



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 21 April 2005

POLICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2004

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (5.14 pm): In rising to speak to this legislation, I reiterate some comments of my colleague the member for Gregory, Vaughan Johnson. The opposition has indicated that it is supporting this legislation. There is a wide range of provisions that are being amended. The shadow minister, Vaughan Johnson, made comment about the need to ensure that our police are properly resourced. As technology challenges, that means that we have to look at the best means possible to provide appropriate technology and resources for our police. On this point, I want to raise with the minister the issue of the need to investigate electronic fingerprinting as well as electronic or digital facial recognition photographs.

When people enter a country such as the United States they are required to give an electronic fingerprint. Obviously this is a system that allows for easier retrieval and storage of those particular details. Fingerprinting is a basic evidentiary procedure that is used within policing work. I do know from talking with police officers that they have concerns that the existing systems are very slow. They say that people see programs on TV—*CSI* and that type of thing—and they think that a lot of things happen instantly—that is, they put things into the computer and there are instant matches. But, as I understand it, that is not the case. There are manual searches or procedures that can take quite some time.

I would welcome the minister's feedback as to what is required to convert to such a system and the pros and the cons of such a system. However, given that manual fingerprinting of people has been superseded by electronic measures, it is inevitable that we have to go that way. I would welcome any advice as to what that means in terms of resources and particularly what that would mean in terms of benefits for our police in getting a more timely response in the processing of evidence. Similarly, the advent of digital pictures and facial recognition technology is something that is increasingly being used in other jurisdictions, once again with border control into the United States. As I understand it, Australian passports are transitioning to have such photographs included in them. This is something that we also need to consider if it is not already being used in some sectors within the Queensland Police Service.

I also have a question for the minister with regard to some of the evidentiary measures proposed. In the amendment of section 284 it makes reference to an amendment that will ensure that a police officer may not apply for a forensic procedure order under part 3 to obtain a child's identifying particulars such as fingerprints in circumstances where it is practical to obtain a Children's Court magistrates order to obtain the particular identifying particular under section 25. I would appreciate the minister's advice as to what the current procedures are and the minister's assurance that this will not create practical difficulties on a difference of interpretation about what is an appropriate definition of what is practical. I raise this issue as I would be concerned if we find a situation in the field where it may become harder to gain appropriate access to the fingerprints of juveniles. There has been some talk about the addition of a year added to what is considered to be a juvenile. I am not talking about particularly young children; I am talking about children who are almost adults in many circumstances. I seek the minister's advice as to whether this could make it harder for police to obtain fingerprints in these circumstances. I am sure that that is not what is intended, but I would be concerned if there ends up being a problem with the interpretation of this particular section.

A number of members have taken the opportunity to mention local issues. I would also like to do that with regard to my electorate of Maroochydore, which has obviously had a population increase. As part of that, there are many law-abiding citizens and there are some who are not. One particular need in my electorate is for a water police station—a police station on the water—so that our water police do not have to travel 20 minutes by road to get to their boats to put them in the water. Currently, the water police on the Sunshine Coast are based at Kawana and, believe me, that station is not on the water. It is really quite a ridiculous situation. There are boats at Mooloolaba and there is Crown land at Mooloolaba. There are already transport department and marine department facilities there, as well as fisheries and other government lessees and non-government lessees on that land. There is an appropriate site there. I urge the minister to collaborate with ministers in other portfolios to ensure that we get a water police station on the water at Mooloolaba to service the Sunshine Coast waterways because it is an area of great need.

There is also a need to alleviate the overcrowding at the Maroochydore Police Station, which currently houses not only the Maroochydore police officers but also the district police officers. This is a justice precinct, and it is important that the expansion of these facilities is within this justice precinct. Of course, there is a need for other communities to have local police facilities as well. I urge the minister to plan for and to put in place additional facilities for our police officers in Maroochydore and within this justice precinct so that people are not working in untenable situations and crowded workplaces.

In addition, there is a need for men and women powers and a need for student numbers. The police staffing model is in desperate need of review, although ultimately the police staffing model is only as good as the number of police who are released to be distributed.

Areas of population boom and areas with a high tourism component have a need for additional police officers to cover those beats. I urge the minister to look at the real policing needs in these areas. Our community has been paying for police specials in order to deal with law and order issues on the streets, particularly in the entertainment precinct at Mooloolaba where there are a number of nightclubs and licensed premises. Something is wrong when a community has to supplement that in order to deal with its law and order needs.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I will give the member some latitude, but could she come back to the bill, please.

Miss SIMPSON: I raise this with the minister, as other members have with regard to their own electorates, in this debate tonight. It is not right that communities have to fund police specials. It is a different matter when it comes to security measures in licensed premises and funding security guards. However, police officers should be funded from the police budget. I would certainly welcome a response from the minister on these matters, particularly in regard to tourism areas and the police staffing model, because the real tourist numbers are not actually factored into that. They are historic figures that can be up to four years old. Believe me, a lot has changed in four years, particularly when one looks at the domestic tourism market.

In closing, I acknowledge that this is a SLUMP bill with many provisions and varying amendments to a number of acts, particularly the Weapons Act, issues relating to juveniles, and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act. Let us look at the resources that can be given to the police, such as up-to-date, smart technology which can be readily available to police officers so that it does not take months for fingerprints to be processed. In the meantime, a lot of people are potentially committing break and enters and going undetected due to a lack of resources to enable police officers to do their job.