



Speech by

Mr. R. CONNOR

MEMBER FOR NERANG

Hansard 30 May 2000

MR P. VISENTIN; POLICE NUMBERS, NERANG

Mr CONNOR (Nerang—LP) (11.30 a.m.): I rise to speak on the recent attempted armed robbery and shoot-out at Nerang, and also to commend the overworked and highly respected police in Nerang.

Who can forget the sight of Mr Visentin, the owner of the Nerang Antique Jewellery Store, his face covered in blood after guns were fired in his store in the centre of Nerang? Who can forget the look on his son's face when he arrived at the scene shortly afterwards? He was overcome with grief due to what his family had been through and joy that his father and mother were still alive.

Most people do not realise that this was not the first time this store had come under attack. In 1993 an almost identical circumstance occurred. That time it was Hadyn Visentin, Paul's son, who had to face armed robbers in the same store, in the same place—the centre of Nerang—in daylight. That time the armed robber survived; this time he did not.

To fill members in on the background to the more recent event, at approximately 3 p.m. last Wednesday three armed robbers entered the Nerang Antique Jewellery Store and opened fire. There were at least nine bullet holes in the back wall. There were spent cartridge shells all over the floor. There was broken glass. Mr Visentin came very close to being shot; in fact, he received a 1-inch or 30-millimetre cut on his face from a passing bullet. He received wounds from broken glass as a bullet penetrated the one-way mirror at the back of the store. Mr Visentin returned fire. What sort of courage does it take to confront three armed robbers who are firing on you in your own store? I congratulate Mr Visentin on protecting his family and himself.

Mr Elliott: The only pity is he didn't shoot the lot of them.

Mr CONNOR: I take that interjection.

My office is immediately behind the Visentin store. Shortly after the incident occurred I went to see Mr Visentin. Obviously he was extremely upset. People do not appreciate the level of trauma that this sort of incident creates. Sure, there was a lot of physical damage, both to himself and to his shop, but the level of trauma inflicted on the family and those around them has to be seen to be believed or understood. It is highly tragic.

Mr Visentin is now closing his store. As he said to me, "After the last time, I talked my wife into staying on. What would have happened this time if she had been shot? How could I have lived with myself? How could I have forgiven myself?" So he is closing his store. What does that say? It says that Nerang is no longer a safe place in which to conduct business.

Before canvassing some of the background issues leading up to this incident, I want to make one further point. Just two days after that shoot-out, they had another go at Mr Visentin's store. This time they tried to break in through the roof. The two armed episodes and the latest attempted break and enter are not the only recent attempts on this store. Since 1993 there have been five attacks on this one store of which I am aware, and there were a couple before that. That gives members some idea of just how bad the situation in Nerang has become.

Lavelle Street is in the middle of Nerang's CBD. Mr Visentin's store is 150 metres from the Nerang Police Station. What chance do the people of Nerang have if, due to a lack of numbers, the police cannot protect the centre of Nerang in daylight? At night-time the Nerang area is not even serviced by a police car; it has to share a car with Mudgeeraba. Only one police car covers the area

from the New South Wales border at Springbrook right through to the Nerang River. It would take three quarters of an hour at high speed in a police car to get from one end of the police patrol to the other. It is simply not good enough.

Over the last 18 months or so I have been corresponding regularly with police and the Minister trying to bring his attention to the level of concern and fear that exists in the Nerang community. Just after the change of Government in 1998 I asked a question of the Police Minister about the staffing levels at the Nerang Police Station. At that time there were 20 operational general duties police. They are the Minister's own words. Seven months later I wrote to the police and was advised that their numbers were down to 11. In seven months under the Beattie Labor Government, the Police Minister allowed the effective police strength in Nerang to decrease from 20 to 11—almost half. That is totally unacceptable and disgraceful. I brought the Minister's attention to that fact.

The police in my electorate cannot even properly man the police vehicles. A lot of the time they are going out one up. In addition, they do not have time to catch up on paperwork. There is no chance for them to do any proactive policing. I have brought these matters to the attention of the Police Minister and the police on the coast numerous times. We just do not have the numbers. I table nine letters that I have written over the last 18 months to either the police or the Minister. I table also the responses to them. The Minister cannot suggest that he was unaware of the situation. I have proof to the contrary in my hand.

These matters have also been front-page news in the Hinterland Sun, the local newspaper, and there have been other articles in the Gold Coast Bulletin. Just over 10 days ago in the Hinterland Sun there was a full front-page story about youth gangs, extortion and vandalism. The article detailed a litany of crime and law and order problems in Nerang. What happens? Nothing!

Last year the people of Nerang became so concerned about police numbers that a mass rally was held. Hundreds of people turned up to Bischoff Park in the middle of Nerang to voice their concerns about just how bad the situation had become. The No. 1 unanimous resolution from that meeting was a call for more police at the Nerang Police Station. The current staffing levels are simply not good enough.

As a result of their huge workload, the police have to do overtime. How else can they get through the work? However, police overtime has now been cut, so they cannot even work extra hours to try to get the work done. They are overworked, they are not allowed to do overtime, and the situation continues to become worse and worse. It has turned Nerang into a war zone. The scene at the Nerang Antique Jewellery Store resembled a war zone. Mr Visentin looked like a refugee walking out of Beirut or somewhere in Yugoslavia. This was downtown Nerang in daylight hours. The police still could not catch the offenders. The store is located 150 metres from the police station. That is some indication of the limited extent of the police resources in Nerang. It is simply not good enough. The Minister has to do something about it.

If this position prevailed in downtown Brisbane or in Beenleigh, which is in the Minister's electorate, he would fix it. This is not just an operational matter; it is a matter of police safety. Mr Barton is the Minister for Police in Queensland, and he should do something about it. Police numbers are not up to scratch in Nerang. In the last few years the population of Nerang has almost doubled, and as a result a new electorate has been created. The number of parliamentary representatives has doubled, yet we have received no additional police.

Time expired.
