



Speech by

## Miss FIONA SIMPSON

### MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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Hansard 4 June 2003

#### **DANGEROUS PRISONERS [SEXUAL OFFENDERS] BILL**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (4.17 p.m.): I strongly support this legislation. As the Leader of the Opposition, Lawrence Springborg, outlined earlier, this is similar to legislation which he proposed three years ago and which he called on the government to introduce because of our concerns about the impact of predators who have come into contact with the law and who are subsequently released to re-offend. This legislation obviously reflects a change of heart on the part of those on the government benches and I welcome it because tragically, as the previous speaker outlined, there is a high recidivism rate with certain types of offenders.

I believe in the ability of people's lives to be transformed. Where they come from is not where they have to end up. I have friends who have come out of prostitution, drug abuse and alcoholism and they are wonderful people. They have walked through dark valleys. It is possible for people to have their broken lives healed. Tragically, sexual abusers have often been abused themselves. It is a destructive cycle of abuse which is repeated generation after generation. However, I have no sympathy for those who abuse others. They must be responsible for their actions. They do forfeit their rights when they hurt others in this way, particularly children.

The ability to rehabilitate violent sexual offenders and paedophiles is so limited that even with the best of programs there is the ability for up to 10 per cent or more to reoffend, and that has a significant impact. With other types of offences or addictive conditions—for example, drug abuse—there is often a high rate of failure. People may cycle through rehabilitation a number of times before they come to a point where they are able to become free of that addiction, if ever. But those who have persisted over time may go backwards before they go forwards. The difference with sexual abuse, particularly paedophilia, is that the failure rate—any cycling back—is not just a damage against the person offending; it is a damage against the child. It is a damage against somebody else, unlike other types of offences such as drug abuse. The impact is just too stark.

These days there is growing awareness that, tragically, child abuse in our community and in our nation has not been spoken about. It should be welcomed that this is being talked about more thoroughly, but the debate as to the impact of child abuse is still to ripen and hit public consciousness. When I talk to people involved in, say, prostitution, I find it astounding to discover the number who have come from a child abuse situation. The figures clearly show that there is a strong correlation between that lifestyle and a background of child abuse. In terms of mental illness and suicide—obviously not everybody who ends up with a mental illness has necessarily been abused as a child—once again the correlation between having been abused sexually as a child and having a mental illness is much stronger than it is for the average member of the community. In terms of women in prison and those who have gone through the criminal justice system as a result of crime, once again there has often been a history of child sexual abuse.

What this does to destroy a child's identity and to detach them from the rest of the community and the values the broader community holds is absolutely devastating. This is the next debate that needs to be had as the issue of child abuse comes more and more to centre stage, as we as legislators and as community leaders seek to find better ways of protecting the vulnerable in our community. This legislation is needed because the rights of society to be protected outweigh the rights of individuals who have already perpetrated terribly destructive acts by way of violent sexual offences as well as sexual offences against children. The rights of society to be protected do outweigh, in this case, the rights of the individual.

I support the legislation before the House. I believe that the implementation of this bill needs to be carefully monitored and that as a community we need to be increasingly vigilant about those who seek to hurt children and seek to take advantage of the vulnerable, particularly those who are disabled and have an inability to articulate for themselves and to speak up and be taken credibly as witnesses. We must be their eyes and ears and be there to protect them. We also need to look closely at how we break that cycle of abuse which has wrought such incredible destruction in so many people's lives—from mental illness to prostitution to drug addiction.