



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 25 November 1999

INCREASE IN CRIME

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6 p.m.): I move—

"That this Parliament views with concern an overall increase in crime of over 5 per cent across Queensland during the first 12 months of the Beattie Government and notes the comments of the Police Commissioner in the Queensland Police Service Annual Statistical Review where he said—

'Regrettably 1998-99 saw a reversal of the downward trends we have seen over the last two financial years in rates of reported total offences against the person and property offences.' "

The Beattie bubble has now burst. After all the PR, fairy floss, gloss, consultation, strategies and so on, the chickens are coming home to roost. Now that some hard data and statistical reports are being put on the table of the Parliament, we can see whether there is any leadership or drive within the Government. We can see whether there has been any improvement in the various services provided in the State. I am sad to report that, as evidenced by the police statistical review, there is a more than 5% increase in crime throughout the State.

Whilst this is occurring, the Government has brought down a Police budget that is the most paltry of all the Police budgets of the 1990s. There has been a cut in recruits to the police academy. The Minister was not prepared to put before the Parliament, through the Estimates process, increased targets and estimates for clear-up rates, perceptions of safety and various output statements, even though he is presiding over a Police Service that has hundreds more police officers as a result of the massive recruitment program that was put in place by the coalition Government. That is the sort of leadership that we see from this Police Minister, who is not prepared to seek even a moderate budget increase for the hundreds of extra police officers funded by the coalition Government.

Queensland's crime rate jumped by 5.1% during the first 12 months of the Beattie Labor Government. The total number of offences reported across the State rose by 20,203, from 389,519 in 1997-98 to 409,722 in 1998-99. In the police statistical review, the Police Commissioner stated—

"Regrettably 1998-99 saw a reversal of the downward trends we have seen over the last two financial years in rates of reported total offences against the person and property offences."

That report gives a very clear message to the Parliament, which is that a very successful downward trend, which had been in place for two years during the term of the coalition Government, has changed and crime rates are rising. The worrying thing for members of Parliament and the Queenslanders whom we represent is that this is occurring when the results of the massive coalition recruitment program are really starting to have an effect.

There are quite a few reasons for the increase in reported crime statistics. The figure for the Sunshine Coast is up by 20%. Even the Minister was eventually forced to say that that is concerning. The Redcliffe district is up 18.6%, the Gympie district is up 15.1%, Townsville is up 11%, Gladstone is up 11%, the Brisbane north and south areas are up 7.7%, Logan is up 7.5%, Toowoomba is up 7% and Mount Isa is up 5%. Some areas have reported a decrease, and I am happy to acknowledge that. I congratulate all involved. For example, the Gold Coast, Mackay and Rockhampton have reported decreases. However, in most areas, offences against people as opposed to property offences continue

to spiral. Across the State there has been an 18% increase in rape and attempted rape, a 14% increase in motor vehicle theft, a 5% increase in assault, a 9% increase in robbery and a 5% increase in property offences, although I acknowledge and welcome that unlawful entry offences dropped by 2%. That is very welcome indeed. There has been a 7% increase in property damage and a 5% increase in fraud.

In the two years that the coalition was in Government, it put in place Queensland's largest ever police recruitment program. For example, we built the second police academy in Townsville, which the current Police Minister, when he was the Opposition spokesperson, opposed strongly. That academy has been a part of the success of increasing the number of recruits to the police force, especially the number of recruits who wish to serve in the north and north-west of this State. We introduced that recruitment program, which included the retread program, because there was a decline in the rate of increase of police numbers during the six years of the Goss Labor Government. Due to the coalition's efforts, some 480 recruits came on line in 1997-98. Because of our program, the current Government was able to benefit from an additional 595 recruits during its first 12 months in office. Because of the coalition's forward-thinking policing and recruitment programs, as at June this year Queensland was able to boast a total of 7,178 sworn officers.

It is an indictment on this Government that, in this financial year, it is cutting the number of police recruits by 114. We will never catch up on that loss. At this time, suburbs, towns, cities and regions throughout Queensland are calling out desperately for more police. Can members imagine what it would mean to have those 114 extra police available? That opportunity is lost forever because the Beattie Government, through Mr Barton, has cut 114 recruits from the current recruitment program.

The Police budget for this financial year was absolutely pitiful. It shows that the police have been put at the end of the queue by the Police Minister and the Premier. Whilst the Premier received a 41% increase in the budget for his department and the Deputy Premier received a 61% increase in the budget for his department, the Police Service received a budget to budget increase of 4% and an actual to budget increase of 0.1%. Members should look at that 4% increase. It is hardly enough to cover the full 12-month 4% enterprise bargaining increase that is to be paid to the police throughout this financial year. It is hardly enough to cover the additional wages for the extra police numbers that have resulted from the coalition's recruitment program.

As a result, there has been a major rationing in police districts and regions throughout the State. There have been clampdowns on overtime, fuel usage, telephone usage, training, travel—just about everything—at a time when crime has escalated by 5%. One would think that the Government would adequately resource the police to provide them with the wherewithal they need to undertake the very difficult task that they have in the face of such escalating crime.

I mentioned earlier that this Police Minister is not prepared to show any leadership. Despite the massive increase in police numbers, he is not prepared to seek even a modest target increase to improve public perception of public safety and other areas of community policing. He is not prepared to seek increases in clear-up rates. He simply sits back and says, "We will take the average of last year." Therefore, if the percentage last year was 11%, he will say that a target of anywhere between 10% and 12% will do. Under the lax leadership of this Minister, there is no drive and incentive.

Tragically for members of the Police Service, the Minister was unable to get an adequate amount of funds at the Budget table for a core program—one of the most important programs in this State. The Minister's handling of the Police Service budget has been absolutely pitiful. Officers have been given edicts to watch overtime claims, telephone calls, fuel expenses and so on. In some districts police have been told not to make arrests in the second half of their eight-hour shift, because that might lead to overtime claims. That is the sort of problem that is occurring in this State under this weak Minister who has no power at the Budget table and who offers no direction.

The police officers of this State are doing a magnificent job, but they are being hamstrung by a Minister who has not represented them properly and given them a decent budget. Queenslanders are asking: when we have hundreds of extra police on duty in this State, why do we have an increasing crime rate and a static clear-up rate? It is because of the pathetic leadership of this Police Minister and the Premier of this State. They have put the Police Service at the end of the queue as they pursue their social engineering objectives. The Police Service and Queenslanders deserve better from this pathetic Beattie Labor Government.

Time expired.
