



Speech by

**Mr R. QUINN**

**MEMBER FOR ROBINA**

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Hansard 3 September 2002

**DRUG REHABILITATION [NORTH QUEENSLAND COURT DIVERSION INITIATIVE]  
AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr QUINN** (Robina—Lib) (6.02 p.m.): It was the Liberal and National parties who first championed the trial of drug courts in Queensland. On 22 June—

**Mr Shine** interjected.

**Mr QUINN:** Yes, I will. On 22 June 1999 the Liberal and National parties moved a motion calling on the Beattie government to set up the state's first drug court. The motion was defeated by the Labor Party, which wanted more time to consider the issue. It claimed that it needed to study models interstate and overseas, but the studying had already been done. It boiled down to actually committing the money and putting the program in place. Finally, in November 1999, the Labor Party announced that it would introduce legislation to set up a trial of three drug courts but only in the south-east corner of the state—in Ipswich, Beenleigh and Southport.

In the lead-up to the 2001 state election our side of politics committed itself to introducing drug courts across Queensland. In fact, we talked about eight drug courts across the state. That is why today, some three years later, we are pleased to see that the government is moving to introduce drug courts into the northern part of the state. I still believe that there is need for additional drug courts across the state. There are areas other than those in which the drug courts currently operate that could benefit from them. Areas such as Mackay, Toowoomba, Hervey Bay, Maryborough and the Sunshine Coast also deserve to have drug courts because of their particular problems.

We all know that the social cost of drugs is enormous. It is estimated that two-thirds of all crimes committed in Queensland are drug related. That means that if we can break drug addiction we can begin to eat away at the major causes of crime in our community. Drug courts give non-serious offenders a chance. They offer rehabilitation. I think everyone in this chamber would rather see people who have a drug problem being rehabilitated than serving time in prison. So far the Beattie government's crime prevention strategy has not worked in north Queensland. I indicated today during question time that break and enters have increased by 10 per cent since the government took office and motor thefts have increased by 25 per cent. These are indications of the serious nature of drug abuse in this part of the state. It is unfortunate that it has taken this time for the government to understand that there needs to be a drug court in the northern area of the state. If drug courts are to be successful, though, the rehabilitation programs have to be properly funded. There is no use having a court if the resources and the programs to help addicts to beat their addiction are not available. We welcome the bill but caution that it will be ineffectual if the government does not provide the resources necessary to make sure that the programs work.

During the recent estimates process it was revealed that to date the drug courts had cost Queensland some \$6.5 million but had resulted in only 31 successful graduates. It was also revealed that of the 400 people that had been assessed to take part in the program over the past three years just 90 are still involved. I think there needs to be a serious examination of the programs the government has put in place and the level of resources in order to make sure that these programs are much more effective than the results to date would indicate. These are not good results and they indicate that the programs are not properly tailored to breaking addiction.

We want our drug court program to work, but we know that it will only have a future if the community can see that it delivers results. If the community perceives or sees that money is being spent but the runs are not on the board, they will quickly become disillusioned with the courts and look for other solutions to the problem. The results need to be a lot better if the community enthusiasm for this project is to be maintained and political support is to be ongoing. As I said, we welcome the bill. We support the legislation.