



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES BILL

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (3.50 p.m.): It gives me pleasure to speak on the Police Powers and Responsibilities Bill. I was on the Bills Committee with the previous Minister, Mr Cooper. I recognise the importance of this legislation and the amount of work that went into preparing it. As with any new legislation, it is not going to be 100% correct at the start. It is going to need some finetuning. I trust that this Bill will be no different.

Every member of this House says what a great job the police in their own electorate do. I am certainly no exception to that. With the changes in society, police are called upon to do work that 20 years ago we would not have believed they would have to do. They have adapted very well. One of the reasons we need new legislation is for our police to adapt to new challenges. The three areas I want to address in the debate on the Police Powers and Responsibilities Bill today relate to the distribution of police on the Sunshine Coast, the powers available for certain types of offences and the hardy annual issue of police numbers throughout Queensland, particularly on the north coast.

In relation to the distribution of police officers on the Sunshine Coast, I had some dealings in ensuring that the Kawana Waters area was given a police station. That occurred during the Goss Government. I think Mr Braddy was the Minister at the time.

Mr Nuttall: You are not taking all the credit for that, are you?

Mr LAMING: No, I am not taking all the credit. I was working very hard for my electorate, as I am sure the member for Sandgate works very hard in his electorate. The situation is that that station is not a 24-hour station. It operates mainly in daylight hours. The population increase in the Kawana area is quite huge. The station is strategically located on the Nicklin Way, which is the busiest road on the Sunshine Coast. As such, a lot of people who perhaps do not live in the area but drive past to go to work, school and other activities drop into the police station to report thefts and so on. I believe it is high time this station was extended to at least two shifts totalling 16 hours so it is open until midnight. A trial has been undertaken. It was a very good trial and it proved the benefit in having that police station open for longer hours.

The Mooloolaba police beat, which has been going for about five or six years, has proven to be an excellent strategic placement of police in an area that, over the last few years, has needed a police presence. I believe that the situation there is improving thanks to not only police numbers but also initiatives by community organisations, the council and local traders. We need to keep that effort up in that area. I would hope that officers can be made available to the Mooloolaba police beat. It is doing a good job, but it is certainly suffering a little from not having quite as many officers so as to make the job a little easier for those who find themselves stationed there.

The Sunshine Coast Police Service recently trialled a presence in Buderim, something that has been sought after for a long time by its residents. It is not a high crime area, but I might suggest—and I do not think I would get much disagreement by honourable members—that we do not wait for the problem to occur before putting police officers in. If we do, it is a rearguard action and playing catch-up football in order to get on top of the problem. It is always better to have a presence of police officers which quite often keeps crime away and discourages people from unlawful activities. The police presence in that area has been operating out of the post office at, as I understand it, no cost. The community really appreciates the occasional presence of police on Buderim Mountain.

Another matter which is quite serious and one that is not often discussed very much when talking about police is the water police. This initiative arrived on the Sunshine Coast in the last five or six years and is based at Mooloolaba. Water police do a great job. They are not quite as visible to most people as those police operating on the streets. I commend the water police officers, the same two officers who originally came to the area. They are doing a great job, but they are in very cramped circumstances. They are in an office that is leased from the Mooloolaba Yacht Club. I have been to visit them from time to time. I do believe that, with the importance of their work, they deserve a better office, perhaps on the Mooloolaba Spit. Perhaps they could make arrangements to share their office with DPI Fisheries or Harbours and Marine. I understand that a similar situation exists on the Gold Coast and that it works very well.

I would like to think that the Minister could give consideration to that sort of cooperation with the Maritime Division of Queensland Transport or Fisheries and other organisations that need to be together on the waterfront. I hope that consideration is given to that. I do not have the figures, but I wonder whether the Minister can avail himself of figures for the length of coastline covered by the water police, the number of vessels registered in that area and what staffing levels and equipment Mooloolaba has compared with some of the other areas. I do not wish for that exercise to take anything away from other police depots, but I think that Mooloolaba might be seen as not being as well equipped on a responsibility basis as some of those other places.

There is another issue I want to raise, and I have mentioned most of these issues in this place before. There is to be a new station at Beerwah. There has been an undertaking that the Landsborough Police Station will remain, and I certainly hope it does. It should not be seen just in juxtaposition with the work to be done out of Beerwah. The Landsborough Police Station also services the townships of Mooloolah and Eudlo, which is further north.

Mr Barton: The undertaking has already been given.

Mr LAMING: That is good. I am glad that the Minister has reiterated that undertaking. I am sure the people there will appreciate it. Perhaps down the track when the Beerwah station is being constructed—and this is being investigated—the situation at Mooloolah and Eudlo should be looked at. It is a long way between Landsborough and Palmwoods, which is the next station further north. There are two towns there with a significant population. That is another reason why Landsborough should be kept intact.

Mr Barton: I was there last Friday looking at the situation and again gave the locals that undertaking.

Mr LAMING: I thank the Minister for that undertaking.

Turning to the second issue I wish to raise, which refers directly to police powers, an issue which regularly comes up at Neighbourhood Watch meetings I attend is the frustration that people in the community feel about what is commonly called hoon drivers—those who have very loud exhausts and squeal the tyres, particularly at night. Although this might not register as high on the list of crimes, it is certainly one of those things that annoys hundreds of people at night, particularly on the weekends.

I brought up this matter at the recent AGM of the Community Police Partnership. This body does an excellent job of combining the thoughts of the community about and its aspirations for crime prevention on the Sunshine Coast. It has the active involvement of the three mayors on the Sunshine Coast. That it has support at that level is a signal that it is doing a good job.

When I raised this matter at the meeting there was general agreement among the people there that this is a significant community problem that is very difficult to police. From speaking to police officers about this matter I know that one of the problems is identifying who was actually driving the vehicle when it made the noise. People can get the registration number and the description of the vehicle. It may even be apprehended shortly after on the same evening, but the driver can say, "I was not driving the vehicle." I know that this may relate more to an Act administered by the Minister for Transport, but I would like this Minister to give some consideration to making the driver of the vehicle responsible, as we do with speed and red-light cameras. I do not know what the Minister thinks about that at first blush, but he might like to discuss that with police officers.

If somebody was really causing a problem and they had to be pursued and apprehended, that provision would obviate the necessity for police to chase a vehicle, which is better avoided where possible. If an officer has been able to identify the number of the vehicle—he might have seen it earlier in the evening and taken the number—the necessity to chase that vehicle, which is always a dangerous procedure, would be obviated.

A couple of years ago we were able to change regulations in relation to drinking in a public place. We were able to make that a SETONS offence, rather than an offence for which people had to be charged and go to court. We made it easier for police to do their job. We need to give police new ways of dealing with people who are finding new ways of avoiding police. People are finding ways to avoid being brought to book and we need to give police officers new ways of addressing some of these problems that are becoming more prevalent in the community.

I mention police numbers. We can give our police officers all the powers we would like, within reason, but unless we have adequate numbers of police in the community they are somewhat lost. I have raised this issue in this place before. It is good to see that Queensland's police to population numbers are getting fairly close to the Australian average. I believe that is an improvement. I compliment recent Police Ministers from both sides of politics for achieving that.

However, the north coast region still shows quite a significant departure from the average. I have done a bit of work on this subject and I have spoken to people in the human resources section of the service and with the Police Commissioner. The problem gets back to the police staffing allocation model. We can debate the model and whether it could be changed.

I asked the Minister a question and he answered by saying that he did not think it would make much difference to the numbers on the coast without affecting other regions, but there must be something wrong somewhere if one region shows such a significant departure. I am not looking at this from a parochial point of view in relation to the Sunshine Coast or the Maroochy district. I am keeping my comments broad and relating them to the region. The north coast region is quite big; it goes from Redcliffe up to Bundaberg. The other region that is similarly disadvantaged is the Minister's own region, which takes in the Logan area, probably for the same reasons.

Mr Musgrove: He has a selfless devotion to his portfolio.

Mr LAMING: The problem did exist prior to his becoming the Minister. I am a bit surprised that he did not raise it then.

This is quite a significant issue which needs to be addressed. As I said before, it is obvious that, regardless of the powers we give police officers, unless they are on the ground and unless they are visible then those powers are somewhat limited in their application.

I restate the three points I have brought to the attention of the House today. The first related to the distribution of the police stations on the coast, including the water police. The second related to powers to deal with hoon drivers, who are a significant nuisance in the community. It highlights frustration in the community. People say that police are not doing their job. I always assure them that they are doing their job but that there are some difficulties in the application of the legislation. The third issue was the allocation model and how it affects one or two regions in Queensland. I trust that the Minister will address those points.
