



Speech by

# Miss FIONA SIMPSON

## MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 19 July 2000

### DRUGS MISUSE AMENDMENT BILL

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (3.20 p.m.): I wish to speak briefly to this Bill and, in doing so, address the issue of the misuse of Rohypnol and the amendment that my colleague the shadow Police Minister will move.

The abuse of drugs in our society is robbing people of their destiny. I know that all members of this Chamber and other people in our communities are concerned about that. We often talk about people's freedom of choice—the choices that they make and of which they suffer the consequences. However, as people adopt lifestyles of substance abuse, which starts to control their destiny, they lose their freedom of choice and their ability to get themselves off drugs. As a community, we have to recognise that this occurs, particularly to young people who get caught in these circumstances.

I believe that, as elected representatives, we need to be very firm on our anti-drug stance to make sure that we send the clear message that drugs are robbing people of their destiny and that they are killing people. However, where people want to get off drugs and need help to do so, we must ensure that they are given the support to do so. So we need to strike a balance between sending the very clear message that there are penalties and consequences for those people who push drugs and providing assistance to those who want to get off drugs.

The statistics indicate that increasing numbers of young people, who are the future of our communities, are becoming addicted to these substances. That robs them of their ability to go out and earn a living. That creates that terrible cycle of people robbing other people, who have chosen to stay right away from drugs, and doing terrible things to them. Those people are the innocent victims of this whole nasty circle of drug abuse.

My colleague the shadow Police Minister referred to the misuse of Rohypnol during his speech. Previously, the legislation that this Bill amends came under the supervision of the Health portfolio. However, it has been recognised that there is a need for stronger penalties in relation to the misuse of such substances and the legislation has now come under the supervision of the Police portfolio. The misuse of this drug is particularly nasty in that it has been used as a weapon against people. As has been referred to earlier, Rohypnol has been used as a weapon of rape. People who have taken Rohypnol are not even aware that it has taken away their ability to make choices and decisions for themselves. When Rohypnol is combined with alcohol, people suffer blackouts and do not realise that sexual abuse has been committed against them and that they were not in a position to resist it.

That is why I support those stronger provisions in this legislation that address the misuse of Rohypnol. However, I particularly support the amendment that will be moved by my colleague because we recognise that there needs to be a penalty to fit this type of crime. Young men, young women and maybe older people have been targeted in a very nasty way by this so-called date rape drug. Certainly, such instances have occurred in the nightclub scene on the Sunshine Coast. People may in good faith accept drinks from other people without realising that those drinks have been spiked with such substances.

This is an opportune time to send a very clear message to people to never accept drinks from people whom they do not know or trust, to be very careful when they go out in groups, or to go out with people whom they trust and, when they are meeting new people, to make sure—and this relates particularly to young people—that they protect themselves and guard themselves. I wish that we could trust everybody. However, it is a sign of the times that we need to send that message, particularly to our

young men and our young women, to take people whom they trust with them when they go out to have a good time and socialise. They should not only look out for each other but also be ever so careful about the drinks that they accept from people. If those young people do not know or trust certain people, then they should not accept a drink from them.

Those warnings do not absolve those people who commit these crimes. However, we need to send the clear message to young people that there are predatory people in our community who look to take away people's freedom of choice and steal their innocence. I reiterate that the provision that takes these drugs and responsibilities out of the Health portfolio and places them in the Police portfolio is appropriate. However, there needs to be stronger penalties in recognition that the misuse of Rohypnol is a nasty crime and to send the very clear message to our judges and our courts that there needs to be the appropriate penalty that fits this crime of cowardice that destroys many lives. We do not want to see any more lives destroyed in our communities. We recognise that these laws need to be in place to protect people and provide a way of limiting the damage that has been done in our community.

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