



Speech by

**LINDY NELSON-CARR**

**MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA**

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Hansard 12 November 2003

**EDUCATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION [STUDENT PROTECTION] AMENDMENT BILL**

**Ms NELSON-CARR** (Mundingburra—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): Our most precious commodity is our children. I think I should know, because I have had enough of them! Having had enough of them, protection for me is an instinctive urge and instinctive drive. Mothers in the animal kingdom fiercely guard their offspring. If they are not socially dysfunctional due to drugs, alcohol, violence and some of those nasty things in life, then this protection continues right through childhood into adolescence. In my case, I still feel very protective about my adult children. When we entrust our children into a compulsory setting like a school, we do so in the knowledge that they will be safe—that is, they will be out of harm's way. In light of the very serious nature of child abuse, it is fantastic that this government has acted so swiftly and promptly to address the deficiencies in the previous legislation. Of course, this is exactly what the community expects.

The amendment to the Education (Teacher Registration) Act 1988 and the Education (General Provisions) Act 1989 will enhance the capacity of the Board of Teacher Registration to screen, monitor and make decisions about the suitability of teachers who work with children, thereby providing greater protection for children in schools from sexual abuse and other inappropriate conduct by school based employees.

A report was done by the board of inquiry. That report highlighted the issue of sexual abuse in schools and weaknesses in the existing systems for checking and monitoring the suitability of teachers and non-teaching staff to work with children and for responding to complaints of sexual abuse perpetrated in a school setting. This is all about preventing, detecting and responding to complaints of sexual abuse and other inappropriate conduct by school based employees to schoolchildren.

The bill also creates a mandatory reporting requirement whereby teaching and non-teaching staff are obliged to report actual or suspected sexual abuse of children by school based employees to prescribed persons, who must then pass the information on to police. How will it be done? It will be done by making the welfare and best interests of children the primary consideration of the board.

**Ms Keech:** And so it should be.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Absolutely, and also by enhancing the capacity of the Board of Teacher Registration to screen, monitor and make decisions about the suitability of teachers to work with children.

Teachers today need not be concerned about the increased powers of the Board of Teacher Registration. In fact, in protecting our children from the vile behaviour and practices of a few, teachers should welcome the legislation. Most teachers, as we know, are dedicated, committed, energetic people whose sole interest is to educate children in a supportive, caring environment. I can speak about my children, who have had a succession of excellent teachers whose availability absolutely went above and beyond the call of duty. Often they would collect my children at night to take them to debating functions and other extracurricular activities. I did not ever question that. I knew that my children were in safe hands. I had known these teachers for many years and the trust had already been established. My children were always safe. But when I consider what has happened in the intervening years and what has become public knowledge, I imagine what a person with child abuse on their mind could do in this same scenario of trust. It is not a very pleasant thought. I am pleased that the bill has been the subject of extensive consultation with stakeholders including the board, unions, teachers themselves, state and non-state schools, parents, churches and the general public. They have come up with a very well-developed legislative plan. I commend the bill to the House.