



Speech by

**DESLEY SCOTT**

**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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Hansard 3 September 2002

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

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (4.43 p.m.): I rise to very strongly support this bill and I do so with many years' experience listening to distressed parents, partners, victims of crime, youth workers, rehabilitation counsellors and members of the general public seeking answers to the ever-increasing problems of drug addiction that have, sadly, lain waste to the lives of so many, particularly our young people, and sent many into a life of crime. A great many people have a strong desire to see the level of drug use in society tackled in a serious way, and I believe this bill will do so. Since the 1970s the rates of property crime and violent offences have increased steadily along with the incidence of drug use. It can be demonstrated that an individual with a high level of drug addiction can be responsible for a huge amount of crime.

The drug court pilot program commenced in June 2000 and is now an integral part of a comprehensive whole-of-government approach to illicit drug use. Drug courts operate at the Beenleigh, Ipswich and Southport Magistrates Courts. Recently, it was my privilege to accompany the Police Minister, the Hon. Tony McGrady, and a number of my colleagues to a sitting of the Beenleigh drug court. To see it in action certainly confirmed for me that this intensive program is playing an important role in reducing crime and rehabilitating drug users back into society to live useful lives again.

We viewed a wide range of cases, some who had found the going too tough and had not complied with requirements and thus received sanctions, and others who had done well and were progressing through the various stages of the program. I remember feeling a little bit teary-eyed as I witnessed a young woman graduate to the next level. Her incentive was that she had three young children. It was quite an emotional experience for me. A camaraderie has developed amongst the participants, with enthusiastic applause erupting from time to time from the gallery.

Due to the intensive nature of this program, many government departments are now involved, including the Departments of Justice and Attorney-General, Corrective Services, Families, Housing, Health, Premier and Cabinet, the Queensland Police Service and Legal Aid. I was very privileged to meet the magistrate and his team during a recess of the hearing. I was very impressed by the passion they have for their job. I should also mention that I sat in the court beside the Salvation Army chaplain, who plays an integral role in meeting with the participants each morning before court hearings. This is necessarily a very coercive form of treatment, with the threat of imprisonment always there as an incentive to carry out all requirements. Should an offender breach their conditions, resulting in termination, they are then sentenced for their original offence and will serve their prison sentence. No-one should be under any illusion that this is anything other than a very intensive program dealing with offenders who are often difficult to treat and who will frequently fail without intensive support and encouragement.

It was an election commitment of this government to expand the drug court pilot to regional Queensland, and so on 1 November drug courts will commence in Townsville and Cairns, with funding of \$14.3 million committed to 2005. Queensland Health has proposed a total of 50 residential treatment beds—20 in both Townsville and Cairns and 10 in Mackay. The drug courts in north Queensland will run in the most appropriate way to meet local needs, which will be different from the

south. Considerations include the greater indigenous population, the greater distances to travel and the lack of correctional facilities close to Cairns. Experience from the south-east Queensland pilot suggests that offenders who have slightly less serious criminal histories and who have not been imprisoned previously have greater success rates through the drug court pilot program.

The bill before the House proposes to exclude offenders who have served more than six months imprisonment. Offenders who are facing a term of imprisonment for the first time may already have a long criminal history and a very serious drug problem. It is hoped that the support and intensive nature of the drug court program will turn around many lives. I emphasise that this bill is a commitment by the Beattie government to do whatever is possible to reduce crime, offer help to individuals to overcome their drug habit and return to society away from their criminal behaviour. To date, there have been 32 graduates through the program who are now living drug free, and we are very excited about the prospect of offering this program to offenders in north Queensland. The future expansion of the program will be determined by an exhaustive evaluation. I wish those who will be involved in this worthwhile effort in the north well and offer my thanks to the minister and his staff for their leadership in this strategy. I commend the bill to the House.

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