



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

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Hansard 24 November 1999

PERSONS CONVICTED OF OFFENCES AGAINST CHILDREN

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.36 p.m.): It is a strange feeling to stand in this Chamber between 6 o'clock and 7 o'clock at night in an atmosphere of members working together. This is usually the hour of venom. I am a bit worried. Seriously though, I believe that what has brought about this cooperation is the way in which all members in this House take extremely sincerely and seriously the protection and safety of children. I join with other members on this side of the House in applauding the Government for supporting this particular motion.

The Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care made a comment about the fact that this was Labor Party policy, but we had to push them towards it. I hope that this feeling of cooperation continues into the night when our private member's Bill regarding Anzac Day, which is so sensible and pragmatic, comes before this House.

The real issue here is about the absolute protection of children. The Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care spoke about the particular Bill that she is preparing, that is, the Children's Commission legislation. No doubt the preparation of that Bill is going to be fairly difficult, because there are some areas in which it is probably difficult to draw the line. Many people are involved in straight-out employment with children; that is quite clear-cut. Many people work with children in full-time or part-time employment. But then we move into the sector of volunteers—people who work with children and who help in various areas.

No doubt all members have been involved with footy clubs, netball clubs, Brownies, Girl Guides and other organisations. There are times when we could feel a bit insulted by some of the things that have been suggested. But if we put them aside and think that this is really about the kids first and foremost, then I believe that everyone who has the interests of children at heart would be prepared to accept quite reasonable arrangements.

I reflect on the Mary Valley Tigers Junior Rugby League Club, which I started in the seventies. We had under-9, under-11, under-13 and under-15 teams. We took them into Gympie every Sunday for a game of footy and trained them at Kandanga or Imbil on Saturdays. We were just local farmers. I do not know how we would have ever coped with all the business of legislation and signing off on this and that. But when I think about it, we only did it for the kids' sake. At the end of the day, I believe that if something like this had been in force, all of us would have been prepared to sign off on some sort of a proviso so that the parents of the kids in other teams and we ourselves would have felt that the kids were safe.

As to the proposals that the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care has been putting forward—some of the suggestions for legislation that she is developing and working on—I mentioned Guides and Brownies. What about the fathers who put up the tents, dig the pits, put in the barbecues and all that sort of thing? Many people are involved in those organisations in one form or another. Whatever legislation is developed, it will have to abide by the principle of protecting the children, but it is also going to have to be quite sensible and pragmatic.

As I said, I think we can all see immediately very clear-cut areas where this would apply and it is quite sensible. I think all of us would be 100% behind the principle that, if someone has committed a sexual or physical offence against a child and has been convicted of that particular offence, that person should not be allowed in any shape or form anywhere near our kids.

Another issue is the recidivism rate of those involved in paedophilia, which is well over 60%. This principle is a good principle. If it can assist the Police Service to reduce the number of these dreadful investigations that they have to go through—and the Police Minister, who is present, would probably agree with me that they are some of the worst investigations that police have to undertake, particularly those investigations that involve the Juvenile Aid Bureau—then we have certainly achieved something.

I support fully this principle. I agree with the way in which we are going about it tonight, because it will need a lot of careful development. However, we must adhere 100% to the principle, and the principle is straightforward and simple: those who have committed the heinous crime of sexual or physical abuse of children should not be allowed back working, or caring, or coaching, or assisting kids.

Time expired.
