



Speech by

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (3.35 p.m.): In opening my address on the Corrective Services Legislation Amendment Bill, I give members a very strong warning, because this is one of the most important pieces of legislation to come before the House for some time. This legislation very directly and closely affects one of the most important Government departments and services, that is, Corrective Services, which is responsible for the incarceration and rehabilitation of prisoners, and the safety of staff and the community. The community wants to see that this system is modern, professional, safe and secure. If passed, this legislation will implement quite a substantial, if not a dramatic, change to the existing system of administration, organisation and management of the prison and corrective services system in Queensland.

In dealing with this topic, it is important that we look at the principles: the principles of security, the principles of safety, the principles of the working environment of the staff, the principles of rehabilitation and the principles that make up what the public expects of the corrective services system and what it is meant to do. From the Minister's second-reading speech, it is obvious that the real drive behind the amendment of the Act is the Minister's strong desire, as he put it, to have his hands on the levers. The driving force behind the Bill should have been those principles. Will this Bill, and eventually the Act if the legislation is passed, deliver more efficiency, accountability, openness and, importantly, increased professionalism, quality and security in terms of the service that is provided?

I start with that very strong warning, because the amendment to the legislation will mean a dramatic change. As the legislation evolves the Opposition will be watching very closely to see whether, as a result of these changes, Corrective Services is any better, and substantially better.

One of the key parts of the Bill relates to maximum security units. The Bill establishes a head of power so that the orders, instructions and operations of the maximum security unit can be quite clear. Previously, its power was general, and it is important that that power be spelt out very clearly. The directions that it can provide and the classification that is undertaken must be very clear. The Bill sets up a head of power to establish that. It also introduces some safeguards regarding the directions that can be provided by the general managers of the maximum security units or any other new units that are put in place, the length of time of directions and what particular processes have to be gone through.

I will speak about this issue only generally, because there is a matter before the courts at the moment. It is important for the community that this issue is debated and dealt with. The prisoners in our maximum security units are the most disruptive in the system. We are talking about prisoners who have committed serious violent offences, in many cases against other prisoners in the system. These prisoners pose a risk to the staff and other inmates. We are speaking about the prisoners who cause trouble within the system and who have attempted to escape. These prisoners are a danger to the entire system. There is virtually no sympathy in the community for these types of prisoners. It behoves both sides of the House to ensure that the systems put in place are straightforward and give the general managers clear-cut guidelines so that they can deal with these matters and so that society can feel assured that these prisoners—the worst of the worst—are locked away securely.

The other major aspect of this Bill is that it replaces the Queensland Corrective Services Commission, or the QCSC, Queensland Corrections, and the boards of both of those organisations,

with a department. Finally, it also provides for an advisory council within the system so as to enable some community input.

This legislation marks a watershed in Queensland correctional services. I will return to the Kennedy reforms, which also represented a watershed for Queensland corrections. Back in 1988, when the Kennedy report was prepared, Queensland's prison system, as it was then called, could be described as abysmal. Morale was low and the facilities were outdated. For example, I understand that in the Townsville prison buckets were being used in the absence of a sewerage system. Prisoners were taking to the roof of the prisons and rioting, staff were being placed in danger and there was a huge level of community concern about how our prison system was operating. It needed to be brought into the modern era and made professional and accountable to the community.

I will recount briefly the history of the Kennedy report. The terms of reference asked—

"What changes, if any, should be made in the organisation, administration and operation of the Queensland prison system, and what changes are needed in the public interest?"

There was consensus regarding the problems that the system was facing, and those problems were grouped into about five headings. The submissions argued that prison officers received hardly any training, had little support and received little recognition of their role. The parole system was seen to be unfair and inefficient. It was identified that parts of the Brisbane and Townsville prisons were built a century ago, and the submissions pointed out their lack of basic facilities.

Mr HEGARTY: I rise to a point of order. Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Quorum formed.

Mr HORAN: The Kennedy review found that at the time little real attempt was being made to do anything about prisoners other than locking them up; that there were token corrective services; that many prisoners who were released were worse than when they went in; and that the management of corrections could be greatly improved. He went on to speak about various other aspects of justice. The commission of review examined all of those areas of complaint, and the recommendations of the interim report were designed to put in place a system that had the capacity to bring about and manage the many necessary changes.

The Corrective Services Commission, modern prisons, enhanced community corrections, better management, trained correctional officers, adequately funded prisoner programs, and a total commitment to professionalism were all seen to have the ability to add to a humane, fair and consistent approach to the provision of corrective services in Queensland. Interestingly, Kennedy predicted that, if the recommendations of that report and the interim report were followed, in a few years' time people looking back would see very substantial changes in the way in which corrective services operated in this State. He predicted that we would see a corrective services system that was properly resourced; that there would be a serious attempt to provide corrective services; that the services would be staffed by trained and professional correctional officers and security officers; and, importantly, that community corrections would be accepted as the preferred system of punishment for most non-violent crimes. He predicted also that competition would be introduced into the system and efficiency and economy would be substantially enhanced through some private sector involvement to complement the services provided by the Government through the QCSC.

Importantly, Kennedy's report stated—

"These are changes that are needed in the public interest. The process of the review has been dynamic. It is not finished yet, and it may never be."

Some 10 or 11 years later, we are now seeing those changes, and time will tell whether they prove to be dynamic. We are certainly looking at a system that needs continual change and finetuning. As Kennedy said, because of the environment of prisons and corrective services, the process may always need some form of adjustment or review.

I will summarise the findings and recommendations of the Kennedy review, of which there were 65; I wish to touch only on some. Kennedy found that reform was overdue and that prisons, parole, probation and community corrections are closely related and should all be administered together by the one organisation. He stated back then that the Corrective Services Commission would be the best approach to take in administering corrective services for the next five years. The next review, undertaken five years later, found that the Corrective Services Commission should be continued for another five years. We are now five years further down the track and looking at legislation that finally sees the Corrective Services Commission being changed over fully to a department.

As I said, a great deal has been achieved, and I will point this out in some detail later on. We are taking a big step. Certainly, it involves some risks, and the Opposition will be keeping a watchful eye on those. Kennedy stated that the concept of the Crown providing all corrective services in Queensland

was neither cost-effective nor sound. He also stated—and this is history now—that the new Borallon prison would provide an opportunity to call tenders for its operation by private enterprise, which would offer a realistic alternative to Government operation. History has shown that that did occur and that it provided some hybrid vigour, fresh ideas, changes and reform that perhaps would never have been achieved through a purely Government or departmental system.

Kennedy stated also that prisons should be called "correctional centres"; that they should be operated by general managers; that the term "superintendent" should be discarded; that prison, probation and parole officers should be called "probation officers"; and that greater use should be made of community corrections for non-violent offenders. In his recommendations he spoke strongly about the need for programs, which he said were poorly planned. He stated that the prison industry should be developed to provide work, and educational programs should be provided in prisons. He stated that operational and management audits were essential; that security in Queensland prisons was lax and needed upgrading; and that management should, where possible, be devolved to prison managers from the head office. He spoke also about the lack of computerisation, and in particular about ongoing training being essential.

Going on from that point of the Kennedy review and all that was implemented from it, what has been the result? What have we seen as a result of that? We saw the establishment of the QCSC. We saw a number of non-Government correctional services established, in particular two custodial services at Borallon and Arthur Gorrie operated by different companies. We saw a number of non-Government services such as those run by St Vincent de Paul and others in the correctional services area, including rehabilitation in particular and transitional stages from prison to the community. We saw the development of a totally new culture, a more open culture and new professionalism. We saw rehabilitation brought in in a very substantial way. That came particularly from one of the privately managed prisons where the prisoners were provided with hours of rehabilitation and educational activities so that they were not idle. So the whole system operated in a far better way.

We saw the introduction of programs— programs in relation to education, alcohol rehabilitation and drug rehabilitation. The new system of prisons, particularly the non-Government prisons, brought in a testing standard, if you like, whereby it could be seen how one system was going compared with another in all the various facets. I look back at the previous ministerial portfolio of Health. For example, I look at the system at the Mater Hospital, which is run by a non-Government association, which provides that hybrid vigour—a different way of running things. The funding is provided under contractual arrangements, but again it is a benchmark. It can be seen how the Government system is going compared with the non-Government system and which has aspects that are better than the other and which one could be improved and so forth.

The changes from the Kennedy report saw the introduction of the WORC scheme— WORC camps—in parts of the community, particularly in the far west where people, particularly those with non-violent records or those showing good rehabilitation, are able to be useful to the community in times of need, such as the Charleville floods. They provide particular community needs and learn how to live in a community and learn how to live with some discipline and direction but outside of the custodial environment. An important feature was the introduction of training schemes for staff so that staff could be trained to work their way up, to achieve promotion. Despite the fact that they do work in an extremely difficult environment, the Corrective Services staff could then take pride and pleasure in knowing that there were job opportunities and training and that the organisation cared about them and their families.

As we have moved on through the nineties, I think it is important to put on the record the incredible improvements that were brought about during the two and a bit years of the coalition Government. On return to office, despite the improvements that had been brought about, the coalition was faced with a correctional system that was in disarray. The budgets had been slashed, there was critical overcrowding, staff morale was declining and escapes from secure custody were rife. The coalition Government took back control of the prison system and implemented a 10-year plan of record capital works and security upgrades which could rebuild the correctional system in line with the Kennedy recommendations and in line with the direction that had been set out as a result of the Kennedy reform.

The coalition Government put reform back on the agenda in Corrective Services. Deaths in custody fell, new ministerial guidelines for community corrections boards were put in place to keep dangerous prisoners out of the community, prisoners were going back to work with a new focus on prison industries, and amendments to legislation were introduced into Parliament to tighten security and reduce the introduction of drugs and contraband into prisons.

But the biggest neglect of all by the previous Labor Government was in capital works. In this area the coalition Government set about repairing the damage that was caused by six years of neglect by the previous Goss Labor Government. When the National Party left Government in 1989, there was a single cell for every secure prisoner. When the coalition returned in 1996, there was a legacy of 1,400

double-up cells in the system. In 1998-99, the coalition Government allocated a record budget for corrections of \$466m, up 45%—almost unheard of in terms of increases in a Government department—with a massive \$195m capital works component. That in itself is an increase of 113%.

In six years Labor provided just 226 extra beds in Queensland, despite prisoner numbers starting a rapid spiral in 1993. In fewer than two years the coalition produced almost 800 beds, with plans for another 2,100 to come online by the year 2001. The plan also included 1,600 in the following year, 1998-99. The capital works budget included funding to complete a 600-bed SEQ1 men's secure centre at Wacol, a 234-bed SEQ women's centre at Wacol, a 262-bed expansion of the Arthur Gorrie Centre at Wacol, a 130-bed expansion of the Borallon centre, a 108-bed expansion of Lotus Glen, a 96-bed expansion of Rockhampton, a 100-bed expansion of Townsville men's, a 25 open and 20 secure bed expansion of Townsville's women's facility, and two new youth detention centres—one on the Townsville Correctional Centre reserve and the other in south-east Queensland.

The budget also included the expansion by 50 beds each of the low security Palen Creek and Numinbah correctional centres; a 350-bed replacement for the Rockhampton centre, with a capacity to be expanded to 600 beds; a women's annexe at Numinbah and a community-based custody work facility for women at Warwick; Queensland's first designated fine defaulters facility at Palen Creek; the expansion of community-based alternatives to prison, such as Aboriginal out-stations and an adventure-based training program attached to Palen Creek; and crisis support units established at Woodford, Moreton and Townsville Correctional Centres. In addition to the fully funded capital works program, there was a commitment for a further three 200-bed secure facilities in either Yarraman/Nanango, Maryborough, Roma or Inglewood.

In relation to security upgrades and drugs in prisons, the coalition Government brought about improvements in security in correctional centres and the reduction of drug use in prisons as a major priority. Some of the achievements of the coalition were the Mengler drugs in prisons inquiry, which established for the first time the extent of the problem of drugs in jails and made recommendations to counter the problem; the establishment of a proactive intelligence network to combat the introduction of drugs and to gather and analyse intelligence about potential escapes and criminal activity, again a recommendation of the Mengler inquiry; and a \$22m upgrade in security, external and internal, for every correctional facility. That included the provision of the Hummer armoured vehicles for perimeter patrols and prisoner escorts, and protective clothing and weapon upgrades for officers. Millions of dollars was spent on training, equipping and protecting staff.

The coalition recruited 630 staff in two years, with another 642 expected during a second term. Labor's corrections policy promised only 50 extra staff a year. It also included the establishment of a proactive support group, a prisons security squad which was available and indeed involved in auditing security systems and the protection of prison staff and the community and the establishment of the ongoing security implementation task force, pulling together the skills and expertise of police, QCSC and correctional service providers to oversight and expedite security upgrades and improvements in correctional centres.

The coalition established a concerned persons register so that people on the register could be informed of offender movements, such as security classifications, centre transfers and parole date eligibility of criminals who had offended against them. For the first time there was the involvement of correctional staff in decision making through involvement in groups such as the implementation committee, set up in the wake of the Sir David Longland escape, and the Minister's standing committee to advise him on correctional matters. There was the introduction into Parliament of the Corrective Services Amendment Bill aimed at increasing security, combating the introduction of drugs and other contraband into prisons, protecting prison officers and allowing better management of dangerous and high-risk prisoners.

There was the review of the classifications of all high-risk escape and dangerous prisoners, with transfers effected where necessary to counter any risk to staff or to the community, and we saw a new Community Corrections Board with tougher guidelines putting the protection of the community above inmate considerations and ensuring that violent offenders stayed longer in jail.

There were some other highlights and achievements on top of all of this, for example, the corporatisation of the Queensland Corrective Services Commission to separate the purchaser of correctional services from the service providers in order to encourage more competition and efficiencies. That relates strongly to the Bill we are debating, because Queensland Corrections has changed from a corporate entity with a board to a business unit. This was achieved under the coalition Government through the establishment of Queensland Corrections under a seven-member board. This new public sector agency now competes with private enterprise for the delivery of corrective services in Queensland.

There were some major achievements on indigenous correctional issues. Queensland leads Australia in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. There was an

extension of the program of diversions from secure custody to involve community-based organisations in the management of indigenous juvenile offenders, an extension of the family support program for indigenous offenders, the development of a family violence intervention program in jails, and the establishment of specific Murri meeting places in correctional centres.

Each year since 1996 the COAG steering committee for the review of Commonwealth/State service provision has produced a report on Government service provision, utilising the Commonwealth Industry Commission as a coordination secretariat. The latest report rated Queensland highly on a broad range of indicators for the services provided through our correctional services. Queensland was the most efficient service provider in terms of cost per prisoner per day for secure and open custody combined and for secure custody, and was the equal lowest with the Northern Territory for open custody.

Although the death rate for Queensland prisoners increased from 0.32% in 1995-96 to 0.36%, Queensland's death rate remained well below that of Western Australia, New South Wales and South Australia and below the national average of 0.38%.

The total escape rate in Queensland showed a considerable improvement, down from 1.2% in 1995-96 to 0.5% in 1996-97. The national rate was 1.24%. The secure custody rate dropped from 6.4% to 3.4%. The national average was 3.9%.

Importantly, the prison recidivism rate for Queensland fell from 31.6% in 1995-96 to 23.35% the following year, some 12% better than the next lowest, which was Victoria. Queensland had the second lowest rates for both prisoner on prisoner and prisoner on staff assaults. Queensland was the most efficient service provider in terms of cost per community supervision offender and had the second lowest community supervision recidivism rate.

These results were even more impressive when we consider the fact that prisoner numbers have doubled in Queensland since 1993 and overcrowding as a result of Labor's refusal to plan for the future led to an even more potentially volatile prisons environment.

Escape rates are often taken as a measure of how secure and safe the prisons system is. The rate of escapes and absconds dropped dramatically under the coalition Government. The following statistics show the improvements over eight years. I will set out the figures for adult centres from 1990 through to May 1998. The total escapes were: in 1990, 37; in 1991, 67; in 1992, 42; in 1993, 47; in 1994, 20; in 1995, 29; in 1996, 39; in 1997, 24; and to May 1998, nine.

I now set out escapes from secure custody for that same period. In 1990, there were 22; in 1991, 42; in 1992, 22; in 1993, 19; in 1994, eight; in 1995, three; in 1996, five; in 1997, eight; and for the year to May 1998, five. In terms of absconds, there are no figures for the first three years of the decade, but in 1993 there were 47; in 1994, 57; in 1995, 51; in 1996, 42; in 1997, 32; and for the year to May 1998, eight. In relation to absconds from juvenile centres, in 1994-95 there were 109; in 1995-96, seven; in 1996-97, six; and in 1997-98, one.

Earlier I mentioned the prisons that were to be built in three of four centres short-listed by the coalition Government under the SEQ2 program. Those centres were Roma, Maryborough, Yarraman/Nanango and Inglewood. I think it has been a great disappointment and a real slap in the face to the people of rural Queensland that Labor on coming to Government did not see fit to continue with that program. We heard the Premier of this State, Mr Beattie, continually saying that his is a Government for all Queenslanders, but here is a fine example that it was not and is not a Government for all Queenslanders.

Here was an opportunity to provide three 200-bed prisons—medium-sized prisons where the system of security and rehabilitation could have been outstanding compared with a prison of a large dimension with large numbers. In one respect it is like a school. The headmaster of a school with 200 pupils would certainly know the names of the students, would know what is happening, and would be able to keep a good eye on all that is happening compared with the headmaster of a school of 600 or 1,000.

Here was a chance to provide quality correctional services and quality custodial services. Importantly, here was a chance to do something for Queensland. Our strength is that most of our population lives outside of Brisbane. We are the only State in Australia in which the majority of people live outside the capital city. Our strength is the decentralised nature of our State.

Here was a chance to establish something that would have been a platform and a base for three of those four short-listed communities. It would have virtually drought proofed those communities from the ups and downs, the difficult times they face, and would have removed the necessity for young people and families to leave the towns in search of work. There would have been a requirement for 70 to 80 staff in those three centres and there would have been flow-on benefits to small business and industries.

As I said, it would have virtually drought proofed those communities and given them greater viability—the additional teachers, the additional health staff, the additional business operations. It would have made them just that much stronger and able to stand on their own feet.

I think good Government has a responsibility to spread the Vegemite so that everybody gets a taste—so that everybody gets the opportunity to see their district and their community strengthened by the provision of Government services. The first responsibility is to ensure that those Government services are not weakened but only strengthened by being placed in a rural or regional area. There was that chance and opportunity to do this.

I say to the people of Maryborough: good luck and well done. They were selected and got a prison of some 500 beds. I think the people of Maryborough would realise that a prison of 200 beds would have still been a great boost to Maryborough, on top of their existing major industries—the sugarmill, timber and heavy engineering. It is a large city. The flow-on benefits from the provision of a 200-bed prison with 80 staff would have been good for Maryborough. As true Queenslanders, the people of Maryborough would have recognised that two of the other three areas— Roma, Yarraman/Nanango or Inglewood— would have been the recipients of a Government service being decentralised. It would have been given to not just one area but spread around so that some of those other families who do not have the benefits of substantial industries in their own particular towns could have benefited and been strengthened.

The other worrying factor about that procedure is that due process was not followed. The QCSC said—and put it in black and white—that there was a five-step process. One part of that process, which was about the fourth step, was that there would be full consultation with the short-listed proponents. That did not occur. There was a letter from the Minister to the Darling Downs Local Government Association saying that he would fully consult with the shires that were affected. In relation to the Darling Downs Local Government Association, that meant the Rosalie Shire and the Inglewood Shire. But again, that did not occur. It was obviously, at the end of the day, a set-up. Some of the mayors have said that it was a political decision. Instead of being a Queensland decision to see three of the four short-listed centres receive a much-needed boost to their economy, it went to one centre only. It made a farce of the whole process. Not even token recognition was given to those shires that had gone to great lengths to put forward their submissions and had been short-listed.

I believe that, forever and a day, that particular decision will put the lie to the Premier's continual comments that this is a Government for all Queenslanders. Queenslanders are becoming increasingly cynical, and that just drives home the fact that, judging by the performance that we have seen to date, this is certainly not a Government for all Queenslanders. There are people in rural and regional Queensland who got a slap in the face. They have been totally neglected and totally discarded. This Minister did not care about them.

Mr Barton: I did so. I met them all.

Mr HORAN: No, the Minister did not meet them at all. And more than that, I am led to believe that he had Yarraman and Nanango at the top of his list, but the Premier moved in and said, "No. We are going to have this other arrangement." So the Minister had to trot up to Maryborough and make that announcement. Once again, promises were made but they were not delivered. Good government has broken down. The opportunity to serve the people of Queensland in a good, balanced and fair way has been totally neglected.

The Kennedy report recommended that there should be a review every five years. There was a review in 1993. There is now a 10-year review. The terms of reference of the Peach report covered issues like the effectiveness of the operations of the commission and the board, the effectiveness of the division of the commission into two bodies, the sufficiency of accountability mechanisms, and the effectiveness and oversight by the commission of the privately managed prisons and community correctional centres. Those were the key terms of reference. I will not go through the others. I believe that there is no doubt that, in putting forward the terms of reference, the Minister has had a very great desire to get back to having a department. The terms of reference make it clear that there has been a push to get back to a departmental arrangement at all costs. The guidelines have been framed in such a way as to ensure that that happens. One has only to read the Minister's second-reading speech to realise his strong desire to get his hands on the levers.

The key recommendations are that the QCSC be replaced by a department, that a planned change management process be put in place, that the current permanent employees of the QCSC and Q Corr be guaranteed that they will not lose their employment with the organisation, and that there be a corrective services advisory council. The role of that council will be to advise the Minister. But we are actually seeing a reduction in community involvement, because the council will be there simply in an advisory capacity; it will have no teeth.

The Peach report sets out how the council should be appointed and states that it should consist of no more than 10 people; that it should meet four to six times a year; that a cultural change program

be implemented to develop a culture that values continuous learning, openness and transparency; and that the director-general of the new department will lead a broadly consultative process to develop and promote a vision for the future that aligns with the purpose of the system as stated in the new Act. The recommendations also considered the purchaser/provider division. This is where the Q Corr board was to be abolished and custodial corrections were to become a commercial business unit within the department.

This is only the very early stages. We do not know how the business unit will be established. I understand that that process will be undertaken in the future. But this legislation has been introduced into the Parliament, even though the Minister can only say vaguely that it is going to be a business unit. He does not know what particular model the business unit will follow. Treasury contains a number of business models, including one which pays a dividend to Treasury. It is a pity in a way that this process is not a bit further advanced. In saying that, I am not giving the Minister a box around the ears. I know that he has to go through this process in a staged way, but members are debating this particular legislation. All we know is that there will be a business unit. The details of it are vague. We do not know how it will operate. I would be interested to hear the Minister, in his reply, enlighten the Parliament as to how that business unit will actually operate.

Recommendation No. 18 is that a temporary new projects unit be established and staffed by a small number of contracted officers from outside the Public Service to manage the tender process and to ensure transparency and public accountability. This is basically so that when major projects like new prisons come forward—and I presume that projects like the Maryborough prison or the extension of the Woodford prison would have to be considered as major projects—a decision is made as to whether a design and construct arrangement is adopted, whether it is built by a non-Government or Government organisation and whether the operation of that particular facility is tendered to either the business unit or a non-Government organisation. I think that we will have to watch that one pretty closely to see that the new projects unit is genuine, that we do maintain genuine reform and that, if there is any tendering process, all parties can fully throw themselves into the tendering process knowing that the consideration of their tender will be absolutely impartial and that the decision at the end of the day will be what is best for Queensland and what is best for the correctional service that we provide.

Under accountability mechanisms, recommendation No. 21 was that the director-general develop and implement procedures to ensure that information collected through performance monitoring and auditing is used to hold service providers accountable and to assist them to improve their performance. That is a bit strange, because this Minister recently disbanded the PSG—the Proactive Support Group. One of its key functions was specialising in security auditing. I know that that sort of specialisation and professionalism should exist in every unit, because it is essential to their 24-hour-a-day operation. But it is important that an external audit is able to be undertaken so that, at all stages, the security and the systems are being run at the highest possible level. Sometimes it takes an outsider to be able to see what someone cannot see when they are working totally within the system and are seeing it perhaps every day of the week.

I turn now to the results of the Peach report. These are the risks that I warned about at the start. In the past decade, we have seen what was basically a dreadful system transformed into a system which, generally speaking within correctional services organisations, is regarded as one of the leading correctional services in Australia. The improvement in the Queensland system—and I outline what happened under the coalition—is regarded throughout Australia as the leading-edge, dramatic change. The figures speak for themselves. With all of that behind us, we are now taking this step which amounts to a watershed. Going back to a department carries some real risks. The Kennedy report was instituted under the departmental system and we have seen the Kennedy findings and the recommended changes.

I know that in the past 10 years there has been more accountability and more professionalism brought into the system. We have seen more programs instituted. We have seen the construction of different types of prisons in place of the brick walls. Mr Deputy Speaker, when you and I went to St Laurence's we used to ride our bikes past the brick walls of Boggo Road jail. We were aware of the guard on top of the wall. All that has been changed with the construction of modern prisons. We have seen the introduction of rehabilitation programs.

Peach argues that the correctional services system is mature enough to accept this next step. Kennedy himself said that the QCSC may, in time, have to revert to another system. I repeat my warning to the Government that this is a big step. It is a step back to the original situation that brought about the problems in the past.

Under this new system we risk taking the community out of the corrections system. That was one of the important tenets of the Kennedy reforms. Under the Kennedy reforms we had a community board and later on the development of Q Corr. The community was involved in a very real way. The members of the board were in paid positions. They had monthly meetings. They had a real reason to

provide the oversight of, the direction and the improvements to and the reform of the organisation. It was a very real and substantial organisation.

That system is going and we are now going to have an advisory council. I will have more to say later regarding the advisory council. It will have far fewer powers than the community board. The Minister appoints the members of the council and there is no Executive Council oversight. The Minister is able to appoint and dismiss personnel as he sees fit. As a result, we are seeing a lessening of community involvement in the corrections system. We face the risk of having less accountability because the managerial input of the board will not be available. We are facing the risk of less public scrutiny of correctional services. We are also facing the risk of ongoing prison reform and improvement being reduced.

Q Corr is to be a business unit. That may be a simple cosmetic improvement. We are yet to see how the business unit will be established. The real risk with only an advisory council is the potential possibility of a closed shop. That is the warning that I provide to the Parliament.

I started off by asking about the reasons behind this particular change in the system. The system currently in place is held in high regard. Did we need this dramatic change in order to allow the Minister to put his hands on the levers? The Minister may well have some frustrations, but Kennedy ensured that in the previous legislation the Minister could give written directions to the QCSC. It was obliged to reply to those directions. The Minister's power in that regard was contained in section 23.

When we have such substantial reform as this we want to see something better for society. The community expects to have a secure and safe system. One of the most important aspects of this debate is the staff. These people work in a most difficult environment. We want to see an improvement in staff conditions. These people need fair pay and security of employment. They need training in order to deliver a professional performance. It is most important that the staff have a safe environment in which to work.

The community looks upon law and order, justice and the prison system as being among the most important and compelling issues in society. Elderly people live in fear of people breaking and entering their homes. Young people come to live in Brisbane and find their houses are broken into and they lose their cassettes, their CDs and everything else. As a result, they live in fear instead of enjoying living in their homes. We see elderly people closing their houses up and locking themselves in at 4 o'clock on hot Brisbane afternoons because they are terrified.

People are also concerned about sentences handed down to criminals in our courts. Parliament legislates for penalties and sentences. This Parliament is currently debating a private member's Bill dealing with the issue of truth in sentencing of serious violent offenders. Over the past decade the prison population of Queensland has doubled from some 2,200 in 1993 to some 4,600 at the moment. The increase in the prison population is an indication of Parliament's acceptance of community concerns.

The public want to know that the prisons are safe and that escapes are kept to an absolute minimum. The public want to feel that the locking away of prisoners acts as a deterrent to other people who are contemplating committing crimes. Imprisonment must act as a form of punishment whereby criminals repay their debt to society. This is particularly essential for serious violent offenders. They must be taken out of society and not allowed to remain on the streets.

Society recognises the value and importance of rehabilitation. It is important that the 80% to 90% of offenders who have the potential and the capability to be rehabilitated are able to return to the community, make a contribution to society and not reoffend.

Today, we are talking about the principle of security and custodial services. We are talking about safety of the staff. We are talking about safety for the inmates of the prisons who could be attacked by other prisoners. We are talking about rehabilitation programs that exist within the prison system. We are talking about the working conditions of the staff. Staff members should be able to take pride in their job and know that what they are doing is making a difference to society. Ultimately, we have a responsibility in regard to rehabilitation.

Today in this Parliament we are taking a very significant decision on something that is of major importance to Queenslanders. The Opposition is issuing a warning. We are not going to oppose this legislation because, as I stated, the Kennedy reforms said that there should be a review every five years. This review has been undertaken by Mr Frank Peach. The Opposition will maintain a watching brief to ensure that these changes bring about an improvement in the situation. The Opposition's responsibility is to ensure that, whatever we do today, we end up with a better system.

In conclusion, although I have provided the warning about six times, I want to make this point: without a doubt, this step today is taking the community out of corrections to the extent that it existed before. Despite the growing maturity in the correctional services system in Queensland and the improvements of the past decade, this step that we are taking today has some potential to bring back some of the problems that existed before. That is the warning that we put in place. The Opposition will

not oppose the Bill; it adopts a responsible position towards it, because there has been a substantial review undertaken. However, we have put that warning forward strongly. From here on in, our brief will be to ensure that what changes may occur here today are changes for the better.
