



Speech by

**Fiona Simpson**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

Hansard Wednesday, 23 February 2005

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## **SUMMARY OFFENCES BILL**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.44 pm): The Summary Offences Bill clarifies and updates a large range of summary offences which police are able to take action on. It enables public order offences and minor criminal offences to be heard and determined in the Magistrates Court.

I will make reference to some local issues on the Sunshine Coast. Recently a lot of attention has been given to the Brisbane debacle and the violence that has broken out in the CBD. Partnerships between police, Liquor Licensing, Maroochy Shire Council and the community are the reason Mooloolaba has not been on the front page for the same level of violence Brisbane has recently faced. However, that situation has not come easily and it is always fragile due to resources. It takes a lot of effort. It takes a lot of work from Mooloolaba Safe, which is a coordinating body involving community representatives, police, Liquor Licensing and the council. There is a great deal of concern that police resources have not been sufficient.

The reasons Mooloolaba Safe has been perhaps so successful are the ability to target areas and say that there are better local community solutions plus the employment of special police. The concern is that an appropriate number of police have not been made available or allocated on the police roster to deal with the growing concerns about how to maintain public safety, particularly in tourism areas and particularly in areas where there has been a major change in the way dining and drinking affect the public arena.

Mooloolaba is a wonderful area, but it is typical of a problem which is emerging in other tourism areas—that is, the mixture of licensed premises, people who tend to drink late, the lack of Liquor Licensing officers and the lack of police officers to deal with the social problems that arise, particularly on the streets late at night. When we have had adequate police specials to supplement the rostered police numbers at Mooloolaba, it has made a significant difference. In conjunction with the outstanding ability of the local council ranger, Pat Quinn, the solutions have been more targeted. That does not mean there have not been problems. It means, as I said earlier, that the fight to maintain safety on the streets has been fought through a lot of effort and through payment by local ratepayers to add to what they believe has been insufficient state resources.

I recently had a briefing with the police department about the police staffing model. A concern has been whether this model really takes into account the problems that occur in areas that have high tourism numbers—high transient numbers that may not necessarily be picked up in census figures. The model certainly has not picked up recent numbers because of the change in the domestic tourism market and the boom areas in this state. I was assured that the tourism component was taken into account in the policing model, even though actual tourism numbers are not proven. They are estimates, and I appreciate that it is difficult. However, we still see a real lack of resourcing of policing in these areas of not only high residential growth but also high day tourism and night tourism presence in the community.

The problem is not only in the way the police model is formulated. It is only carving up the cake, so to speak, of available police numbers. The problem of having enough police in a timely way in these areas continues to be a major issue. I will continue to raise the need for additional police. I note that, with the way the police staffing model is formulated, with the givens that have to be factored in, if a community has won

the right to a 24-hour police station, that obviously goes into the base allocation and it naturally gets first bite of the cherry in the way those numbers are allocated to ensure there is the threshold number of staff to meet the requirements of a 24-hour station or other particular services.

That is why I would like to raise with the minister the need for more areas with 24-hour stations. There is a desperate need for a 24-hour police station at Coolumb. In the last few years on this part of the Sunshine Coast tourism and residential growth have put extraordinary pressure on those officers and the wider police district. At the end of the day, it is the whole police district that feels that pressure as there is a fight for the reasonable allocation of police numbers.

I also raise the problem of communities that feel they have to actually employ police specials in order to bolster what are otherwise inadequate police numbers. I wonder whether the state has actually looked at how that is taking the pressure off resourcing in some of these areas. Obviously it has been necessary for the community to do that, but it is not the best option. Some of the offences that occur in these places—and certainly some of the offences are ones that are identified quite clearly in this bill—are public nuisance offences, which are time consuming. They may not necessarily be life threatening, but they are time consuming and they are having a huge impact upon the livability of communities.

These offences may not be life threatening, and some of these offences may not result in damage to people's property. However, if they go unchecked, as in the broken window theory of overseas police experience, it establishes a culture or an environment in which offenders believe that they are not likely to get caught or that they are not likely to be reined in for their abuses against other people in the community. Therefore, it escalates, and it can be seen that there is a connection between so-called minor crime and an environment which cultivates major crime because of the perception by the criminal element that they are not going to get punished for what they do.

Juvenile crime is one issue that has been canvassed by the opposition in the parliament this week. That is not because all juveniles are law breakers but because of a genuine concern that there is a band of young people who have already progressed to the stage where the seriousness of their crimes no longer warrants just a slap on the wrist. I have advocated strongly for youth conferencing where it is appropriate for certain crimes. That is something I was pleased we were able to get established on the Sunshine Coast after I lobbied for it. Police have said to me that consideration has to be given to when it is appropriate to have youth conferencing. Obviously it involves the victim being willing to be involved in that process, so the victim's consent is obviously a very important part of that.

In the early stages there was some question as to whether youth conferencing was appropriate for certain types of crimes. From memory, I think one of them was flogging cars. Some of the early anecdotal evidence was that there were certain crimes where youth conferencing does not work. I am saying that we should use those measures, where appropriate, to nip in the bud the early stages of criminal activity, but it would be naive to think that it is appropriate for all circumstances. It requires more than just policy documents; it requires the appropriate awareness of whether certain types of crimes are being nipped in the bud by these measures. That is why we have raised our concerns that the figures are showing clear cases of reoffending with certain types of juvenile crime.

I have a constituent who recently had his hips broken when he was king-hit by a young thug who was a juvenile. We are not talking about a minor incident. That constituent of mine was an elderly gentleman who was taking an early morning walk, his early morning constitutional, and he is still recovering and still using a walking frame. That dear gentleman is now incapacitated. For some time he was unable to walk at all, and now he cannot walk unaided. I hope that he will eventually be able to walk unaided again. It meant that he was unable to be with his family at Christmas time because he was hospitalised. That was as a result of the actions of a young person who was not just some poor, dear little offender who needed a tap on the wrist. It was somebody who wilfully and deliberately set out to attack this gentleman and also threaten other people.

The penalty that was applied to this young person still has not been made clear to this gentleman, who has gone through a great deal of distress and a great deal of pain in that time of rebuilding. We need to talk about these issues because these are real people who are now prisoners in their own homes or who are incapacitated because of crimes that have been committed against them. In these circumstances, by law the victims were unable to be present in court to hear the outcome because it was a juvenile offender. In this case it was somebody who was just under the age limit and their details could not be released publicly. Even the victim does not know what the outcome has been.

Let us not be naive. The penalties must fit the crimes. Appropriate interventions need to be in place, but when we are talking about serious crimes it is not about having a revolving door or someone receiving a slap on the wrist. I have constituents who still bear the scars. I am concerned that the system needs a substantial overhaul to make sure that those sorts of offences are not allowed to go unpunished or are punished appropriately.

I want to mention another issue related to the Summary Offences Bill. It also relates to juveniles. I have raised this issue in the parliament before. I have a youth shelter in my area that has virtually been a

halfway house for young crims. I have been very keen to see the youth service that has been involved with that not only relocate but also having adequate resources so that it can provide appropriate intervention for young people. But, for goodness sake, it is the last place you would want to put some young innocent who has an urgent and desperate need for accommodation. It would not be a good idea to put them in the local youth shelter. This is not the fault of the staff. It is a fact that there is a concentration of young people who are not at the earlier stage of crime but who are quite advanced in many cases. That is creating a culture in itself.

We have to be realistic about solutions that we, as governments and bureaucracies, might think are appropriate but which can make a situation worse. We need to have an overhaul of youth shelters so that children have a safe and supervised place where they can play outside, so they have appropriate settings where they can access programs and services and deal with appropriate rehabilitation. We have to make sure that we do not create an even worse culture by providing inappropriate settings which lead to an increase in abuses against other children. There has to be a better answer than what we have come up with to date. That is a related issue in this debate; we do need appropriate emergency housing for young people with appropriate interventions.

I raise that because it is another issue that has been very much related to some of the offences that we have seen on the streets in our CBD area on the Sunshine Coast around Maroochydore and Mooloolaba. It cannot be said that these issues are not related, because they are related. I talk to the police, I talk to the community and I talk to the youth workers. It is time that these issues were addressed because they are making the situation worse.

In closing on this issue, I seek the minister's assistance with regard to the Coolool Police Station and the pursuit of a 24-hour station. There are many areas of need, but this would certainly assist with the overall police numbers on the Sunshine Coast. We would also seek a review of policing numbers in communities where they have had to go and employ police specials in order to maintain safety on the streets. That is something that the communities have felt has been necessary. I would commend the work of Mooloolaba Safe. It is a model that I believe has the potential to work well in other areas. The fight for safety on the streets is constant and requires an ongoing police presence. I do commend the police on the Sunshine Coast and those who have been committed to community policing and working with that model. We just want to make sure they have the resources to do the job.

I am keen that Maroochy shire does not withdraw from the process. There needs to be partnerships with local government. Urban designs have altered. There is outdoor dining next to busy thoroughfares. The nature of public space has changed. It can be beautiful during the daytime, but sometimes it is very difficult to police at night.

The process must involve a partnership between local government, state government and the local community with agreed strategies at the local level so that there is more flexibility as to how those solutions are applied. I commend the Mooloolaba Safe process.

No system is perfect, but I believe that it is heading in the right direction because it also involves Liquor Licensing. Liquor licensing is not the police minister's responsibility, but it is time to look at how the current Liquor Act can be adequately policed in respect of dining and food being available with alcohol. That has certainly been a complicating issue with policing on the streets, because it is very difficult for police to understand and very difficult to implement the liquor licensing laws the way they are now.