



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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### DRUG LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (2.30 pm): I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the Drug Legislation Amendment Bill, as it is a subject I feel very strongly about, particularly breaking the cycle of crime and drugs, the connection between those who have a drug and an alcohol problem and the crime that often ensues from those extreme addictions.

The Drug Court concept in Queensland was proposed by the now Leader of the Opposition, Lawrence Springborg, in 1999 as coalition policy. At that time initially the state government said 'yes, but not now' and we disagreed with its timing, but we are pleased that the policy was adopted and pursued. It has had bipartisan support in Queensland. The legislation we see before us, among other things, is seeking to bring about a permanent system rather than a pilot system in Queensland for drug courts which is very much about breaking that cycle of crime that is related to drugs. Unfortunately, once people have addictive behaviours, if they are only jailed, in many circumstances their behaviours get worse and not better. I would like to say that our jails are drug free but that is a myth. However, the underlying addictive behaviour and problems related to drug addiction are something that go beyond taking a drug. It is about addressing some of the underlying issues and helping people rebuild those areas of their lives so they do not look to alcohol and drugs as a way of life, and other supporting mechanisms are in place.

The issues of rehabilitation and drug use are things that I have spoken about in this House before. I have also raised with Attorneys-General over the years the need for a Drug Court on the Sunshine Coast. I will continue to advocate for a fully functional and funded Drug Court on the Sunshine Coast. One of the impediments in the past to doing this was a lack of rehabilitation—a lack of centre based care. We had some home based care, but there was a dearth of services providing drug rehabilitation on the Sunshine Coast. Despite the size of the region, despite the fact that we shared the drug problem as much as any other area of Queensland, we did not have the facilities to effectively intervene and help people who wanted to change their lives and rebuild and leave those addictive behaviours behind.

There are now a number of providers, but I want to acknowledge in particular a facility established on the Sunshine Coast hinterland which has been auspiced by WHO, We Help Ourselves. A number of years ago it joined with a very active community group on the Sunshine Coast to try to establish effective rehabilitation services. While the service is still in its relative infancy, its parent organisation has a long history of effective drug and alcohol rehabilitation. It is certainly a very important addition to the suite of services on the Sunshine Coast. There are not as many as I would like to see, but we acknowledge that it is not an easy issue. There is not a pill that fixes the problem of addiction. There is not a drive-through solution. It is a very complex issue: changing people's behavioural patterns but also addressing underlying life issues that have contributed to addictive behaviour and criminal behaviour.

Certainly those on the opposition benches and in the coalition could never be accused of being soft on drugs. We have a very strong approach to those who push drugs and to those who seek to profit from others, but we also recognise that we need measures in place to support those who want to break the habit and change their lifestyle.

Drug courts are a mechanism that recognise addictive behaviour with drugs has an impact on the wider community. It is not only about rehabilitating the offender. It is also about ensuring that communities are safer. Where drugs are involved, there is a significant issue as far as public safety and certainly people's own property and the damage that can ensue where drugs are involved.

The issue of amphetamines is a lot more prevalent than the issue of heroin. Queensland in recent years has earned the unenviable nickname of being the amphetamine capital of Australia. That is not something anyone is proud of. That is of great concern, particularly in the nightclub industry. A lot of people go out to have a good time and they can do that alcohol free—well, drug free. Venues are licensed for alcohol consumption, but they can do it drug free. The reality is that a considerable amount of drugs flow through these areas. That in itself is fuelling psychotic behaviours that impact not only on the person taking those drugs but also on the community.

In addressing this legislation, we support the concept of drug courts where they are properly funded and properly monitored. That is very important. If the community is to continue to support this concept as having a benefit not just for the initial offender but particularly for the wider community, then we have to ensure that the appropriate monitoring continues, that credible and well-financed rehabilitation facilities exist and that there is a genuine rollout of these options in the regions of Queensland.

I know that women with addictive behaviour and who are caught in a cycle of crime often have the added complication of being the primary carers of children. One type of service does not fix all situations, but sometimes the likelihood of people slipping back into a life of addiction and crime is greater where those basic social factors of help for people who have children are not easily available. I mention that because, once again, people are complex. There is not a one-size-fits-all solution. That is certainly true of drug abuse and the reasons why people fall into that lifestyle and then find it very difficult to break that cycle. When circumstances arise where they fall off the wagon, the downward spiral can be so devastating.

I certainly support this legislation. I particularly seek the Attorney-General's support for a Drug Court on the Sunshine Coast and the funding that goes with that to ensure that there are appropriately funded rehabilitation beds and services to complement those that exist but to create a more robust framework. I know that education is not strictly a part of this legislation, but it is part of the overall strategy for which I think there is bipartisan support. There is a need for better education on the ramifications of drugs.

As I said, human beings are complex. The reasons why people from seemingly good backgrounds sometimes end up in disastrous and damaging lifestyles with all of the associated fallout can be astounding. This is about trying to break that cycle, and certainly appropriately funded rehabilitation of the right people to go into the system will always be a major consideration. Once again, I support the legislation but I certainly seek this to be rolled out on the Sunshine Coast with the appropriate services to support it.