



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

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COURT HOUSE HOTEL, PORT DOUGLAS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (7.24 p.m.): I rise to bring to the attention of honourable members of this House a problem that is arising in the festive and famous town of Port Douglas north of Cairns. It is a problem that, if it has not occurred already in other cities around Queensland, it is likely to. Therefore, this matter has relevance to all of us in this House.

The problem that has arisen relates to noise complaints made over the past several months in relation to the music emanating from the Court House Hotel in Port Douglas on Sunday afternoons—not Sunday evenings or Sunday nights, but Sunday afternoons. It would appear that, technically, the complaints are correct and that there has been a breach of our present legislation in relation to the noise levels on several occasions. Therefore, the complaints are legally well based.

However, in my view the situation should not be managed purely as one that is in accordance with the law. Behind those complaints is a much more serious issue that bears on the future of Port Douglas and other similar cities in relation to music and entertainment in city areas. The owner of the Court House Hotel, Mr Michael Gabour, has been there for some nine years and has been managing that venue very successfully not only for his family and himself but also for the general town of Port Douglas. The Court House Hotel is a well-patronised venue that enjoys great popularity, particularly for its music on Sunday afternoons. As members might guess from its name, the old Court House Hotel, the entertainment is held in the beer garden. The hotel has high ceilings and lots of open windows. That is how it should be in the tropical climate of Port Douglas. On balmy afternoons people want to sit outside and be entertained.

For the past nine years, thousands upon thousands of people have enjoyed this music without complaint. In large part, that has been thanks to Mr Gabour's conciliatory approach. At all times he has attempted to work with nearby neighbours and other businesses to ensure that there is minimal disruption to any nearby activities and to cause as little nuisance as possible to others.

Currently, the complainants are serious about this issue, and I understand their point of view. However, they are new to the situation and they are small in number. In the meantime, thousands of people in Port Douglas have signed a petition asking that all members of this House give recognition to the importance not only of concerts at the Court House Hotel but also entertainment in general in the centre of Port Douglas and an acknowledgment that with that musical entertainment comes a certain level of noise.

There will always be people in our society who find noise offensive. Quite frankly, it is my view that those people should not move into city areas. Inner-city residences—as fine as they are—should not be sought by those who want peace and quiet. Silent cities are not possible or even an appropriate goal.

I believe that the challenge—and I know that the Minister has encouraged her department in this regard—is not to have a legalistic response to the present situation in Port Douglas but rather to have mediation. It will require mediation skills on the part of the departmental staff. I make no comment on their abilities in that regard as at this point I have no knowledge of them. However, rather than simply issuing orders or breaches, I strongly recommend mediation. I support the Minister's move in that direction. Our difficulty is that while Mr Gabour of the Court House Hotel may be willing to mediate and to seek a joint solution, we also need the complainants to be willing to participate in the mediation process.

As difficulties arise more and more in our complex communities, I think that many departments will be required to seek mediation as a means of finding solutions rather than resorting to the law. In this particular instance, that is the only way of suiting the majority whilst being mindful of the needs of the few and at the same time keeping Port Douglas the truly vibrant and festive community that it is and should continue to be not only for its residents but also for the many international visitors who visit not once but repeatedly.
