



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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BRISBANE CBD, PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (5.30 pm): I move—

That this House notes:

1. that in excess of 30 per cent of incidents in Brisbane's CBD reported to police through the City Council's security camera surveillance system are not attended to by police;
2. the proactive measures being trialled and introduced by the Lord Mayor and the Brisbane City Council to prevent violence in the CBD;
3. the government's belated response to this public safety issue;

and calls upon the Beattie government to increase police numbers to improve public safety in the Brisbane CBD.

I am pleased to move this motion this evening. In doing so, I would like to clear up the quagmire of words, anecdotes and stories filtering from the offices of members and ministers on the other side of this House. As always on these matters, and as I have already mentioned in this House today, I am saddened that when the Queensland Liberals come out in support of police, we are shut down by the waffle and scare tactics of the minister and members opposite.

This morning I stood in this place and inquired as to why the minister was out of step with the police commissioner on the very important issue of policing tactics in the Brisbane CBD. I will take this opportunity to outline the situation again for those members who may not recall it. In a press statement on 18 February, the Minister for Police and Corrective Services trotted out an old press statement flagging the merits of the Summary Offences Bill that has been debated today. The first paragraph of the minister's statement says:

We already have a zero tolerance to crime. We don't tolerate crime that threatens public safety.

Fair enough. Apparently we have a zero tolerance policy and, apparently, that is the way in which the minister can ensure the safety of members of the public. Zero tolerance has many merits. It is a very smart move by the minister to play this line, as the public loves to hear that this is happening. In fact, I would be glad to hear that this is happening.

The sad thing about all of this, though, is that the minister is out of touch with what is actually going on in the department that she purports to run. This morning on 4BC Radio, the police commissioner, Bob Atkinson, said that he did not believe the Brisbane public would accept a zero tolerance approach to crime. Let us focus on that for a second. On the one hand, the minister has said that we already have a zero tolerance approach to crime. On the other hand, the commissioner, the top police officer in the state, has said that the public will not accept a zero tolerance approach.

Who is right? If both the police commissioner—a fine, upstanding officer who has served the state with distinction for many years—and the police minister truly believe that what each of them has said is correct, then clearly the public should be worried about the indecision and inconsistency within the Queensland police department. If the minister truly believes that we do have a zero tolerance approach and the commissioner says that not only do we not have one at present but if we did the public would not accept it, then the minister is obviously not doing her job correctly.

The minister has said that there are policies in place within her department which, in fact, are not in place—the officers in the field do not know about them—and are not policies that the police commissioner, the man at the coalface of policing in this state, believes we should have. The minister should communicate her messages far better than she has been. How many other policies does the minister think are being enforced in the department that—through lack of communication—are not being implemented?

Perhaps the minister likes to sit at home or in the office in the evening and read up on policing in other parts of the world, then write down those ideas on a napkin and store them for no one else to see. Then, when her department and her handling of that department come under fire, she resorts to this drawer full of napkins and pulls out, in a lucky dip, the newest policy of her department.

Evidently on 18 February, the date of this press release, the napkin that came out of the secret drawer in her files was the zero tolerance policy that has been put to use elsewhere in the world, most notably in New York. Then we found out that it was all just words and that the police commissioner—for one—did not know about the concept being in place in Queensland. Then, when he was asked for his opinion about its possible implementation in Queensland, he would not support it because the public would not respond well to it. Remember that this is the man at the coalface of policing and one of the best police commissioners we have had. Surely he is the man to know these things.

It was discovered that this zero tolerance rhetoric was all puff, that it was a policy made on the run, designed to deceive the people of Queensland into thinking that something was being done when, behind the hyperbole, there was actually nothing being done. When all of this was revealed, the minister stood here this morning and said that what zero tolerance means in New York is very different from what it means in other countries and in the states of Australia.

First of all, zero tolerance—by its very name—is self-explanatory. Zero is a fairly self-explanatory number or concept. Either we have zero tolerance or we do not. Even if this very simple to explain concept was in some way different in other jurisdictions, it must be realised that the commissioner's answer was given in Queensland and it related to Queensland issues. It was not made in reference to the New York style of zero tolerance—if, in fact, a distinction exists. The minister and the commissioner were talking about the same zero tolerance, yet one said that it is here and the other said that it is not here and that it would not be supported if it was.

The minister has obviously lost touch. Her own commissioner is not singing from the same song sheet as her, yet she stood in this place this morning and said—and this is really great—

There is absolutely no point of disagreement between me and the police commissioner on the issue of zero tolerance.

Regarding her answer, I would ask the minister to preface everything she says on the issue of zero tolerance by identifying which type of zero tolerance she is talking about. Could she please refer to either 'Queensland zero tolerance' or 'New York zero tolerance' if she is so adamant that there is a difference between the two.

I make these comments to outline the incompetence of this police minister and how out of touch she is with the police force. I do not envy Mr Atkinson in the slightest. He has to endure indecision and undermining from this minister, which she could pass off as a hobby such is its frequency.

As the motion says, 30 per cent of incidents captured on the cameras in the CBD are not attended to by police. I can tell members that this is not because the police are doing nothing but it is because there are not enough police. The minister had the gall to stand here this morning, in response to a question by my learned colleague the member for Robina, and say that these cameras have never been used politically before the election of this lord mayor. How long, under the Labor City Council, were these figures suppressed and not mentioned? I thank Campbell Newman for bringing this to the public's attention and for exposing the lack of police on the beat in the CBD.

The second part of the motion recognises the proactive approach of the first lord mayor in a decade to do anything productive about crime in the CBD. Campbell Newman, aside from fixing the problems left to rot by his Labor predecessors, has attempted to work through these issues with the state government. The City Liquor Industry Partnership is an initiative of the Brisbane City Council to look at after-hours transport and community safety, and inroads have been made into securing these objectives. Most importantly, CLIP has provided a forum for communication between lawmakers and holders of liquor licences. This level of communication and consultation—concepts which the minister is perhaps unaware of—has paved the way for the protection of members of the community who use the Brisbane CBD after dark. After all, when we put politics aside, that is what we need to be doing.

The final part of the motion is the government's belated response to this issue. If the best that the state government, the Premier and the minister can do is to walk through the city on a Saturday night, then they have truly lost their idea of what is actually going on. When a regular person goes out, they are not accompanied by the police commissioner, a media scrum and two security guards. They go out alone or perhaps in pairs. There is a big difference in the perception of the goings-on in the mall after dark of someone in the middle of such a group and that of two girls going from one club to another on their own

after dark. To these people, the city is a scary place. I was talking to a 20-year-old-girl about this issue the other day. She told me that her birthday celebrations were ruined by a member of the city's underbelly who decided to punch one of her female friends in the face as he was jogging by.

Perhaps the Premier should talk to his children and their friends who go out in the city into typical situations without security guards, commissioners and the media. Then he could get a true idea of the situation in the city and perhaps the government would work with the city council and Campbell Newman to find a real solution to this problem. The first step the government can take is to admit that there is a problem and to support this motion this evening.