



Speech by

**Mr D. BRISKEY**

**MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND**

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Hansard 22 August 2002

### **CORRECTIVE SERVICES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BRISKEY** (Cleveland—ALP) (4.50 p.m.): I rise to speak in support of the Corrective Services Amendment Bill. The proposed amendments within this bill are designed to ensure the long-term future of what has been a very successful program within the rehabilitative sector of Queensland's corrective services system. The establishment of WORC camps across 11 locations in Queensland since 1990 has provided a blanket of benefits to both the offenders who have been placed within the camps and to the community at large. One big spin-off has been the enormous economic injection to western and northern rural communities. I will touch on this aspect in a moment.

The corrective services system has progressed in leaps and bounds over the last decade or so. We now have a system which balances the needs of the government's rehabilitation agenda and the important priority of creating safer and more supportive communities. In fact, no human service has changed so rapidly and effectively as the Australian prison system between the 1970s and early 1990s. Here in Queensland, reform has come quite a long way in the 13 years since a broad brush approach to long overdue change received bipartisan support. With those changes came the acceptance that a secure and effective prison system did not have to be a draconian one.

It is an undeniable fact that all but the very worst offenders will one day be integrated back into the mainstream community. It is the responsibility of any government to develop and maintain mechanisms which allow this to happen in a productive way. Members on both sides of this chamber do not need convincing that it is better to have former prisoners making their way in the community as contributing citizens rather than continuing to be a burden upon it.

The challenge for any correctional system is to provide an important balance between public safety, security and rehabilitation. Communities have a right to feel safe and secure, and governments have an obligation and duty to provide safety and security. Community custody aims to reintegrate offenders into the community and to assist offenders to find and maintain paid employment upon their release. The role of WORC camps in this context is vital. As the minister mentioned in his second reading speech, the support for the WORC program within the communities it assists is enormous. Why wouldn't it be? The economic benefits to a region, in terms of projects completed, is significant. In the last financial year alone, 72,268 hours of community service was performed by low security prisoners who lived and worked in the state's 11 WORC locations. When we translate this into a monetary value, we are looking at the equivalent of an \$852,900 investment in those communities. In addition, local business within those regions benefits from a decision to purchase the supplies needed to run the WORC camp locally.

Some of the projects carried out in the past financial year have included the provision of flood relief; assisting the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service to protect the endangered bilby through the construction of fencing around Currawonga National Park; and the construction of a

grandstand facility for local camel races at Boulia and Blackall. On the other side of the coin, the benefits to the prisoners involved are enormous. Aside from the core rehabilitative programs undertaken, the placement in a WORC camp offers the prisoners an opportunity to develop new skills that they can use upon their release back to the community. So the role of the WORC outreach camps within our corrective services system provides a win-win system to the community and assists in meeting the government's objective of creating safer communities.

I strongly support the government's amendments, which seek to ensure that the program continues on its path of success well into the future. I believe that the changes to the eligibility requirements for offenders placed on the programs are of a relatively minor nature and pose no additional threat to community safety. As members will be aware, changes made to the Corrective Services Act last year provided for the inclusion of a number of offence categories to be included in schedule 1 of the act that were previously not there. The offence categories included the dangerous operation of a motor vehicle, burglary that does not involve violence, and entering a premises or being in a premises and committing an indictable offence. The inclusion of these offence categories has meant that the number of prisoners eligible to participate in WORC programs has declined by about 20 per cent, a figure which could substantially limit the future success of the program.

What is important about the changes proposed in this amendment bill is that serious violent offenders will still be ineligible for the program, and those considered for the program will still undergo the necessary checks against the criteria to ensure their suitability. There are no automatic approvals just because their offences have not fallen into schedule 1 under the act. The changes in this bill will ensure that our rural communities can continue to benefit from the economic gains associated with WORC and the government's rehabilitation and community safety objectives can continue to be met. I commend the bill to the House.

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