



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (4.01 p.m.): I have neither the extensive experience nor the profound experience of my colleague. However, I will not do what the member for Cunningham did—and quite ineffectually, I think—and pretend to have this wide, profound and extremely moving experience that the member for Algester has. I am going to stick to some things that I have some knowledge about.

I want to start on a positive note in supporting these amendments to the Domestic Violence Legislation Bill. Recently on Saint Valentine's Day—and for the non-romantics that is 14 February—I attended a very special event. I was honoured to officially launch the Gold Coast sexual assault support services Reject the Violence, Protect the Peace poster and promotional campaign. This campaign was launched at Nerang State High School where the senior students took the matter very seriously. There was some mirth and enjoyment among them when I talked to them about Saint Valentine's Day because they were in the process of expressing their romantic feelings towards each other as young adults—some involved in relationships or hoping to be involved in relationships. They took the opportunity on Saint Valentine's Day to make and sell special Saint Valentine's Day chocolates at the school and to give each other cards, flowers and that sort of thing.

The Gold Coast sexual assault support service specifically picked that day to launch this project to bring to the attention of these young people the importance of safe and healthy relationships. The Reject the Violence, Protect the Peace campaign involves the production of posters, stickers and leaflets aimed at young people. They were designed by a graduate of Nerang State High School who last year was an art student who designed a very poignant artistic piece, which is the keystone of this campaign.

The campaign aims to raise awareness among young people of issues surrounding sexual assault and domestic violence and to encourage safe, healthy and supportive relationships based on mutual respect and dignity. It was not easy to face 40 or 50 young adults on a day such as Saint Valentine's Day and say to them, 'Think about the relationships that you are in. Think about the respect that you have for each other and that you should have for each other in these relationships.' It was not easy because I remember very clearly being a young adult. Believe it or not, it was not all that long ago. I know how completely subsumed by matters of romance a young 15- or 16-year-old woman certainly is—and sometimes young men are as well. In my situation, as I attended a Catholic single sex school, it was very hard not to be obsessed by boys and romance and all of those things simply because boys were not in the classroom to demonstrate to us their very many faults and human foibles. However, I stood up to speak to these young people and I was impressed and delighted with their interest and their response to me and to what I was saying.

These children take this matter seriously. They are paying attention to the kinds of relationships that they are in. Young people, young women especially, now feel, and we want them to feel, that they can come forward, that they can disclose when matters are not right, when they feel that they are being abused in relationships by their boyfriends, girlfriends—whoever—or at home. That is what we want to be able to tell young people to do. That is part of the aim of this legislation.

I want to cover one very important area that this bill addresses, knowing that many other speakers to this bill will follow me and cover the other areas specifically. That area is the extension of coverage to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Frankly, I cannot believe that the opposition

has deemed to oppose that. The Queensland government is committed to addressing violence in indigenous communities and legislative reform is a crucial element in ensuring that this occurs. In its 1999 report, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's task force on violence, chaired by Boni Robertson, recommended legislative changes. The report drew attention to the prevalence and serious nature of domestic and family violence that has so profoundly affected almost every indigenous family and community in Queensland.

Furthermore, the recent Cape York study conducted by Justice Tony Fitzgerald indicated that indigenous women were 45 times more likely to experience violence, 30 times more likely to be hospitalised than non-indigenous women and 10 times more likely to die as a result. The member for Cunningham referred to these figures, yet in some leap of logic managed to come to the conclusion that no matter how serious this matter is, he cannot support this legislation because it may go some way towards addressing this issue. Indigenous men are also 10 times more likely to be hospitalised than their non-indigenous counterparts.

It is now understood in the broader society that indigenous communities have found the levels of violence within the family so intolerable that they are demanding attention. This bill ensures that the incidence of violence will no longer be concealed and left unchallenged where the offence occurs between members of a family, as it so often does. This government has listened to the indigenous community and its concerns. It has also listened to the concerns regarding the high rate of incarceration of indigenous people. This bill is designed to provide protection to indigenous people under civil legislation thereby ensuring that criminal penalties will apply only if the civil protection order is breached.

This government recognises also that although domestic violence is being characterised by abuse directed towards a spouse, the term 'family violence' is what is preferred by indigenous communities. It recognises that violence occurs not only between adult partners but also other relatives can be victims, for example, elders, aunts, uncles, cousins, informal carers, parents of adult children, and people who may not be related directly but who are considered by the community as family. In these communities, the idea of family is something that is very different from the idea of family that many of us grew up in—and I would say, given his reaction to this bill, particularly different from the family that the member for Cunningham grew up in. But that is no reason for us to ignore, to not take into account and to not be responsible for these very significant kinds of families who are the ones who are recognised by Aboriginal communities.

Some of the proposed amendments in this bill are designed to expand the scope of the act in recognition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples kinship and extended family relationships. Although it is recognised that the inter-connectedness within indigenous communities can deprive the victim of a safe base in which to recuperate, I believe there are provisions in the amended legislation which are a step forward in ameliorating this situation. This bill enables protection orders to be applied for by a person against a relative or someone who is considered a relation, whether they live or have lived in the same household. Protection orders can also be applied for if the person was intending to marry or is betrothed to the perpetrator.

I have spoken about this bill today with the peak body for the Gold Coast's indigenous community, the Kalwun Development Corporation, and described the provisions in it. They are absolutely delighted with the proposed amendments. On an almost daily basis the Kalwun Development Corporation provides support, counselling, advice, emergency assistance—you name it—to Aboriginal victims and families who experience domestic violence in the Gold Coast area. They regularly assist women and families seeking shelter and support and are well-placed to comment on domestic violence legislation and programs.

While they are unreservedly happy with the amendments set out in this bill, they have ongoing concerns about the matter of safe bases for victims. There is always a crisis in the availability of crisis accommodation and, indeed, of culturally appropriate shelters for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. Like other urban based Aboriginal organisations, they find it hard to have a voice when issues of concern to indigenous communities, such as domestic violence and alcohol abuse, are raised in public debate.

In part, this is due to their relatively small population and their location within a big city or the region of south-east Queensland and, therefore, their perceived position within mainstream society. Grants programs designed to help indigenous communities to develop domestic violence programs and other matters are difficult for these urban groups to access because, in the main, they are established to help communities which are most at risk and suffering the most—as these programs need to be—and those communities are in far-north Queensland. That makes it hard for these other groups to gain access to them. They also have difficulty accessing mainstream domestic violence programs because these are often just not culturally appropriate.

I know that the minister is aware of these issues. The spokesperson from the Kalwun Development Corporation certainly did not wish me to make any criticism as such but asked that I raise the matter of the availability of safe bases for victims. In a small community such as the Gold Coast's

Aboriginal community, rest assured that any family member or friend who is a victim of domestic violence and her family could possibly seek shelter with would certainly be well known to the perpetrator. So difficulties definitely arise in those circumstances.

Tomorrow, on International Women's Day, I will be fortunate enough to pay a visit to the Numinbah Correctional Centre in my electorate of Mudgeeraba. I will visit the women's facility to share with the sisters inside a family celebration of International Women's Day. It is a very sad fact of life that many women, if not all, who find themselves incarcerated have had some experience of domestic violence. Many have found themselves in violent and abusive relationships with men over whom they had little control. Many found themselves coerced into becoming accomplices in crime, if not perpetrators of crime. That is the reality of how they have often found themselves in these positions. Indeed, some have possibly found themselves in jail for perpetrating violence in retaliation against violent partners.

I will be giving a great deal of thought to these women when I meet with them tomorrow. I will talk to them about what International Women's Day means to them. I will discuss with them the outcomes of today's debate and I will let them know that this government is indeed committed to stamping out domestic violence in all its forms and for all its victims. This government is proud of the introduction of this Domestic Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2001 because it better protects and provides safety mechanisms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, for older people, for people with disabilities and for the most vulnerable people in our society, including young people starting out in their first experiences of intimate relationships with other people. For all those reasons, I sincerely and heartily commend this bill to the House.
