



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR WHITSUNDAY

Hansard 26 November 2002

SCHOOLIES WEEK, AIRLIE BEACH

Ms JARRATT (Whitsunday—ALP) (11.45 p.m.): We have all heard a great deal about schoolies week on the Gold Coast, but tonight I want to tell the House about one of the state's best kept secrets—schoolies week in the Whitsundays. This year the Whitsundays was the destination of choice for over 2,000 year 12 school leavers from places afar afield as Atherton and Cairns to Rockhampton, Yeppoon and Gladstone. This is the fourth year of official schoolies week activities at Airlie Beach and it has truly become a week to celebrate. The fundamental reason for the success of the program is undoubtedly the high level of planning and organisation that occurs in the weeks and months leading up to the event, and for this much credit must go to schoolies week Whitsunday coordinator, Bruce Green, who doubles as the youth development officer with the Whitsunday Shire Council. He and his very able committee ensured that the program was enticing and exciting while having built-in safeguards to maximise the personal safety of the young participants.

I am very proud of the Whitsunday community, which not only welcomed the school leavers into their midst but in many cases played an active role in supporting them. Many local businesspeople went out of their way to contribute by either donating services or providing them at reduced cost for registered schoolies. Special mention must also go to the many wonderful workers from the youth sector who came from far and near in order to provide a free chaplaincy service for the young people during schoolies week. These dedicated volunteers made sure that they were available at crucial places during activities in the street and around accommodation units so that they could lend assistance where needed and provide a rescue service for anyone who felt unwell or unsafe. They were also on hand to cook breakfast for some groups in their accommodation units, which I am sure provided welcome relief from instant noodles and take-aways.

I also want to pay tribute to the local police, health workers, the sexual assault service staff and the Whitsunday Shire Council who worked so hard to ensure that the schoolies were kept safe and had a week to remember, not one to forget. Evidence of the success of the strategies put in place by the organising committee is reflected in the headline in the local paper which declared 'Schoolies get top marks for behaviour'. It is also evident in the fact that police reported an incident-free week. I think it is important that credit also be given to the young people themselves who, though sometimes noisy and overly energetic, proved themselves to be fabulous ambassadors for youth. I was amazed and delighted at the high level of awareness in relation to issues such as drink spiking and the benefit of sticking with a buddy through thick and thin. Not only did the schoolies bring a heady dose of youth culture to the Whitsundays, they also injected over \$1 million into the local economy. Schoolies week was a win-win situation in the Whitsundays.

In the time left to me, I want to explain why it is that I wish I was 17 again if only for schoolies week. Had I been able to register as a school leaver last week, I could have chosen to indulge in movies on the beach, pyjama parties, foam parties, island cruises, snorkelling trips, jelly wrestling, quad bike riding adventures, Skirmish and pool parties to name just a few activities. All this leads me to ask if we should consider having a pollies week at Airlie Beach, but then again I doubt we would have the stamina!