



Speech by

## John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard Tuesday, 29 November 2005

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### CANNABIS USAGE

**Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (11.50 am): I rise to address a matter of public interest—namely, the damage that cannabis is doing to young Australians. Over the last month the *Australian* and the *Courier-Mail* have run more than five articles from health experts and other professionals outlining the dangers that ongoing drug usage poses to our children. An article in last Monday's *Australian* revealed evidence that four out of five people with incurable schizophrenia smoked cannabis regularly between the ages of 12 and 21. It was Dr Andrew Campbell of the New South Wales Mental Health Review Tribunal who offered this advice—

It's much safer to take heroin—you can live to be 90 with heroin ...

Of course, he is not endorsing the use of heroin, but a medical expert making a comment like that exposes the seriousness of the issue of cannabis usage in Australia. When referring to the four out of five people with incurable schizophrenia who regularly smoked cannabis, he said—

That's 75 to 80 per cent of the people who are getting long-term psychotic disorders who are not getting better ... That's four out of five who were healthy, they could smoke, they were not sensitive to the stuff, then they hit the wall.

It can take up to five or six years. It's an epidemic, and in some ways we're blind to it.

He also made this point—

There seems to be a vulnerable period at critical adolescence.

Dr Campbell further said that we should try to keep kids off cannabis until they are 21 and they have the keys to the door. The solution, therefore, is for the state government to put more funding into education campaigns for young Queenslanders. Also, families in the home environment need to help them make a more informed choice when presented with the opportunity to use cannabis, and not make light of it. Barry Thomas of the Mental Health Review Tribunal said that, after 30 years of involvement in the criminal justice system, he was surprised how many patients before the tribunal had their first psychotic experience after using cannabis and yet failed to see any connection with their cannabis usage and ongoing psychosis. The evidence is clearly telling us that the message is not getting across to young Australians. If they choose to smoke cannabis, they face serious consequences in terms of their health and particularly their mental health.

The case I am making about the need to change attitudes amongst young Australians on cannabis and other illicit drugs is strengthened by the front page of today's *Courier-Mail*, which reports that almost half of all Australians aged under 25 have used illicit drugs and view their usage as acceptable. This is often exacerbated by comedians who joke about drug abuse. According to information in the *Courier-Mail*, one in three Australians have tried marijuana at least once. There only needs to be a portion of those 33 per cent of Australians who go on to use cannabis on a regular basis, and it will put more of a burden on a mental health system in Australia that is currently struggling to keep up. It may very well be struggling to keep up because of the consequences of what has been happening, with young Australians smoking cannabis, or marijuana, for the last 30 or 40 years.

Roadside drug testing, which has been trialled in Victoria and which has been considered in Queensland, I think will attach a certain stigma to cannabis and other illicit drug usage, and thus present

the image to young Australians that cannabis does inhibit and affect their senses in much the same way as alcohol does. I do object, however, to any proposals that there be a fee paid to those who are randomly tested, as the spirit of the test is to make our roads safer.

When trying to prevent illicit drug usage amongst young Queenslanders, there has always been a focus on the negative implications of using drugs. But another aspect that needs to be brought into the light is the role that alcohol plays in leading to illicit drug usage. It is clear that not only should we focus on educating young Queenslanders on the negative impacts of cannabis usage but also the government should be vigilant in its campaign to discourage binge drinking. It has been one of my concerns with schoolies. In the *Bulletin* newspaper over the last few weeks they have been using vox pop interviews of young schoolies. Kids have been bragging about how much they are going, in their words, to 'get smashed', 'written off' and 'party'.

Father Dan Ryan, who is a parish priest in my parish in Surfers Paradise, commented in today's paper that he was speaking to a parliamentarian 25 years ago about the damage that cannabis was doing to people's brains. With the 'crisis we had to have' in Queensland's health system overseen by this government, and also with the heavy punishments and convictions that have been brought down on Australians in other countries, we can find some positives. The main positive—and I do not say this lightly—is that we can say to young Queenslanders that getting mixed up with cannabis and other drugs can be a lifetime habit. It can have serious consequences for their mental health, not to mention the risk of other diseases, and in some circumstances it can lead them to prison. Father Dan Ryan said that in his 30 years as a priest it has always been the first tablet or the first injection or the first drink that is the problem. It is our duty as representatives of Queensland's parents and guardians to do everything in our power to stop the first use and stop our kids from being vulnerable to highly damaging substances.