



Speech by

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OFFENDERS (SERIOUS SEXUAL OFFENCES) MINIMUM IMPRISONMENT AND REHABILITATION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (8.01 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Leader of the Opposition's, the coalition leader's, legislation before the parliament tonight. This legislation is not about making it easier for sexual offenders to get back into the community. In fact, it provides another measure that prevents them being released back into the community—that is, if they fail to undertake a rehabilitation program. Rehabilitation programs are not a panacea to deep-seated, ingrained habits that somebody has formed over a lifetime. However, they are an indication that somebody is at least willing to confront their offending behaviours. Child sexual offenders in particular often deny that they have in fact done anything wrong. While it may sicken us as adults to know that there are those who can abuse a child and say that the child wanted it, we know that in their minds they think they have done nothing wrong. That is abhorrent and needs to be confronted.

It is interesting that the minister, on the one hand, told us why rehabilitation fails yet, on the other hand, told us how the government is going to increase availability of offender programs. To date the research shows that these programs are not 100 per cent successful. What the research does show is that these programs are one element towards improving the outcome for prisoners, particularly after release, but that they must be coupled with other measures. This is something that the opposition, the state coalition, has in a very balanced policy way addressed and put into the public forum as well as proposed in this House. The minister referred to the fact that the government is actually looking at implementing surveillance measures such as electronic tagging. That, in fact, was a policy that the state coalition put forward. We were the first ones to advocate that this measure needed to be put in place for those who are back in the community but still have offending behaviours or need a level of accountability.

We are not saying that this legislation before the House is the total answer, but it is one part of confronting offending behaviour—that is, that those who are willing to confront their offending behaviour fall into a different classification. But it does in no way make it easier for dangerous sexual offenders to be released into the community. I strongly believe that dangerous sexual offenders should never be released into the community. Those who are not considered to be dangerous sexual offenders should still be electronically tagged and monitored. If child sexual offenders pose any risk, they should never be released.

When I was first elected I said that I thought that there were some repeat sexual offenders who should undergo chemical castration. A lot of people seemed to be shocked by that. For some categories of offenders if that is the only option why should we not investigate it? There is no one solution. Some prisoners should never be released. Some prisoners should be monitored electronically and tagged for life to ensure that they do not reoffend. They will know that there is a level of scrutiny and they cannot hide in the dark. We should look at all of the options for those who have offending behaviours that will never be fixed. I do not back away from that view.

It is a tragedy that there are those whose offending behaviour is generational—that is, they were child sexual offence victims themselves. There is a cycle of abuse. Sometimes the abused becomes an abuser in another generation. I believe that we need to boost early intervention measures for victims of

child sexual abuse. There are programs already, but a lot more needs to be done because, unfortunately, many victims of child sexual offences are not identified until later in life. We know that the pain of those people in coming forward is still very relevant, even decades after they were abused.

It is a terrible offence at any age. It has a terrible impact on a person of any age. Sexual abuse has such a profound and devastating effect on their lives. It can often plague a child in terms of other areas of their development. Some may become offenders and others may end up in a life of crime or depression or in dysfunctional relationships. We cannot state too highly the impact that sexual offences, particularly child sexual offences, have had upon this generation and will have on many to come. We need to do something different, something new, something over and above what has been done before. No one option will fix the problem. Not all laws will fix the problem. Certainly we need to look at all options. I think that there is more that can be done. We should never tolerate child sexual abuse or abuse at any age. I would advocate that the legislation before this parliament is another step in strengthening the provisions and for some people will make them confront their crime.

I will speak for a moment of something outside the area of sexual offences. I know that there are those who have been in the prison system and did not succeed with any of their rehabilitation programs or withdrew from the system. When they get out if they have had no integration process back into the community they will have problems. The tragedy is that there are people who will serve their time legally but will have no support in getting them back into the community. The system is almost setting people up to fail. I have no sympathy for sexual abusers, but I do see a system in the general area of corrective services that is absolutely failing in terms of the way that it rehabilitates both those still in jail and those who are now in the community. There is a broader issue than the one before the House. There is a desperate need for us to review the way that Corrective Services is actually operating in this state.

Yes, there will be those who will never be rehabilitated. They should never be released if they are dangerous. Yes, there are those who will benefit from those programs, but they may still need a lifetime of monitoring. There are other people outside of the sexual offences area in the general criminal offences area who desperately need proper programs for integration so that they can get on with their lives and do not reoffend anymore. Tragically, in that latter category too many of them end up back in the system.

I commend this bill to the House because it is not about making it easier for those who are still a risk to the community to get back into the community—far from it. It is another measure to ensure that those who have no intention of mending their ways or acknowledging their guilt face a penalty which is recognised in law. I would urge this House to look at not only this measure but also every other measure possible to make it harder for those who have already perpetrated this kind of evil against children and adults to go on perpetrating this evil in our communities. All measures should be looked at. They should not be viewed on their own but viewed collectively as measures and tools to ensure that in future these types of offences are not perpetrated on another generation of children.