



Speech by

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STATE MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 4 June 2003

DANGEROUS PRISONERS [SEXUAL OFFENDERS] BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.45 p.m.): At the outset, I congratulate the Attorney-General on listening to concerns that I and others have raised in connection with cases that have been brought to me by constituents. I sincerely thank the Attorney-General on behalf of those long-suffering families and, worst of all, the victims, who have been put at risk.

Sex offending is the most insidious type of offence that can be inflicted on a victim, because it deprives them of their dignity and has lifelong consequences. Research has shown that sexual abuse has a number of adverse consequences for victims, including increasing suicide risk, depression, alcohol and drug abuse, anxiety and distrust. It also limits the employment and educational opportunities of victims through fear and can make a victim overly protective towards his or her own children. Research has also shown that victims are significantly greater users of medical and psychiatric services than are non-victims. Women who have been sexually abused as children are also at far greater risk of adult revictimisation than non-victims.

Research also indicates that serial paedophiles can have hundreds of victims and that the majority of these cases do not come to the attention of the criminal justice system. The consequence is that thousands of lives can literally be wrecked by the actions of a single offender. A small minority—and they are who this bill directs its attention towards—of sexual offenders are intractable, that is, they are considered to be untreatable, they do not want treatment, and see nothing wrong with their perversions. Others are simply unable to exercise control over their deviant sexual urges.

What to do with this small group of offenders has exercised the minds of legislators across the world. So it has not just been a Queensland issue of what to do; it is an international issue of what to do. That is why the Attorney-General is deserving of praise in the face of that criticism from civil liberties groups. The point is that all over the world, legislators have reached similar conclusions to the one that the Attorney-General proposes in this bill. Such offenders will never be cured and will always be a danger to the community and, as such, they must be kept incarcerated in order to protect vulnerable members of our society, particularly women and children.

With respect to child sex offending, the greatest danger is when we tell our children to beware of strangers. We know and research indicates that it is not stranger danger; often the offender is someone whom the child knows.

Mrs Reilly: And trusts.

Mr MICKEL: And trusts. Research suggests that the prevalence of child sexual abuse could be as high as 40 per cent of children. The point is that increasingly—and we know of instances within families where the closest relative has been an offender; there are instances in my electorate and certainly in outer metropolitan areas of this—where there has been a breakdown of the family and a stranger is admitted into that family in the form of a partner, in that partnership lies a great risk to children.

Police in my district tell me that paedophiles can pick out women who are at risk, who are lonely and who are seeking a partner, and that partner can be a paedophile who makes his way into that family structure. In every sense of the word, these people know how to target innocent people and therefore how to ruin innocent lives.

The need to protect our vulnerable children from the predations of sexual deviants justifies the making of this bill. Parliament, and this parliament in particular through the Attorney-General, is sending a clear message that there is zero tolerance for such activities, and the people who perpetrate them will face severe consequences. By breaking the cycle of offending not only can future potential victimisation be minimised, but also the development of new sexual offenders who are being brutalised by their own victimisation can be prevented.

This bill will keep communities safer by strengthening powers to retain dangerous sexual offenders in prison and requiring supervision of released sexual offenders under appropriate community supervision. These measures will go a long way in motivating sex offenders to undertake and complete treatment programs, and restrict opportunities for child sex offenders to undertake grooming processes.

I would particularly like to thank the work being undertaken by the Corrective Services Department, and in particular I would like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution to my own research, to my own thinking, of an officer in that department, Gabrielle Sinclair, and I would like to acknowledge—

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr MICKEL: I acknowledge the interjection from other members, who have made their position clear in this debate, when I mention her name and the very positive way they have responded to her. I want to congratulate the Minister for Police and Corrective Services for allowing us to be briefed by such an outstanding officer.

I also come to this debate with a great deal of sadness, and it is this. I had the harrowing experience some years ago of having a mother present to my office. Her son had been the victim of a sodomy attack in the nearby park. What outrageous activity was this youngster up to? He was riding his bike in the park and had been lured into the toilet in the park by a person. The mother was presenting to me the need for the government to take action. What were the circumstances of this offender? He had been released from the prison system the day before the attack. He did not look like Ferguson. This fellow, I am told, was a family person who had three kids of his own. Honourable members might be interested to learn that they caught this fellow the next day at the same park and with the same car. That is why this legislation is needed.

Now I can go back to that constituent, now I can go back to that school community and say, 'Look, your coming to me and me taking this up with the government and it being supported by the backbench in the government is going to make a difference.' Unfortunately it is not going to make a difference to that child. I recognise that. That child is scarred forever, and I am desperately sad about that. However, I am enlightened by the fact that we have in the Attorney-General someone who is prepared to take that on board and stare down the civil liberties people on this account because I believe my constituent and my constituent's son have a right to some civil liberties. I believe they have a right to go cycling in the park without having some offender abuse that child in that way. So I will stand by my constituency every time, and if this bill locks up somebody like that, then good on you, Mr Attorney-General for doing that. That is why I support this bill.

I am grateful that my colleagues and their constituencies have also joined with me in staring down what would have been opposition to this bill, and I congratulate them for that as well.