



Speech by

Mr T. MALONE

MEMBER FOR MIRANI

Hansard 25 November 1999

INCREASE IN CRIME

Mr MALONE (Mirani—NPA) (6.26 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to speak on this subject tonight. The subject of crime is one that will always occupy the minds of Queenslanders, especially when crime statistics back up the perception that crime rates are on the increase. My major concern, apart from the fact that Queenslanders' lives and property are increasingly at risk, is that police officers in this State are finding it more and more difficult to do their jobs properly. They have been given, and they have accepted, the responsibility of providing to the people of this State the safest possible environment in which to live, yet they are being frustrated in their efforts to do so.

I do not care how many statistics are churned out or how much rhetoric pours out of the Minister's office: I know for a fact that some police officers and some police stations in this State are grossly underresourced. Over recent months I have received reports from many areas of the State, especially from the more remote areas, indicating that resources have been horribly depleted under this Government.

When one talks to some of the police officers in regional Queensland, one finds that many of them are working under impossible conditions. They virtually have one hand tied behind their back. Many of these people are very resourceful, but when some of their basic necessities are taken away, performing at a top level is almost impossible. For example, I have been told of instances of fax machines that have been broken for some period of time simply not being repaired because funds are not available. How can police be expected to do their work when there is not enough money made available to maintain their offices? This is very basic stuff—the sort of thing that should never be a problem where sufficient funds are available.

Even more worrying are reports that in some single police officer stations the use of mobile phones has been curtailed. I have been told of instances where people have tried to contact these stations and have been denied access because calls have not been redirected to mobile phones when officers have been away from the station. I have been told that, because using mobile phones is more expensive, redirection of calls is not permitted in some situations. It might appear unbelievable, but I have been assured that this is the case. I know the people who have reported this to me and they are not prone to telling lies or exaggerating. This is an indictment on the Beattie Government, which is so big on rhetoric and public relations but so poor on performance.

I am very pleased to see that statistics on overall crime in the Mackay region indicate a decrease. Indeed, as the Minister has indicated, I went to the local media and indicated that I was pleased to see that, but even that comforting information for the people of that part of the State is tempered by other information being provided.

It is widely known that in some police areas in my electorate the annual overtime allocation has already been spent. One would have to wonder where they go from there. If the overtime budget is used up, are the officers expected to do the work in their own time? Where is the incentive for them to maintain their excellent record of fighting and reducing crime? How can we expect officers to enjoy their work and maintain high morale when they know that their efforts are being dominated by, and dictated by, a lack of resources? I have nothing against realistic targets and budgets being set and unnecessary spending being eliminated. In fact, I know many police officers who wholeheartedly agree with this line

of thought. But surely those budgets have to be realistic and have to accommodate the amount of work that is being set.

If the Minister wants to stand up in this House and boast about the Beattie Government's work, he should at least make sure that he is supplying sufficient resources to allow the police officers in this State to do their job properly. If he believes he is providing the necessary resources, but those resources are not getting out into the field, he should be asking why. He should be finding out why fax machines are not being fixed and why mobile phones are not being used. He should be finding out why overtime budgets are being used up in the first four months of the financial year. If the Minister thinks that those sorts of things are not occurring, he should get out and talk to the officers in the field.

I am sure the Minister knows about these things because the Police Commissioner would have told him. I am sure that many officers around the State have delivered this message, yet we continue to hear Beattie-inspired rhetoric from the Minister which does not reflect the real picture. The picture painted by the Minister could only be created by an artist wearing rose-coloured glasses.

If the Minister believes that his troops in the field are being well-resourced, he must be spending too much time in his office, or absorbing only the information that he wants to hear. The Queensland Police Service is undoubtedly being run down by the Beattie Government—probably not by design, but certainly by decree. No amount of window dressing can camouflage the holes already appearing in the 1999-2000 budget. No amount of rhetoric can gloss over the fact that officers in the field cannot continue to do their jobs properly if they are not adequately resourced.

Time expired.
