



Speech by

Mark McArdle

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

Hansard Tuesday, 23 May 2006

POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr McARDLE (Caloundra—Lib) (3.28 pm): It gives me pleasure today to rise to speak to this bill and to applaud the government for bringing it before the House. I think that every person in this chamber and, in fact, every member of the community understands the importance of police officers—those on the street and those behind the scenes in the stations. They are an integral part of our society and form part of the bulwark against the evil that can at times interrupt the peaceful lives of members of the community.

I will start by making a few comments with regard to domestic violence and the provisions within the bill concerning it. In my opinion, domestic violence is one of the most insidious crimes in our society. For many years, police have been concerned that although they have a role in stopping domestic violence or at least hindering it, they spend many hours on paperwork as a consequence of that involvement. Many police have commented to me that up to four hours have been lost at a time in paperwork at watch-houses and elsewhere as a result of them attending a residence. Of course, that means not just one police officer but two who are down and out of service, and a motor vehicle as well in many cases.

Domestic violence occurs predominantly on Friday nights, Saturdays and Sundays, which is also the same time that antisocial behaviour reaches its peak. So at a time when the community does need police officers in numbers we have an upsurgeance of domestic violence and those same officers are taken from other duties that they could be performing. In that regard, this bill provides relief at least in relation to certain work that the police are required to undertake. An application can now be commenced by a notice to appear with what are, in essence, bail terms imposed or included thereon.

The police are also very mindful that the predominance of homicides in this state derive from domestic violence incidents. They are ever watchful that the role that they play in the domestic violence arena is one of extreme caution in that they do deter people from taking the ultimate step of taking the life of a spouse or a partner or some other third person.

On 5 May I had the opportunity to attend a domestic violence forum in Caloundra at which the guest speakers included magistrate Di Fingleton and Zoe Rathus, the woman who was the driving force behind the Caxton Street Legal Service. Both women delivered excellent speeches on the role that they saw in the community for the courts and also for academia with regard to domestic violence and how we can grow and attempt to tackle the issues that are the root cause of that domestic violence and the consequences of it.

It may now well be time for Queensland to consider family violence courts or domestic violence courts as a specialty area. That is not to say that they can happen, but certainly I feel that we have now reached a point in our jurisdictional growth where we need to consider whether those courts are of use in Queensland and also whether or not we have the expertise and capital funds available to make them work.

An excellent paper on that exact issue is the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Issues Paper No. 10 by Julie Stewart who, in a fairly detailed document, goes through

whether or not specialist family violence courts within the Australian jurisdiction and context are viable. She comes to the conclusion that they are, provided a number of initial hurdles are overcome. I suspect it is something that the Queensland government is looking at and it is certainly worthwhile doing that in the future. If we are going to have an impact upon the effects of domestic violence—not just on the perpetrator and the victim but also on the children—we may need to look at different methods of approaching the issue of domestic violence, perhaps akin to how the drug courts look at drug addiction and how they assist all those involved in that process to readjust their lives and to become better and more informed members of society.

The issue of police numbers generally across the Sunshine Coast has been a passion of mine for some time. The population growth in that region is significant. When one takes into account the Gold Coast, Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast, we have three of the top 10 fastest growing areas in Australia. With that population growth, of course, comes an increase in tourism. It also brings with it more venues such as nightclubs and more alcohol being consumed, which then, unfortunately in today's society, generates into more trouble on the streets, petty crime, hooliganism, hooning and other antisocial behaviours. Caloundra is not unique in that regard.

Recently there was a sale of a Kings Beach property owned by the Queensland police which was the former police station for Caloundra and a police house. That property sold for \$1.25 million. I would ask the minister to address in her closing remarks whether or not those funds will be utilised for the benefit of the Caloundra policing district or somewhere else outside of that region.

Ms Spence: It has nothing to do with this bill.

Mr McARDLE: As long as the minister can address it, I will be happy.

Ms Spence: I am happy to, but not in this context.

Mr McARDLE: I thank the minister very much.

The bill goes on to deal with other matters incorporating evading police officers in vehicles. That is very much an admirable provision in the bill. It does, of course, provide the police with a mechanism to protect not only themselves but also other members of the public. I believe it is a provision that will benefit the public at large. No-one likes to see or hear of people who are innocent bystanders or people in a motor vehicle being struck and killed by a vehicle speeding through a red light. This provision will provide the protection that people need to go about their daily lives. It will provide the police with the mechanism to take the action that is required to protect all members of society.

Protecting police against people spitting and other such action, is, of course, long overdue. As I have said on many occasions in the past, police officers are men and women who are greatly respected but, in my opinion, often misunderstood until such time as we need to call upon their services for our own protection and safety. The police put their lives at risk every single day of the week. When they go to a front door and knock on it they simply do not know whether they are going to get a shotgun blast or a welcome from the occupant. The police protection provisions contained in this bill are long overdue and certainly will provide a deterrent to those who would engage in such antisocial behaviour against police officers.

Another provision that is to be applauded is the concept of using civilians to do police chores and, in this case, using civilians in the watch-house. This, of course, allows more police officers to be released into the mainstream of society to do in essence what their primary function is—that is, to police and protect those in society from the few who wish to cause them harm.

The police need extensive police phone tapping powers if they are going to deal with modern criminals. We have heard here today that there are many criminals who act with very sophisticated materials and technologies. If we are going to capture those criminals and bring them to justice then the police certainly need to be equally well informed and resourced. One way of doing that is, of course, phone tapping.

I also commend the Neighbourhood Watches in the Caloundra region. Neighbourhood Watches perform a very important and integral role with regard to policing in this state. They are, in fact, an adjunct to police officers for the very simple reason that people watch over their neighbours; they provide the police with an extra set of eyes and ears.

Finally, I compliment the police officers across the Sunshine Coast and, in particular, Caloundra for the work that they do under very trying and extreme circumstances. These police are few in number, greatly underresourced and are in need of assistance from this government so that they can deal with the needs and necessities of a growing population. Unless they get that financial backing and support, their job will become more and more difficult. With those few words I commend the bill.