young people to access the cinemas, the skating and the other venues in Cairns City that are important to young people. I do thank the school and Martin Saxon, the manager of Sunbus, for their support for this scheme. We have also had the new District Court judge, Judge Sarah Bradley, coming along to our meetings as a guest speaker, talking about the topic of restorative justice and the innovative community conference program for juveniles which is being initiated in our area. The other particular program in terms of having a broad contribution to crime prevention in my electorate is the Positive Parenting Program at the Smithfield Community Health Centre. I know that parents of young children are finding that enormously valuable.

Finally, I turn to Kuranda, the third police district in Barron River. Overall, the picture in Kuranda has been pretty stable. And while there has been a decrease in property crime and serious assaults, in the category of "other assaults" there has been a quite significant increase, which is of concern to me. Kuranda is very fortunate to have as its senior sergeant Steve Stafford, who came to Kuranda some two years ago. He is a person who becomes very involved in his community, and he has worked hard to improve the relationship between the police and the Aboriginal community. He was involved in organising a youth forum held in Kuranda recently, looking at ways of meeting the needs of young people and reducing crime. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend because of my parliamentary commitments, but I look forward to supporting the community to implement the strategies that have emerged from that particular forum.

The Rotary organisation in Kuranda is also looking at developing a youth centre. I attended a Rotary meeting recently to discuss that particular initiative, and I look forward to that coming to fruition. There is one initiative that will, I know, make a great contribution in the Kuranda area. That is an initiative of the KMKM Aboriginal Corporation, which is in the process of constructing a rodeo grounds and youth camp at Mona Mona. The State Government has made a contribution towards that particular program by funding a Community Jobs Plan project that has enabled 10 long-term unemployed Aboriginal people to be involved in that particular activity. Minister Paul Braddy and I visited Mona Mona last week. It was really wonderful to see the pride that those people had in their achievements and the pride with which they accepted their certificates for the various modules of training that they had completed as part of that Community Jobs Plan. The first rodeo is going to be held towards Christmas. Once again, unfortunately, I am going to be in this place and not in my electorate at that time, so I will be missing that. I am sure it is going to be a great success, and the work that they are going to be doing with young people will really pay dividends.

Kuranda does have some problems, and I have written to the Police Minister about those problems. There is a need for an Aboriginal police liaison officer in Kuranda. Another car would also be of great assistance. The police accommodation in Kuranda could be improved. All of those things have been put on the agenda of the Police Minister, and I look forward to having some good news in due course for the Kuranda community.

On the issue of crime statistics, I request that the Police Minister consider renaming the Cairns Police District the Cairns and Cape Police District so that when crime statistics are reported people in

Cairns will not pick up the newspaper and think that those statistics, which apply to that vast area, apply to the Cairns City area itself. There is a real danger of people getting totally the wrong picture of the crime rate in the Cairns City area. I believe that, in the interests of providing accurate information to the community, the Minister really needs to have another look at that particular issue and consider renaming the Cairns Police District.
