



Speech by

**Mr P. PURCELL**

**MEMBER FOR BULIMBA**

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Hansard 20 June 2001

**COMMUNITY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr PURCELL** (Bulimba—ALP) (5.21 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to rise to support the Community Services Legislation Bill. I believe that the minister, Judy Spence, has been very courageous in introducing it. A lot of people have stepped around this problem. I refer in particular to the policy objectives of the bill from (e) to (m) with regard to the Island Industries Board and members and the ramifications of that part of the bill.

Many people would like to see the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the north do better than they are doing. I believe that this bill will go a long way towards assisting them to do that. There has been consultation, and the minister has been talking to everybody concerned. The minister is noted for being able to talk to people, to hear what they have to say and to then act on their thoughts in order to improve their lot through legislation. I congratulate the minister on that.

I have witnessed examples of how this bill will certainly assist communities with which I have been involved. I have done various trips to the Torres Strait. I did one memorable trip with Tommy Burns, when we drove from Cairns to Bamaga and spoke with many people. One place we visited was Napranum, and our visit to that community really sticks out in my mind. The chairman of that community and the AC—the person who assisted the council—were outstanding. That council probably had the same chairman and council—except for turnovers because of deaths—for 10 years, and it showed in that community.

The community council worked very hard for their people. They were very candid when speaking to us. They were not looking for a lot of assistance; they were just looking for their fair share. One of the issues that they took up with us—and which we raised with the then Aboriginal and Islander minister when we returned—was that if they got funding for five community houses, they would be able, through their work for the dole scheme and from talking to the people for whom they were building the houses, to make sure they built houses that they wanted, therefore saving money. If they did not want a big place, or there were special needs to be met, they would talk to them. They had their own block factory, which was a great start. They produced a lot of their own building materials, and they cut their own timber and processed it.

With the money that would have been allocated for five houses, they might have been able to build eight or nine houses. But they were getting penalised. So they were complaining about that, and I agreed with them. In the next round of funding they were to be trimmed because of the number of houses they had built. Fortunately, that was rectified. They were using work for the dole money. They were training their own people. They had apprentices working for them. They even had their own construction company. It was a marvellous effort. They had their own police officers there—special officers who worked within the community. The chairman was quite candid. I said, 'What happens if people in this community do not want to work for the dole?' He said, 'Well, we are surrounded by very large tracts of land where they can go out and hunt and catch and kill their own food. Because if they do not work they do not get the dole. They are required to do so many hours a week, and if they do not do it they do not get the money.' I thought that was marvellous. I thought obviously this chairman and this council have the respect of their community, and it is working for them. I will not name the community that I am going to use as an example. I was there on a Public Works Committee hearing. But that might identify it more than I want to, I suppose.

**Ms Spence:** You went to a few.

**Mr PURCELL:** Yes, I went to a few. That is right. I thank the minister for getting me out of that hole. It was like chalk and cheese, day and night. That community had just held its election, and a bloke with the nickname of Six-pack Joe became the chairman. Joe got elected on a platform to build a tavern, and that was about the only platform on which he was elected. The community was divided into thirds because of the make-up of the people in it—the tribes or where they came from.

I knew quite well some of the people who worked in the local school. One of them was a former delegate of mine from the Gold Coast—a builders labourer. We had a beer over lunch at his place and a bit of a chat about the community. He was quite candid about what was happening and why, and I was able to follow up some of those issues during the public hearing and put the wood on some of our own people to see that we did something about it.

One of the things that concerned me was that, before we went in to conduct the hearing, there were children who were sniffing glue within sight of the council. They obviously should have been at school, because they were of school age. But there was nobody there in authority. From the police officers down, nobody did anything about those children who were sniffing glue—nothing was done to protect them. I can assure members that I gave the inspector from Cairns a hard time. He said that he and his officers could do nothing about it. But it was his obligation and duty, where children were in danger, to do something about it and to take them into protective custody. They have the greatest jail in the world there, but it is empty. I will not say what I said to the police officers outside the hearing and off transcript, but I told them what I thought of the three of them; they were not doing their duty and were not looking after people.

The difference was that, at the other community I had been to, they knew that the glue sniffers were coming in and teaching their children bad habits. They got rid of them from their community and got the backing of their community to do so. Those children who engaged in that practice were taken out into the scrub for a period, they were talked to by the elders who had an influence on them, and that ceased to be a problem. I have to say that some of this nonsense was being perpetrated by people coming in from the territory; it was not a Queensland problem to start with. I am not trying to blame anybody, but it was something that was foreign to those communities and was introduced by other people. So I see this bill as certainly improving those communities and giving those councils every opportunity to deliver better governance for their people.

In relation to the water system at Napranum—we do not do it really well if we do not put a lot of thought into it. The water main for the town was a two-inch main. I will not say what I could do after a night out, but I could probably do better than what went down that water main. They had to replace the whole water system—which they were doing at council expense—because of a lack of forethought by the people who managed those communities in the early days. I do not want to blame certain governments, but it was certainly not in our time. Moneys were wasted in those places because, during their development, no forethought was put into how big they would become, and people were not consulted as to their needs.

I congratulate the minister on her forethought and her courage in introducing this measure. In years to come, people will look back to the introduction of this bill as a significant turning point. With a lot of hard work—because nothing will happen by accident, as we know—things will change in these communities in the future. I support the bill.

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