



Speech by

**CAROLYN MALE**

**MEMBER FOR GLASS HOUSE**

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Hansard 26 February 2003

**SEXUAL OFFENCES [PROTECTION OF CHILDREN] AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms MALE** (Glass House—ALP) (12.06 p.m.): I rise to support the Sexual Offences (Protection of Children) Amendment Bill 2002. I am sure all honourable members and most people in the community agree that sexual abuse is an appalling crime and even more so when it is perpetrated against children. The Beattie Labor government has introduced this legislation to ensure that paedophiles are caught, sentenced and monitored on release. It is about protecting children. This bill has several objectives: firstly, to insert two new offences into the Criminal Code to permit the effective prosecution of child sex offenders; secondly, it will amend the Criminal Code and the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 to ensure that penalties imposed on child sex offenders truly reflect the significant physical and psychological effects of these crimes on their victims; and, thirdly, it enhances the powers of courts and corrections boards to require ongoing reporting of the movements of convicted child sex offenders.

The Beattie Labor government is creating a new offence at section 218A of the Criminal Code. It will be an offence for an adult to use electronic communications with the intent to procure a child under 16 to engage in a sexual act and to use electronic communications with the intent to provide indecent matter to a child under 16. It has been necessary to introduce this change because of the expansion of Internet usage among young people and the fact that these disgusting sexual predators are using the Net to find children. This government is keen to ensure that police have the necessary tools and support of the law to proactively work to catch these paedophiles before another child is hurt. Section 218A ensures that it is irrelevant to the offence that a child is actually a police officer who is working undercover.

Importantly, the bill increases the penalties for indecent treatment of a child under section 210 of the Criminal Code. The penalty for indecent treatment of a child under 12 years will now be 20 years. If the child is under 16 years the penalty will now be 14 years. What this government is saying is that this is a serious offence and it provides a clear direction that the punishment must also reflect this. The sentencing guidelines in section 9 of the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 will no longer apply, and the primary considerations for judges sentencing child sex offenders have also been redrafted to emphasise the effect of the offence on the child, the need to protect the child and other children from the offender and the need to deter similar behaviour by other would-be offenders.

The sentencing regime is an important part of the fight against paedophilia, but the Corrective Services Department needs to look at the types of rehabilitation programs that are available to offenders and ensure that all offenders have the ability to access them as appropriate. The provisions relating to the reporting of released offenders' locations is also very welcome. Many members of my community have expressed their concerns about ensuring that police have knowledge of the whereabouts of released offenders. It is another step in providing extra protection to our communities. We need to stop the sexual abuse of children, and these reforms will go a long way towards breaking that cycle. I thank the Attorney-General for his ongoing care and concern for Queensland children and look forward to the next round of reforms, which will make significant improvements to the way in which children are treated in the court process. I commend the bill to the House.