



Speech by

Dr LESLEY CLARK

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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TRANSPORT OPERATIONS [ROAD USE MANAGEMENT] AND ANOTHER ACT AMENDMENT BILL

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (11.24 p.m.): The Transport Operations (Road Use Management) and Another Act Amendment Bill provides for a range of measures to reduce accidents due to speeding, drink-driving and illegal practices in the transport industry. I welcome any measures at all that will improve the behaviour of drivers, because it is now official: far-north Queensland drivers are amongst the worst drivers in Australia. According to the *Cairns Post* report of this week, we are one and a half times more likely than fellow Aussies to drive around drunk, we are more abusive to other road drivers, and one in 20 of us has been assaulted by another driver. These shocking figures are amongst the findings of the latest survey by AAMI Insurance. The AAMI crash index released on Tuesday of this week revealed that 53 per cent of motorists in north Queensland have admitted to driving when they were probably over the limit. The survey also found that nine in 10 northern motorists have been the subject of road rage. One in 20 said they had been physically assaulted by another driver. Some 71 per cent said they had been tailgated, and almost as many had been subject to rude gestures from other drivers. One-third will toot their horn when they think another driver is doing the wrong thing and, what is worse, we are getting even more angry at the wheel.

Cairns police superintendent Steve Hollands was reported as conceding the region had a high rate of drink-driving, but part of this was because of the vigilant policing that targeted the peak times for random breath testing. I commend the police on their excellent work both in trying to reduce drink-driving and also other road offences. I think members will agree that it is a pretty sorry state of affairs, and I am certainly not proud of what is happening in far-north Queensland. As I said, I hope that measures such as those in this bill can start to turn around that situation.

Interestingly, nationally, 88 per cent of the survey respondents admitted that they speed sometimes, and far-north Queensland drivers have been frequently clocked going more than 40 kilometres an hour over the speed limit. I therefore welcome the fact that this bill contains amendments to support the new penalty regime that applies to speeding. This new regime commenced on 17 April this year and included the introduction of a six months drivers licence suspension for drivers detected in the extremely dangerous category that I have referred to of more than 40 kilometres an hour above the speed limit. The amendments within this bill address the sanctions that are to apply to a person who is detected driving while their drivers licence is suspended for speeding. These people are considered unlicensed and are dealt with under section 78 of the act. This section is clear as to what constitutes an offence and the penalties and sanctions that apply to the different types of unlicensed driving. The imposition of an automatic drivers licence for a specific offence, in this case speeding by more than 40 kilometres per hour over the limit, is a new sanction type within Queensland. Therefore, this category needs to be reflected within section 78(3), which sets out the disqualification periods to be imposed for different types of unlicensed driving.

While it has been possible to deal in the Magistrates Court with persons who are driving while suspended for speeding, the provisions up until now have only allowed the court to impose a monetary penalty, with no subsequent disqualification period. The amendments within this bill will accommodate this new approach by incorporating this new classification of unlicensed driver and will allow for consistency in the sanctions imposed for all unlicensed driving offences. I certainly hope this has a further deterrent effect on those drivers.

While 88 per cent of the respondents, as I have said, to the AAMI survey admitted to speeding, 58 per cent of them believe that speed cameras are nothing but revenue raisers. I know that is a very widespread view in the community, so I was very interested in the report the minister had in the House this morning in relation to the evaluation of the Queensland speed camera program. It is worth putting that on the record so that I can have this to convey to constituents who talk to me about this issue. The review was carried out, as it said, independently by the Monash University Accident Research Centre. It looked at the effect of speed cameras on the number of crashes in Queensland from the program's introduction in 1997 to the end of June 2001.

It is extremely rewarding to see the impact that that program has had. Specifically, the results indicate that when operating at maximum coverage, the speed camera program produced estimated reductions in fatal crashes of around 45 per cent in areas within two kilometres of speed camera sites. There was a corresponding reduction of 31 per cent for hospitalisation crashes, 39 per cent for medically treated crashes, 19 per cent for other injury crashes and 21 per cent for non-injury crashes. I think those are terrific results.

The accident research centre also developed a social benefit to cost ratio for the speed camera program. So for the period of the evaluation, the benefit to cost ratio was estimated to be 47. This means that for every dollar spent on the program there is a saving to the community of \$47 due to crashes prevented by the operation of the program. So this clearly indicates that the program is a highly cost-effective means of reducing road trauma.

I hope that will put paid to that debate we have in our community that the only thing that speed cameras do is raise money. Clearly, that is not the only thing they do; they have a very important effect in reducing road accidents. I hope that this independent evaluation will change the perception in the community about the speed camera program. I certainly welcome, as I am sure do other members, the confirmation of its effectiveness.

In common with other members, I would like to thank the minister for his support for road safety initiatives. He has been very supportive of me in my electorate in relation to two particularly dangerous intersections. The first is the Brinsmead-Kamerunga Road which has been improved by the introduction of traffic lights. The safety of parents and students at the Caravonica State School, located on this same busy western bypass, has also been improved by the introduction of traffic lights last year. The safety of roundabouts on the Captain Cook Highway, which passes through my electorate, has also been improved in recent years for both drivers and cyclists with both state and federal funding dedicated to a variety of projects.

However, I am still concerned about the safety problems on the highway in the vicinity of the Smithfield shopping centre, where pedestrians cross the road rather than use the existing underpass, exposing themselves to significant danger. While additional fencing has been erected to discourage this practice, I have recently written to the regional manager of the Department of Main Roads to request an assessment of other possible options to improve safety at that location.

I would like to conclude by commending the minister for his commitment to his Transport portfolio and congratulate him on his significant achievement to far-north Queensland and, indeed, across the state. As with other members, I would like to say that we commend him for that work. He is one of Queensland's best Transport Ministers and he will be sorely missed.