



Speech by

Mr R. QUINN

MEMBER FOR ROBINA

Hansard 10 April 2002

CRIME STATISTICS

Mr QUINN (Robina—Lib) (5.57 p.m.) I move—

That this Parliament believes the community should be able to access data on crime rates in their local areas and therefore calls on the Minister for Police to reverse his decision yesterday that ended the practice of providing Members of Parliament with crime statistics for individual police divisions which now means suburban breakdowns will not be available to the public.

I do so because I am genuinely concerned that the practice that the government had in the past was an open one and it allowed members of parliament, through the avenue of asking questions on notice, to ask for details about crime statistics within their areas and to use those details as provided by the minister in terms of working with Neighbourhood Watch groups and the police consultative committees for the betterment of the community in general.

The fact that the minister has said that he will no longer allow those statistics to be given out in answer to a question on notice sends a real shiver of alarm through members of parliament, particularly those on this side. After all, we have had a longstanding convention in this House that those statistics are provided to members of parliament. In fact, for quite a considerable period we have been applying and getting those crime statistics for areas such as Cairns, Townsville, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. In the past we have had cooperation from the minister, but that cooperation has been withdrawn and we now have to refer to the annual report, which does not give those statistics in the form of the breakdown that we require.

This is not an onerous task. For the minister to say—if he does say it—that it uses valuable police resources is just a nonsense argument. Those statistics are collated as a matter of process within the department, and to allow members of parliament access to those statistics requires only the pressing of a computer button, then out they come and they are tabled in the House. So this change has nothing to do with police resources, it has nothing to do with the wastage of money; it is simply a fact of whether or not the government wants to allow these statistics to be released.

If those statistics are not released, if the minister is going to maintain his position, then this is just another step down the path to the secret state. The government is locking up information, refusing to allow it to be accessed by members of parliament and the public in general. It is putting a cloak of secrecy around the real crime rates in this state and how they impact upon local areas.

Over the past four years under this government, crime has increased by about 17 per cent. Of course, we do not know in which suburbs the larger increases have been. The intention of this motion is to ask the minister to comply with the previous convention and supply those statistics.

It is regrettable that this motion has to be moved in the House to force the government to answer a question on notice. How regrettable is it when a motion has to be moved in the House to highlight the minister's actions. He is refusing to supply statistics which are available quite easily from within his own department. One can only assume that this is bringing down the veil of secrecy even tighter over the government of Queensland. In fact, it is an act of breathtaking arrogance and typical of a government which has a huge 66-seat majority in this House. This government thinks it can overturn a convention or process which has been in existence for quite some time, and refuse to provide those statistics.

In the past, we have had access to these figures. In May last year those figures were provided to the member for Caloundra when she asked about crimes reported for each station area within the Sunshine Coast district. What did she receive? A 20-page print-out—which is very easy to supply—listing station by station the statistics for homicides, murders, assaults, break and enters, and so on! As I said, this is nothing new or novel. It has been an ongoing scenario for quite some time. In fact, prior to the change of government, these statistics could be accessed through the Parliamentary Library. Any member of parliament could go to the library and ask for the statistics for the police stations in their electorate. The library staff would ring up the Police Service, access the material and out it would come. This is not secret material. It has been available for many, many years. For the government to say now that it will not provide them and that we should go to the annual report where the figures are simply listed by region is a backward step from being open about the crime rates and where they are occurring throughout Queensland.

In fact, opposition members are not the only ones who were receiving these statistics. Even Labor Party members were receiving them. The blanket censure on releasing these statistics now will, of course, apply to everyone. However, if a member of the government really wants them, do members really think the minister will not supply them? That will still apply. The only people who will be disadvantaged by this new rule brought into the House by the minister are the non-government members. It is just a way of preventing members on this side of the House from accessing statistics we have had access to for quite some time and working with their communities to identify problem areas and putting in place the necessary responses with the local community, Neighbourhood Watch and the police consultative committee to work out solutions.

It is a pretty straightforward motion and it is regrettable that we have had to move it, because it really highlights the actions of this government. This would never have occurred if the minister was responsible enough to understand why the statistical breakdown is needed and to act in an open and accountable manner. The fact that he is not says that this government is trying to hide the rates of crime in a particular area.

I think I have covered the issue fairly well. It is not a long and involved debate; it is simply a matter of whether the government wants to continue with the protocol which has been in place. The fact that it does not means that it has something to hide and is not willing to be open and accountable. This is just another step down the path of the secret state agenda. The government has tightened up the FOI process to make it impossible to obtain information unless the application is from a large multinational company. Now there is this process of refusing to answer a question on notice when the material is available at no undue cost to the Police Service. It is simply a matter of the minister not wanting to release it. By doing this, he has said, 'No, I refuse to release the information.' No reason is given, it is simply a blanket no.

That is not acceptable in this day and age. The minister cannot simply buck the requirement to be open and accountable all the way down the line. To wind back a practice which has been in place for some time is unbelievably arrogant and a sign that this government really does not care whether or not it is open and accountable. This is simple; it is easy. Every member of this parliament should be supporting this motion. It is what has happened in the past, it is nothing new. It is not a step into the brave new world, it is simply asking the minister to provide the relevant information.
