



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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YOUTH CRIME; CLEVELAND DETENTION CENTRE

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.42 pm): I rise to speak on the serious issue of juvenile crime in Charters Towers and the takeover of the town's streets at night by gangs of youths. Since November last year there have been up to 223 offences committed in Charters Towers, and I am led to believe that 68 offenders have been charged. This is an extremely high number, especially when one considers the extensive workload endured by the skeleton staff at the Charters Towers Police Station. The police are doing their best but are unable to stop gangs of youths roaming the streets late at night. They catch them and the next day they are back on the streets reoffending. Two weeks ago a group of six youths aged between 13 and 15 was arrested and charged with over 42 offences, only to be released on bail. They even admitted their guilt to police but still managed to get off scot-free.

On Sunday night these same youths and other gang members were again roaming the streets, smashing windows, threatening the public and throwing rocks at passing cars. They threatened staff and customers at a fast food outlet by waving sticks, stealing soft drinks and smashing the store's window, leaving staff and customers severely shaken. When approached by police they simply said, 'You can't touch us. We're juveniles.' We can no longer afford to sit back and accept the excuse that because they are juveniles nothing can be done. Youth crime is out of control in Charters Towers.

It is time the state government stopped ignoring this problem, because these young criminals are becoming more and more brazen in their acts of theft, wilful damage and violence and have no respect for the law or authority. I am not talking about kids out at night watching a movie; I am talking about juveniles breaking into homes and terrorising people. They are out there to deliberately inflict and cause serious bodily harm on other people. People in our communities have lost their right to feel safe in their own homes. It has got to the stage where people will begin taking the law into their own hands and they will, inevitably, end up being the ones in jail.

I call on the government to take urgent action to do something about this serious crime problem. I call on this government to provide more police on the beat to combat and crack down on juvenile crime. There needs to be stronger laws introduced by the police minister to ensure an ongoing crackdown on gangs and for a youth curfew to be put in place, especially at well-known trouble spots, until juvenile crime is wiped out.

There is also a need to investigate the Cleveland Detention Centre. It is known as 'Cape Cleveland' and as providing good food, games and new track shoes. Spending time there is regarded as a badge of honour amongst gangs. The detention centre should be a deterrent for juvenile criminals. However, this centre has become a place where juveniles are prepared to steal, destroy property and become a public nuisance and inflict serious bodily harm on people to get into this place. The people of Charters Towers need security. They need a guarantee from the state government that everything possible will be done to protect their lives, their property and their safety.