



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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### **JUVENILE CRIME**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (12.09 p.m.): This afternoon I wish to speak about juvenile crime in the central business district of Toowoomba and the very serious efforts that are being made by police and by a large number of community organisations, particularly the Aboriginal elders, to combat this particular problem which has existed for some time.

A group of young people aged between as young as seven or eight and 16 are undertaking street crime and nuisance crime. Generally speaking, they are making the very pleasant and very attractive CBD area of Toowoomba a place which at times people feel is unsafe. Certainly, these young people are undertaking a number of activities which are disrupting the normal business activities of small business operators throughout the CBD.

I will give some examples of the sorts of things that have been occurring. One evening Silly Solly's was trashed. Clothes were knocked down, counters were written and scribbled on and chip packets were thrown around and busted. People in various coffee shops have witnessed coffee cups and saucers being thrown around. People have been spat upon. People have had coffee spat into. The normal thing is that a group on the footpath give people a bump as they walk by or not let people through, and so forth. Unfortunately, these young people are really criminal apprentices and may become very serious criminals later in life.

As a result of all of this activity, over a period of months there has been growing anger and frustration in the city—within the Police Service, amongst the business community and amongst the citizens of Toowoomba—about what can be done about this particular problem. A lot of people say, "Why aren't they at home?", or, "Why aren't they at school?" Truancy is part of the problem. These kids should be at school, but they do not have a home life that encourages them to go to school or that makes them stay at school. At one public meeting I talked to one of the Aboriginal elders about what could be done in relation to taking these kids home. He said that in some cases these young people come from the homes of absolute no-hopers or from totally broken or dysfunctional home settings. It is a serious problem.

The frustration that exists within the city is that everyone knows who these people are. They want to know why something cannot be done to stop them from doing these things, to curb their activity or to put some fear in their hearts about undertaking these activities. They want to know why something cannot be done to bring about some rehabilitation of these young people.

I think the real nub of the problem is that the juvenile justice system is becoming like a turnstile. No matter what the police do—no matter how many charges are laid and no matter how many arrests are made—these young people are just going through the turnstile of the juvenile justice system, coming back out into the street and thumbing their noses at people. They are saying to shopkeepers and police, "We are juvies. You can't touch us. We know our rights." They do know their rights. They have no fear that they will be in any form of serious trouble once they are arrested, charged and put through the juvenile justice system.

When we were in Government we made some substantial changes to tighten and toughen up the juvenile justice system. It was always felt that, if needs be, there should be a review of the juvenile justice system. I think this is a good example of the need for a review. The problem is that either the judiciary is not applying the Juvenile Justice Act as it should be applied or the Act needs further refining

so that problems such as this—these problems appear so simple to the average citizen and are so frustrating to the Police Service—can be addressed through the juvenile justice system.

One of the first public meetings held in the city was called by the Toowoomba Mayor. The sergeant from the Juvenile Aid Bureau, which does an enormous job in Toowoomba—it has an incredible workload—said that recent CBD offences included robbery, stealing, swearing, urinating in public, breaking and entering, spitting, obstructing police, seriously assaulting police, causing wilful damage and breaching bail conditions. One of the problems is that a number of this gang of 20 are young girls. They are involved in much of this crime around the streets.

As a result of that first public meeting, a substantial number of things have occurred. I congratulate the Aboriginal elders in the town. They have a difficult situation to deal with. They have formed a Murri youth community service, which receives some funding from Centrelink. For about 13 and a half hours per week, eight Aboriginal people are involved in patrolling the city at certain times. They are endeavouring to get these young people back to their homes, if they have a stable home environment, or to get them off the streets, out of the CBD area and away from the trouble that can be caused. That group has been assisted in this regard by the police liaison officers.

Commercial Watch, which is similar to Neighbourhood Watch, has been developed within the town. The CBD task force has undertaken a substantial amount of additional work in assisting the police. The Toowoomba City Council has held a number of public meetings. One of the things they are undertaking as a result of those meetings is an expansion of the CitySafe camera program. There will be special training so that trained operators are running those CitySafe cameras. There has been an expansion in the area those cameras cover and an expansion in the times those cameras are fully functional and operational. That certainly should help the Police Service.

In recent weeks the Police Service itself has had to comply with the direction that no officer should have more than 228 hours' leave as we move into the period prior to the Olympic Games. That has meant that the service has been somewhat short-staffed. The Police Service has come through that particular period and it is now moving to provide additional Police Beat patrols in the town. So at most times there will be two additional police working throughout the city. There will also be additional mobile patrols. The Police Service is also undertaking a number of other campaigns that I do not particularly want to divulge here. I certainly have confidence—and I know that the police themselves have confidence in what they are putting into place—that this will bring about a resolution of the problem.

The police have been making a large number of arrests and have laid a large number of charges. At the end of the day, I think there are a couple of things that we as members of Parliament—members of both the Government and Opposition—have to address. Either the juvenile justice system needs some refinement or the judiciary needs to work strictly in accordance with the existing system in order for the hard work and effort made by the police to be worth while.

These police are working in a difficult street environment. They have to work within rules and regulations, otherwise they get reported to the CJC. They have to act in a professional manner, in the way in which they have been trained, despite the abuse they might be coping and despite the environment and the nature of the street work they are having to do. At the end of the day, when all of that has been done, it must be very frustrating for the police to see these young people simply come back onto the streets, very often within a matter of hours. Juveniles need to see that the more serious offenders are detained. They need to see that other offenders are sent to places such as Boystown, where there is an attempt at providing offenders with a degree of home life, direction, discipline and rehabilitation. I think that is the key area that needs to be assisted and supported.

I refer to what happened at Ipswich, to the Ipswich Mall situation. Three police officers were stood aside following a report to the CJC. I have no doubt that in the back of the minds of a lot of police officers is the thought, "Are we going to be reported to the CJC? To what extent can we undertake our duties in the street?" I think it is up to this Parliament to shift the balance back in favour of the good, decent people—to shift the balance back in favour of the Police Service, which is undertaking its task, and in favour of the local governments, which want to see their CBDs safe.

It is important in a place such as Toowoomba, which has a magnificent CBD—it is a very pleasant and enjoyable place—that we maintain safety and security. We need to ensure that there is no overdramatisation of what has happened, but we do have a serious problem. It can be addressed and the Police Service is addressing it. I have confidence that it is going to fix it.

I call on this Government—it is our responsibility as an Opposition to support it—to make sure that at the end of the day the juvenile justice system provides prevention, detention, a degree of punishment and a degree of rehabilitation so that the efforts of the police can be rewarded by seeing that the streets actually do become safer and that these young people are rescued from a potential life of serious crime.

Time expired.