



Speech by

DESLEY BOYLE

MEMBER FOR CAIRNS

Hansard 7 October 2003

CAIRNS, PUBLIC DRUNKENNESS

Ms BOYLE (Cairns—ALP) (12.17 p.m.): Cairns has long had a problem with intoxication in public places, particularly in the CBD. In fact, some time ago, in amusing myself with old editions of the *Cairns Post*, I discovered mentions of the problem of drunkenness in public places in Cairns 100 years ago. However, I am pleased to say that over the past 10 years the problems associated with public drunkenness have definitely improved. We have had two sorts of problems. One is a daylight and early evening problem with mostly indigenous people who become drunk, some of whom offend against the public order. This results in offensive behaviour. To locals it is an eyesore, an intrusion and an assault on our city; it is also shameless behaviour in front of tourists.

There have long been calls for this government and previous governments to somehow solve this problem. The other problem that we have had with intoxication in the CBD has occurred, not so visibly to many of us, in the early hours of the morning—3, 4 and 5 a.m.—when, unfortunately, mostly males spill out of venues, many of them with too much alcohol under their belt, not enough sense and in an aggressive mood, which leads to serious assaults and occasionally even murder. Today I wish to address the first of these problems in terms of the wide range of actions that this government has taken and that have resulted in next to no complaints about public drunkenness in daylight hours in the CBD of Cairns for the past three months.

The first important plank in our program addressing this problem was the opening of a purpose-built and purpose-designed diversionary centre last year. Those who become intoxicated and are at risk of breaking the law can be taken by police or other service people to the diversionary centre where they can, under supervision, be given food and allowed to sleep until they are safe and in control of their behaviour again.

The next plank in solving this problem came when the Police Minister introduced into this parliament move-on powers for police and also the power for police to empty out alcohol which is being consumed in places where it is not permitted. This has provided a very quick and immediate lesson for numbers of people caught drinking in public places. Frequently these people are of limited financial means and to have their alcohol taken from them and disposed of down a drain instantly sends them a very clear and sharp message.

The police also deserve commendation for the establishment of a program whereby two police liaison officers are on duty at any time and are able to head off problems. They can be aware of groups forming around the CBD where early reports or indications are that alcohol is being imbibed and may result in problems later in the day. Accordingly, their early liaison work and coordination with other services has meant that these groups are broken up or moved on or encouraged to more productive activities.

Another plank that we are hoping will shortly be announced by ministers in this government is case management for these people. While it is right and proper that we move these people on out of the public gaze in order to prevent the occurrence of offences, it does not solve the real problem for these people, many of whom are serious alcoholics. Case management to assist them to access health services, to access proper housing, to establish a reasonable lifestyle with some hope for the future is an important plank in this network of services.

My compliments go to Rolf Stratemeier who, along with the magistrates of Cairns and other service providers, has led a program called the alcoholic offenders rehabilitation program. It is designed to divert people from the streets of Cairns. The leadership in all of these programs of Alan Butler from DATSIP and Brett Heyward and Pat Anderson from the Department of Families has been tremendous. They deserve public recognition for the hard work and commitment to establishing a more integrated and coordinated response. Nonetheless, it is the resources provided by the Beattie government, particularly through the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Police, that have really made the difference.