



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 4 March 1999

POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (2.56 p.m.): My contribution this afternoon will be rather short, because most of the points that I wished to raise have been covered in the contributions that we have already heard this afternoon. However, I take this opportunity to support operational police. The police force has many difficulties to contend with and, as legislators in the State of Queensland, it is very important that we support it to the utmost. It has always been the coalition's intention that police powers would be looked at continually, revised and changed as we go along. It gives me great pleasure to support the Minister in this regard.

There are huge difficulties to be overcome in terms of crime, especially juvenile crime. However, every juvenile is somebody's child—every juvenile is somebody's son or daughter—and that makes the issue very difficult to deal with. Unfortunately, the problems of street-wise children, peer pressure and so on are creeping into our society. I believe that a lot of children are led into lives of crime despite the best intentions of their parents. Unfortunately, that happens so easily and so quickly. Another perspective obviously relates to the drug scene, and certainly the availability of drugs is becoming more and more difficult for police to deal with. Any changes that we may be able to make in terms of assisting the police in the day-to-day operation of their work must be made with the utmost priority.

Another matter that I am sure the Minister is aware of relates to the Sarina Police Station, which I mentioned in a speech yesterday. This matter impinges on how the local police perform their duties. For some time, the citizens of Sarina have been calling on the Police Minister to upgrade the Sarina Police Station by ensuring that it is fully staffed and that it moves towards a 24-hour operation. I commend the police sergeant in charge, Bob Cain, for the work that he has been doing for some time now in relation to this matter.

As members would be well aware, Sarina is a growing community on the busy Bruce Highway. It encompasses satellite townships along the coastline such as Armstrong Beach, Campwyn Beach, Sarina Beach, Grasstree, Half Tide—which is the township that is close to the Hay Point coal loading terminal—and, of course, Louisa Creek a little further up. Because of the proximity of those townships to the police station at Sarina, which is probably an area of about 30 kilometres in any direction, it makes it very difficult for police to cover that area effectively, particularly in recent times when there seems to have been a downgrading or a loss of police numbers at that station. I do not believe that that is intentional—or I would like to think that—but it does seem that when police go on recreational or long service leave, they are not replaced quickly so that the police numbers are kept up to speed. There may be some way that the operations of the Police Service could be effectively enhanced by mobile police who could move into those areas to cater for periods when somebody goes on leave and is not able to be replaced quickly.

The Sarina Police Station has a staffing level of nine. Towards the end of last year, the police numbers at that station actually got down to four. That is not good enough. That problem needs to be highlighted. I believe that we need to work towards getting those numbers up and making sure that if there are nine police officers on staff at that station, they are there during the whole period. Over the past six months or so in the Sarina area, there has been a steady escalation in crime. That seems to coincide with the numbers of police at that station.

Indeed, the station itself is in need of quite an amount of work. It is a combined courthouse and police station. The courthouse is not used very often but certainly the police station contains very cramped quarters, which makes it very difficult for operational police to work. In the coalition's Budget there was a high priority for that station to be replaced. The people of Sarina would like the Minister to consider this matter and see whether he can do something about it.

I have some letters expressing concern which contain the signatures of some business people in the Sarina area. I would like to refer briefly to a letter that was addressed to me—and I believe a copy has been sent to the Minister as well—which states—

"As a concerned business owner I would like to bring to your attention the shortage of police officers stationed in Sarina. The population has been steadily growing but we find that the police numbers have actually decreased. I believe there are now as few as five policemen on duty when there were once 9 to 10 officers covering this area. Can you please advise me as to why this is happening? Could this be due to a change of government?

Recently I had cause to ring the police at 12.30am on the morning of 14 February 1999 as my husband was being attacked by a visitor visiting friends in our caravan park. The call was answered by the Mackay Police and I was advised that two officers on duty in Sarina were at an incident and those officers would phone me as soon as they could. Approximately an hour later I received a call from the Sarina Policemen and they told me they had to go to Mackay and as they were the only officers on duty they would not be available for another 2 hours.

Also on 20 February 1999 again I phoned the police at 1.35pm when my husband was being threatened in our reception area by a man with a large bottle. Again the Mackay Police answered and I was informed that no police were on duty in Sarina until 6pm that evening. I was also told that if the offender became violent to call the Mackay Police again.

Due to no lockup in Sarina I understand that at present when 2 police officers have to take an apprehended person or persons to Mackay we are left with NO policeman for periods of 3 hours or more. As a caravan park owner and citizen I am feeling very vulnerable and unsafe in my town."

The letter goes on. It is signed by the proprietor of the Sarina Palms Caravan Park. I table that letter. I also have 22 similar letters from Sarina business houses and 289 signatures from people calling for the police station to be upgraded to a 24-hour operation. I take great pleasure in supporting the Bill.
