



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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DRUGS POLICY

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (5.52 pm): It is almost unbelievable—given what we know about the impact of drugs on drug users and, more so, their families and loved ones—that we are standing here today, arguing that the use of illegal substances should be decriminalised. It is simply absolutely inconceivable that a group of people who profess to be responsible and forward-thinking adults could endorse such a policy and expect the people of Queensland to accept that as a rational decision.

The Queensland Greens have adopted what can only be termed a ridiculous and outlandish approach to the attack on drugs. Drugs are one of the greatest scourges in our society, denigrating many young and not-so-young people to a life of misery and, on many occasions, death. To advocate that this form of behaviour should be legalised is simply indefensible. If they spoke to people who have lost children or loved ones as a consequence of drug abuse or use, they would clearly understand the need for the ultimate deterrent to remain in place.

A term of imprisonment is not a pleasant thought. No-one actively wishes to impose that penalty on drug offenders. However, it is a penalty we must have recourse to if we are to provide a real deterrent for people who use drugs or deal in drugs. By all means, maintain contact with drug users and addicts and provide services on a health and social basis, but do not subvert the judicial process. That process is part of the overall strategy that every government, state and federal, in this country has adopted and actively pursued.

However, of greater concern is the Labor Party's endorsement of this policy as far as it relates to marijuana. It is simply incomprehensible for the Labor Party to act in a manner that is soft on drugs and, therefore, send to the public and to the young in this state a message that has damned many young people in the past and, if it continues, will do so in the future. The policy document of the Labor Party as it refers to drug courts states—

Labor supports the establishment of drug offence courts which should aim to minimise re-offences and use the coercive powers of the court to ensure compliance with rehabilitation programs and to break the nexus between drug use and criminal activities.

The Labor Party policy, in part at least, goes the right way. It states that 'the coercive powers of the court' will be used. The government is actually stating that it will use the legal process in a coercive, forceful manner to achieve a positive outcome. That is exactly what the policy should be.

The policy of the Greens is fanciful. I cannot believe that the Labor Party condones such action, particularly when, in part, it flies in the face of its own platform. The Labor Party offers two stances on a very important issue. However, should we really be surprised by the Labor Party's stance on this issue? Certainly not. The Labor Party will twist any way it can to gain a preference deal. It will manoeuvre, manipulate and, in essence, crawl its way into a position whereby it makes itself attractive—not for reasons of logic, not because it is the right thing to do but, rather, purely for political expediency. That is not the way in which policy should be formed and that is not a basis for establishing credibility within an electorate.

Labor Party members must be aware of the dangers of drugs. In a recent debate I heard many of them talk about the benefits of the Drug Court and the institution of that court on a permanent basis. Bear in mind that the Drug Court maintains its status as a court. That is, the judicial system is not the last resort;

it is, in fact, an integral part of rehabilitating people and preventing them from taking to the life of drug abuse and crime that is so often associated with that step.

Government members should read the legislation and read their own comments. The court's success stems, in part, from the ultimate deterrent that it provides. The court can impose jail as a consequence of a breach of its orders in relation to treatment of drug offenders and it constantly monitors the progress of individuals.

There is no correlation between the policy of the Greens and the stated policy of the Labor government. There is no correlation between being soft on drugs and taking the step of instituting the Drug Court on a permanent basis. In a cynical move, this government is attempting to package an arrangement. However, in so doing it is selling out its obligation to the youth of this state in what can be likened to Judas receiving the 30 pieces of silver, all for the idea of a preference swap.