



Speech by

KEN TURNER

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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DRUGS MISUSE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—IND) (2.51 p.m.): In 1974 the International Olympic Committee banned the use of steroids, yet 26 years later steroid use, or abuse, in the sporting arena is more prevalent than ever. Disturbingly, steroids are no longer limited to use by athletes or used solely for performance enhancement. Blue-collar and white-collar workers, females and, most alarmingly, adolescents are using anabolic steroids to improve their physiques. Dr Wadler, who won the International Olympic Committee's president's prize for his work on performance enhancing drugs in competitive sport, states—

"Unlike almost all other drugs, all steroid based hormones have a unique characteristic—their dangers may not be manifest for months, years and even decades."

Therefore, long after people have given up using these substances they may develop side effects such as increased aggressive behaviour and irritability, mood swings, cancer of the liver, premature heart attacks and strokes.

Ephedrine, the stimulant favoured by truck drivers, has been identified as the worst over-the-counter and mail-order product by the United States Food and Drug Administration. Due to the underground nature of these drugs it is difficult to gauge the extent of the problem and the repercussions on the community. Traffic accidents, domestic violence and psychological disorders have all been attributed to ephedrine.

Abusing one's own body with performance enhancing drugs or ephedrine is one thing, but using a drug to abuse another's body is quite a different matter. Rohypnol is a drug that can be used to abuse another's body. Rohypnol is colourless, odourless and tasteless and has a potency 10 times higher than Valium. A tablet of Rohypnol costs between 50c and \$5 and quickly dissolves in liquid, making it the date rape chemical of choice.

Rohypnol acts as a sedative, slowing motor skills and inducing amnesia, muscle relaxation or even blackout. These effects can last up to 12 hours, causing the victim to be uncertain about the facts surrounding the rape. This uncertainty may lead to critical delays in investigation or even a reluctance to report the rape. A women's safety survey conducted in 1996 showed that 89% of rape victims knew the perpetrator, yet date rape is rarely reported to the police. Although it has been an offence for a very long time, date rape has only recently been acknowledged as a serious social problem. Because violence is not involved when a rape victim has been drugged with Rohypnol, certain quarters are reluctant to consider this offence to be criminal or unacceptable behaviour. It is important for officials to understand that using other forms of coercion to obtain sex is still rape.

In the United States Rohypnol is a schedule 1 drug, not a schedule 2 drug. It is not legally available, even for medicinal purposes, yet it is the most easily accessible drug and its use is increasing at a rate faster than that of any other drug. Let this be a warning to us. We can legislate today to make it an offence to trade in and use these drugs, but that will not make an iota of difference if we do not follow through with education and awareness. Legislation alone has not been a deterrent in the use of other illegal drugs, so we must not kid ourselves that this is enough.

Australia usually follows the trends of the United States. According to the young people in my constituency I have spoken to about Rohypnol, it is being used and has been used extensively for years. Chemically assisted date rape is not going to easily disappear, and we need to educate our

young on how to protect themselves. We also need to educate our officials on the extent of the problem.

Rohypnol is gaining popularity amongst high school and university students. The drug intensifies the effects of alcohol, so it becomes a very cheap way of having the feeling of drunkenness. Rohypnol can severely impair driving yet cannot be detected by regular breath testing. Its presence will only be apparent from a urine test. The psychochemical trend is expanding, and this Bill is the first step in turning around this dangerous trend. Also, the world is looking to Australia for assurance that international sport can again be safe and fair. This Bill is a necessary step towards giving that assurance. I support this Bill.
