



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Hansard 22 June 2000

DRUG INJECTING ROOMS

Dr CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (6.50 p.m.): The debate tonight about the introduction of safe injecting rooms is, at its core, about what kind of public policy we will commit to as a Government and as a community. The coalition takes the view that we must rid our society of drugs completely—the zero tolerance approach—irrespective of the fact that this has never been achieved by any society at any time. By contrast, the key principle underpinning Australia's drug strategy since 1985 is the concept of harm minimisation, which has been so derided tonight, but it is the one to which Queensland is committed and which, up until now, has had bipartisan support. But clearly the coalition is signalling tonight that it seems, to me at least, to be moving away from that position to a strategy, a philosophy and a policy based on head in the sand. It is as if members opposite really do not want to confront the reality in our community.

Support for the concept of harm minimisation is not to condone drug use. It is a recognition of reality and it is a pragmatic approach to the fact that there will always be people who choose to use drugs. Drugs have been part of every culture since the dawn of civilisation. But it is also a recognition of the fact that we have a collective responsibility to reduce the harm that drug users do to themselves and to others in our community. That responsibility also extends to doing all in our power to prevent young people in particular from taking drugs and becoming addicted and to support them when they decide they want to lead a drug-free life or to use illegal drugs in a safe manner.

These are not band-aids, as they have been referred to by the shadow Minister. Regardless of our personal views about the trial of safe injecting rooms, prevention and rehabilitation are subjects on which we all agree. There is no question about that. But it seems to me that many of the contributions in this debate from the coalition have attempted to convey that we are at odds, when in fact there are many matters on which we all agree.

Which of the programs that have been discussed tonight would members opposite abandon? Which of our current approaches under our harm minimisation drug policy would they abandon? Is it the PPP programs? No! Is it the drug courts? No! They have proved a success elsewhere, and we are trialling those. Is it Naltrexone? No! Members opposite have said that we should go ahead with Naltrexone. Is it methadone? Would members opposite cease the methadone program? Would they stop the needle availability program? No! Would they stop rehabilitation programs? No! So what they are actually saying is that they want more of all the things that we are currently doing. They want more rehabilitation, as do we. They want more of the programs that will educate our young people. They want more programs such as the Rock Eisteddfod and Croc Eisteddfod. So where is the difference?

It seems to me the difference is that we are prepared to look rationally at every option that attempts to reduce the numbers of deaths of young people from drug addiction. We are prepared to confront the reality in our society. We are prepared to rationally address this problem and consider the best strategies. We are not about to adopt anything that does not work. We are not stupid. We are not about to do things that will damage young people's lives. So members opposite should stop the rhetoric in which they have engaged tonight, which does not achieve anything, and instead—

Mr Borbidge: This speech is a disgrace, an absolute disgrace.

Dr CLARK: The Opposition Leader said that this is a disgrace. Where is the disgrace in outlining the programs we have that are working to assist drug users? Where is the disgrace in saying that we should—

Mr Borbidge: It is all about safe injecting rooms, which you are supporting.

Dr CLARK: I am not supporting them, and it is clear that the Opposition is trying to divide us on this issue. We are not supporting them.

Time expired.
