



Speech by

Peter Wellington

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard Thursday, 25 May 2006

CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENT BILL

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—Ind) (7.47 pm): I rise to participate in the debate on the Criminal Code Amendment Bill 2006. I will not be supporting this bill.

I listened intently to the contributions of speakers on both sides of this House during this debate. While listening to those contributions, I reflected on a recent contribution by the Leader of the Opposition to a debate on another bill. He stated that if the coalition was elected to form the next government of Queensland he would retrospectively approve the controversial Links development in the Maroochy shire on the Sunshine Coast.

I listened to speaker after speaker who do not support this proposed bill. They have spoken passionately about the reasons they will not support it. However, I have not yet heard one speaker from the non-government side of this House state—as the alternative Premier of this state said on another matter—that if they were to form part of the next government of Queensland they would retrospectively support the Links development.

I would ask members of the Liberal Party and the National Party or any other non-government member who intends to speak to this bill to please tell Queenslanders and this parliament—if they want to be consistent in their passion and opposition to what the government is proposing in this forum—what their position will be if they happen to win the next election, whenever that might be held. In response to the question I have just asked I will put on the parliamentary record that if I happen to have the privilege of being re-elected to represent my constituents of Nicklin in the next parliament I will support any proposal to put this law back to what it was prior to this bill coming into force.

When the remaining Liberal, National, Independent and One Nation members who have not spoken rise to speak to this bill I would simply ask that they please reflect on the view that at some stage in the future we will be going to the Queensland people for an election, be it in 12 or six months, and if the alternative Premier of this state has been able to speak so passionately in this House about the reasons why he will retrospectively approve the controversial Links development in my electorate and in the Maroochy shire—

An opposition member: Be relevant.

Mr WELLINGTON: I will be relevant because we are talking about consistency. I only reflect on a speaker who spoke passionately recently about the need to be consistent. Following that same theme about the need to be consistent, if members of the alternative government want to be consistent about the reasons this bill is so wrong they should come into this House and tell Queenslanders whether the alternative government—the Liberals and Nationals—would amend this law and return things to the situation that prevails now. I will support that. I am on the parliamentary record as supporting that.

There has been a lot of emotion and very strong words used in the debate on this bill. I believe that the current legislation puts a very clear onus on ministers when giving evidence before estimates committee hearings to tell the truth and be up-front. I believe it has also put a very clear onus on departmental staff, when they are invited to respond to questions that are raised at estimates hearings, to

be up-front and to answer questions as honestly and as truthfully as they can. I believe that is the most important principle.

As a number of speakers have already observed, this bill is being debated in the last sitting week before the budget is brought down and before we go into another estimates committee hearing process. Recently I studied some comments made in the past by previous ministers when questions have been asked about the requirement to answer questions at estimates committee hearings. I note that a ruling was made that ministers had the discretion to answer those questions in whatever shape or form they chose. I believe that we need to ensure ministers answer those questions, not just in whatever shape or form they believe they want to answer them, but also as truthfully as possible. I believe that is a most important principle.

Estimates committee hearings are unique in this parliament. We have only one house of parliament. I believe there needs to be a very clear requirement on ministers to answer questions that are put to them in relation to issues in their budgets and within their ministerial responsibilities—to not just answer them in whatever shape or form but to answer them as truthfully as possible.

There is a difference between ministers answering questions in estimates committee hearings and ministers coming into this chamber and speaking. I believe that there is a distinction that needs to be drawn. In the short time that I have had the privilege to be a member of parliament and represent my constituents, I can recall seeing ministers come into this House distressed when they have suddenly realised they have misled the House. I can recall very vividly ministers coming into this House lodging an apology and correcting the record.

I believe the current law is appropriate. I believe it places a very clear responsibility on ministers to answer questions in the estimates committee hearings as honestly as possible. I think many people wish that the unfortunate incident which has prompted this bill to eventuate had never happened, but the reality is that it has. I think it has focused many members' attention on the importance and the ramifications of ministers and their roles.

I do not intend to speak any further on the matter, but I reiterate that I will not be supporting the bill. I reiterate that if I happen to have the privilege of being re-elected to represent my constituents I certainly will support any attempt to amend the law to return the status quo.