



Speech by

**Hon. R. WELFORD**

**MEMBER FOR EVERTON**

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Hansard 4 April 2001

### DRUG STRATEGY

**Hon. R. J. WELFORD** (Everton—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Justice) (6.15 p.m.): I move the following amendment—

Amend words after 'supports the' to now read—

'Queensland Drug Strategic Framework—a whole-of-Government strategy to break the drugs cycle in our communities through measures such as:

- a. Increased rehabilitation and detoxification facilities and resources
- b. Reform to the justice system which focuses on rehabilitation of drug users including the Queensland Strategy for Illicit Drug Use Prevention and the Drugs Court trial
- c. Enhanced prevention programs and drug education
- d. Properly resourced police and anti-crime agencies to pursue drug producers and suppliers of drugs, including the employment of nearly 1,000 additional police officers over the next three years
- e. Tough sentences for drug traffickers and major drug dealers
- f. Rejection of injecting rooms or the legalisation of marijuana or other illicit drugs as effective measures to address illicit drug trafficking and use
- g. The use of specially trained youth health nurses to work with students and school communities to promote good health and address health issues of concern to Queensland youth such as smoking prevention, alcohol and drug use.
- h. The Positive Parenting Program or Triple P initiative is an important part of the Government's strengthening families strategy giving parents the tools they need to help them overcome problems, such as drug taking, before they take root.'

I take into account the comments of the honourable member opposite and indicate that our government does not want to politicise this issue. A measure of the common ground that has been achieved between the government and members on all sides of the House is the fact that the cameras are not here tonight, because the cameras are here when there is conflict. Regrettably, this issue is not likely to be reported tomorrow. As important as it is, it is less likely that it will get good coverage simply because all members of this parliament recognise the seriousness of the drug issue and are prepared to show some commitment to common ground for it. That is why the amendment proposed by the government as a variation to the motion moved by the opposition adopts all the things the opposition believes is important, such as a statewide strategy, and incorporates all the components contained in the opposition motion, together with a couple of other things which I am sure opposition members will note our government is currently doing and which the previous coalition government had some participation in, particularly parts (g) and (h) of the motion.

In any event, our government is determined to do everything it can to prevent the spread of drugs and the illegal use of drugs in our community. We have already put in place an important initiative, an initiative more comprehensive than anything ever before. Beyond the quick-fix, the Queensland Drug Strategic Framework is a comprehensive whole-of-government approach involving all agencies with a role in drug policy development and implementation. It involves a range of approaches such as school drug education, anti-drug prevention and promotion, drug treatment and rehabilitation services and support for families of people with drug problems. We have put into place a total package of measures—new approaches to a problem that reaches all sections of our society. I am pleased that the opposition is supporting these measures by and large, because our government is willing to acknowledge that support in the House tonight.

Let me firstly refer to the Queensland Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative. Recently, the Premier announced an agreement with the federal government in which \$19.5 million is being provided over four years for this initiative. The major element is a police diversion program for major offenders caught with minor amounts of cannabis—that is, 50 grams or less for personal use. Those offenders who meet the strict eligibility criteria will be offered an opportunity to attend an authorised assessment and education intervention program to address their cannabis use rather than being charged. Violent offenders and those dealing in drugs will not be eligible. Further treatment services will also be provided to those people who are dependent on cannabis and will benefit from more intensive treatment.

This initiative will be implemented across Queensland from 24 June this year and will provide services as close as possible to where people live. The aim of this joint state-Commonwealth initiative is to maximise the opportunities for drug users to break away from the use of drugs and to take personal responsibility for their lives. It provides offenders with an incentive to address their drug use early before incurring a criminal record. Our government supports realistic initiatives to break the cycle of drug dependence. We are building on our work in the first term to make sure our police, schools and health services can make a difference. The Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative complements the Queensland drug court trial, an important innovation funded in total by our government. This 30-month trial, which began at Beenleigh, Southport and Ipswich courts in June last year, marks a comprehensive shift in the way the Queensland criminal justice system deals with drug-related crime.

The Drug Rehabilitation (Court Diversion) Act 2000 empowered the drug courts to divert offenders from imprisonment by making an intensive drug rehabilitation order. These intensive rehabilitation orders imposed by the court are not soft options. Offenders are diverted into residential and non-residential treatment programs and carefully monitored. If they breach a rehabilitation order, they will find themselves back in jail.

The drug courts trial aims to reduce the level of drug dependency in the community, reduce the level of criminal activity associated with drug dependency, reduce the health risks to the community associated with drug dependency and reduce pressure on resources in the courts and our prison system. Our government has committed to extending the drug courts trial ultimately to Townsville and Cairns.

As I said, this government will do everything it can to prevent the spread of drugs and the illegal use of drugs in our community. We believe that the best way to break the drug cycle is to get in early, and that is why we are providing education, prevention and counselling programs. But we also recognise that a combination of measures is needed. We cannot focus on just one aspect. Our government's illicit market scan project, focusing on pinpointing illicit drug markets within certain geographic areas, the targeting of crime hot spots and the commitment to an additional 1,000 police are all important in breaking the drug cycle.

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