



Speech by

**DESLEY BOYLE**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

---

Hansard 26 February 2003

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

**Ms BOYLE** (Cairns—ALP) (3.20 p.m.): I join other members in supporting the bill before the House, in putting on record, too, my horror at the paedophilia that has plagued our society and other societies for generations and, of course, in affirming the pride that we as members in this House can have in supporting some changes that will contribute, we would hope, to less and less of this scourge of sexual crimes against children as the years pass. Some members would know that in my former life I was a psychologist. In that profession I had over the years seen many people who had been connected in one way or another to episodes where children had been sexually abused. Some of them were the direct victims of such activity, whether recently in terms of the timing of seeing me or many years before in their childhoods with experiences that they had not often previously discussed openly with any other human being. It was such that, 20 years ago at least, those who had been sexually abused as children frequently felt shamed by their experience. Some reported—too many reported—that if they did speak about the experience to their parents they were not believed. Others reported that they were blamed for what had happened, that their own integrity was questioned.

I recall one woman who had been sexually abused by an uncle figure in her family and who told her mother that this had occurred. She was called a dirty girl for having such thoughts. When blamed, the incidents were often suppressed by the victim. They were denied within families. They were not acted on. That led, we would understand, to extensive psychological trauma. Not only was the sexual abuse itself traumatic but then the reaction of others to reports of the sexual abuse was secondarily traumatising. What psychologists have also understood for some time but maybe not expressed well—and which is now being recognised by the Attorney and all of those in the drafting of this bill—is that the very process of attending court could itself be traumatising, in fact a kind of tertiary trauma. Not only have children been abused but then they have frequently been traumatised by the very process of reporting that abuse and dealing with others. Further, giving evidence and attending to the various processes associated with the prosecution could be further traumatising. I am pleased, therefore, that a significant part of this bill is directed towards ensuring that children, as witnesses in the court, particularly in relation to sexual abuse matters, are more sensitively and sensibly handled, thereby reducing the risk of further trauma.

I have been the more horrified by paedophilia since becoming the member for Cairns than I was even as a psychologist. Through my position these last couple of years on the Parliamentary Crime and Misconduct Committee I have been aware, via what was formerly the Crime Commission of the extent of paedophilia, which is one of the major references of the Crime Commission. It has brought to my attention the extent of the networks of deliberate paedophilia crime and the importance of the electronic media—especially the Internet—which we now have at our disposal and which can be used by these networks for ill. Indeed, it is sickening to hear of these organised networks of paedophiles who cause trauma over many years to many children as opposed to that uncle figure associated with the family who makes some mistake with one child and, horrible as that is, it is somehow understandable.

I have been pleased, however, to see some signs of good news up north on this dreadful topic. For many years we really heard nothing. There were not many allegations of sexual abuse from Aboriginal people in relation to Aboriginal communities. In these last few years, however, that situation has changed significantly. I congratulate the women, particularly from Aboriginal communities, who have had the courage to spill the beans and to tell of the hidden levels of sexual abuse which have been occurring in their own communities and about which they have felt powerless for so many years

and generations. By admitting these problems, by talking about them in public, not only do they allow some resolution for those who have already been victimised but maybe they contribute to minimising the likelihood of sexual abuse in the years to come.

I did notice in July last year an article in the *Cairns Post* that provided some good figures on this dreadful topic and that suggests that sexual abuse is actually decreasing in frequency. I might quote the key elements of this report, as follows—

Child sexual abuse in Australia appears to be sharply on the decline, a national survey has found. The study of almost 1,800 men and women aged 18 to 59 found that one in three women and one in six men had been sexually abused before the age of 16. But sexual abuse seems to have been more prevalent half a century ago than today, particularly among men. Brisbane-based authors Michael Dunne and Jake Najman found experiences of child sex abuse were much more common among older men. 'Men in their 50s were more than twice as likely as men in their 20s to say they were sexually abused as a child,' Dr Dunne said. 'That's a big reduction.' The decrease in cases among women was not as dramatic. Dr Dunne said the research found women under 30 were about 20 per cent less likely to have been abused than 30 to 60-year-olds.

Those figures certainly give us hope that we are on a correct path by having brought this evil out into the open. I have no doubt that this bill, with its stronger penalties, its more direct action through courts, its recognition of the difficulties that can be associated with the Internet and its connections with networks of childhood sexual abusers hopefully will contribute further to diminishing childhood sexual abuse until it disappears entirely from our society.

However, we have against us several factors. The first of these is that perpetrators of childhood sexual abuse most commonly deny forever their actions. It does not matter even that they have been found guilty in courts in this land; still they deny. Their denial is not, many psychologists believe, a superficial denial. It is some kind of psychological artifice to avoid facing the ugliness and evilness of their actions. As long as there is such a widespread level of denial by perpetrators, we need to be vigilant indeed in ensuring that all good people, the great majority of our society, are on guard, taking all action they can against paedophilia, reporting all information that they get about paedophilia and ensuring that any child who is abused gets the appropriate assistance. I am pleased indeed to support the bill before the House.