



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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DRUG DIVERSION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (2.46 p.m.): One of the most difficult and devastating issues facing not only my community but society as a whole is illicit drugs. The abuse of drugs always leads to pain, grief and immense sadness. The abuse of drugs leads many people into a soul destroying cycle where every waking moment is consumed with how to get money to buy more drugs. As we unfortunately know, people too often become involved in crime because of their need for drugs. It is a vicious cycle that sweeps many innocent people into its path, especially the parents, friends and relatives whose sons or daughters are lost to the harshest and cruelest side of our society.

Having only this week visited Logan House with numerous other state Labor parliamentarians, I heard at first-hand from some of the people there how in their opinion sending some people to prison often teaches them how to be better and bigger criminals. I know that there are many positives that come out of rehabilitation within the state corrective services, but I sincerely believe that we need to look at other ways apart from just building bigger prisons and throwing in more people.

The Beattie government has made a commitment to tackle the problem of drug related crime. We are determined to do everything we can to prevent the spread of drugs and the illegal use of drugs in our society. We have established the drug court in south-east Queensland and more recently in north Queensland where offenders addicted to hard core drugs get a chance to undergo rehabilitation and reclaim their lives. I acknowledge that further drug courts will be established in the future, subject to funding. I have asked the Attorney-General and his relevant cabinet colleagues not to forget the Sunshine Coast.

But if we are to make a real impact on the drug problem and stop a new generation becoming addicted to drugs, we need to intervene at the earliest possible stage. The bill will facilitate the trialing of the Illicit Drugs Court Diversion program at certain Magistrates Courts. This program will let young people address the consequences of drug addiction before they become entwined in a life of crime, damaging our society and of course themselves. The Beattie Labor government has no intention to legalise the possession of any illicit drug. Reputable evidence continues to demonstrate that illicit drugs are dangerous to the user and dangerous to society. While our government will continue to take a hard line on drugs, we must support innovative solutions to address drug related crime. If we can show people who are caught in possession of small amounts of dangerous drugs for their personal use that there is no future in using drugs, we have an opportunity to expose them to the treatment before their addiction becomes full blown.

Reputable clinic research demonstrates that if drug users are exposed to treatment before drug addiction becomes serious, there is an improved chance of stopping drug use. The police diversion program now targets people in possession of small amounts of cannabis sativa of less than 50 grams. From the commencement of the police diversion program in June 2001 to 27 August 2002, 6,635 offenders were diverted. Over 5,000 of these offenders have already successfully expedited their offence by attending an assessment and education session with a health service provider. The compliance rate for the program is currently 81 per cent, a true success.

The Drug Diversion Amendment Bill will provide the legislative framework to facilitate the next stage of the drug diversion initiative, the Illicit Drugs Court Diversion program, by allowing magistrates in prescribed courts the power to send eligible offenders who plead guilty to possession of a small quantity of drugs for their personal use to a drug assessment and education session. If the offender attends that session, no further action will be taken on the charge, apart from a finding of guilty having been made but no conviction recorded. Offenders who fail to attend the ordered session will be returned to the court to be sentenced for the original drug offence. Offenders will be eligible to attend a drug assessment and education session only if they admit guilt to an eligible drug offence. I commend the minister. We as a government must look at other alternatives. Bigger prisons is not the answer, but addressing the issue in other ways definitely is. I commend the bill to the House.