



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING

MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

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QUEENSLAND POLICE SERVICE

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (6.09 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to second the motion moved by the member for Toowoomba South. In common with all members on this side, I call on this Government to boost the Police budget.

I table a copy of a clipping from the Sunshine Coast Daily of only two days ago titled "Police crackdown puts hoon motorists in a spin". Honourable members will have heard me speak on a number of occasions about the problems locals and visitors experience with the hoon element in our communities. The statistics referred to in the article list: 24 people charged with drinking alcohol in a public place; 51 outstanding warrants executed and satisfied; 82 vehicle defect notices issued; eight people charged with driving while disqualified; 10 people charged with unlicensed driving; and 28 arrests for offences other than traffic offences, including break and enter—all this in one operation, and I commend the officers for their efforts. But wait. When we examine the numbers and the types of offences being committed, it is obvious that a lot of these offenders reckon the chance of being apprehended is worth the risk. Why is this? I will tell members why: because this Government is underresourcing the service in terms of officers and other resources, to the point at which a sustained presence is simply not possible.

I do not know what is happening in other regions. My colleagues will certainly add their comments, and I suspect that the Minister's colleagues are giving him the same messages as Opposition members are. There is no substitute for police officers on the beat, and they must be supported by stations, vehicles and other resources. I am on record in this place criticising police to population ratios in Queensland generally, and in the north coast region in particular. I am not alone in this. I make just a few comments sourced from the Queensland Police Union Journal of March this year in an article titled "Staffing model review". The article says that the model has "been perceived by members to be an abject failure". It states—

"Still the biggest problem with the model is the question of 'givens'."

Givens are comprised of support staff in police stations. If you do not have the police station, you do not have the givens. The article goes on to state—

"... if the model accurately reflects current working levels, there would be an improvement in numbers in areas where they are greatly needed.

If not, then maybe minimum staffing levels within divisions could be the answer to a problem of staff shortages that still seem to be the bane of every 'operational police officer'."

In short, the model needs, and has needed for some time, to be made relevant to the needs of not only police officers but also the public. Only then might we get some equity, particularly in growth areas.

Of course, the staffing model comes under such scrutiny only because there are not enough police officers to go around in the first place. The former Minister, Russell Cooper, ramped up the training program, only to see it slide in the past couple of years. What a disgrace it is to see that momentum lost.

Police numbers are not just about statistics; they are about having officers on the beat; they are about having an active presence and not just responding; they are about having the ability to become really proactive so as to increase police presence in schools and for Neighbourhood Watches and other community duties. I know that police are doing that now, and they are doing it very well, but as the

previous speaker said, they are doing it in their own time. Police are doing paperwork in their own time. I will turn to overtime in just a moment. Police do a great job, but there is a lot of stress out there. How many officers are on stress leave at the moment? The Minister might like to respond to that question.

I am pleased to say that we are getting the situation under control at Mooloolaba and similar places, but for two reasons these communities should not have to fork out to pay off-duty policemen to be present: firstly, police and their families need and deserve their time off; and, secondly, these business communities have already paid their taxes once. Neither should they be levied for security officers, who are expected to do quasi police work. That could give rise to a dangerous situation.

There is a simple answer: more funds in the next Budget for police—for stations, officers and resources. I have already written to the Minister on this matter. I am sure that if he has not read that letter, it is waiting for him. I referred to it in a speech just last night. I believe this is the most serious issue facing Queensland, and the Minister must face up to it. The second answer is to fix the police staffing model so that there is equitable distribution of those resources. That is most important. In the Minister's own electorate police are understaffed. The same applies in your electorate, Mr Speaker. I have seen the numbers in your area; they are even worse than mine, and I am sure that you are saying the same thing that I am saying to the Minister about this matter. We have to address the police staffing allocation model, and we have to have the right number of police officers to spread around in the first place, otherwise we are not going to move off square one.

Time expired.
