



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (3.04 p.m.): I want to make only a brief contribution to the debate. This Bill is very important legislation that corrects a defect in the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act which was unforeseen at the time it was formulated. That defect is that, in relation to certain Acts, namely, the Traffic Act and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act, it was thought that the law was extended to allowing the power of arrest against children. However, in retrospect, the powers did not extend to those Acts. If we are going to have appropriate behaviour and if we are going to be able to protect the public appropriately, it is extremely important that we have adequate laws to deal with people and that the police are adequately equipped to enforce those laws.

Obviously, there are many occasions when one does not need to use such powers against children. One would hope that they are the vast majority of cases. I would imagine that that is probably the case. Unfortunately, there are circumstances in which the police are required to exercise that power for a whole lot of reasons, including preventing an offence to continue to be committed. So it is very, very important that police have that power to arrest children. One would not want a situation in which, in a drink-driving case, the police could not arrest the offenders who hopped back into their car and drove a bit further and still the police could not arrest them. We cannot have that silly and unsatisfactory situation, so clearly it has to be rectified.

I am a strong supporter of the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act. It contains a number of important powers that I believe need to be given to the Police Service so that it can adequately protect the citizens of our State. The move on power is an important power. It is very important that people—particularly elderly people, women or vulnerable people—are able to go about their business without being harassed. On occasions, the police need that power to move someone on, particularly if the alternative is to arrest someone or to create an incident by arresting someone. That is a power that is very much needed.

In relation to this legislation—unfortunately there are times when the police need to arrest juveniles. That is a fact of life. However, the important thing to recognise—and my colleague the member for Townsville recognised it in his contribution—is that Labor adopts a multifaceted approach to crime. We are tough on crime, and so we should be tough on crime. If one breaks the law, one suffers the consequences. However, Labor is also tough on the causes of crime. Quite frankly, if we are going to spend public money on these sorts of matters, it is far better that we spend the money early on helping and supporting families and helping young people before they get to the stage at which they want to commit offences, because it is infinitely more expensive to pay for people to be imprisoned. That does not mean that we do not have to do that in certain circumstances. However, from a financial point of view, from a social point of view, from a family point of view—from just about any point of view—it makes better sense that, if that sort of behaviour can be nipped in the bud before it becomes a serious problem, we have done the right thing by society, the right thing by the victims and the right thing by the individuals concerned.

That is all that I wanted to say. I commend the legislation to the House. I have found the Police Minister very committed to his portfolio and to supporting the police in the very difficult job that they do in protecting the liberty of the citizens of this State. I commend the Bill to the House.