



Speech by

Robert Messenger

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Tuesday, 23 May 2006

POLICE POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MESSENGER (Burnett—NPA) (3.44 pm): I, like my conservative colleagues, am happy to support the Police Powers and Responsibilities and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2006, because it will ultimately provide greater legislative protection for our very hardworking police officers, who daily risk their lives so that we might have a chance of living a safe and peaceful life. This is wide-ranging, comprehensive legislation. It is more than 150 pages in length and amends a number of significant areas of law enforcement including police move-on powers, impounding motor vehicles, search warrants, domestic violence which increases police discretionary powers to cool-off provisions, powers relating to persons in custody, reporting to the watch-house, dealing with controlled drugs, dealing with dangerous drugs, evidentiary provisions, provisions about evading police officers or car chases, impounding those cars and costs orders if a child is found guilty of evasion. The list is very comprehensive.

I understand that many people who join the police force do so out of a sense of vocation rather than occupation and are highly motivated individuals who have a strong love of Queensland community and families. So it is only right and proper that, with increasing physical risks to our police officers—not to mention mental risks—from transmissible diseases caused by biting and spitting and exposure of officers to offenders' bodily fluids, this House is presented with legislation which is increasing the penalties against people who are stupid, or bloody-minded, enough to assault our police officers.

I have not forgotten the mental anguish experienced by police officers who are waiting for medical test results after being assaulted in the course of their duties. Clause 89 of this legislation amends section 340 of the Criminal Code by inserting a new clause, section 340(2A). There is no doubt that assaults against police are increasing. Anecdotal evidence proves it and Parliamentary Library research shows a number of recent media articles. An article which best sums up this issue was published in the *Courier-Mail* on 27 October last year. It is titled 'Violence against police on the rise'. The figures show that seven police officers are assaulted on the job every day across Queensland. I was quite surprised to think that that many police officers were assaulted. The article goes on to say that in hot spots like the Brisbane CBD and Fortitude Valley violence against police has risen significantly in the past year. The minister herself said that she was alarmed at the escalating violence and warned drunk and violent revellers that anyone who fought police would end up in the watch-house. The minister also said that preliminary data revealed that 2,500 police were assaulted during 2004-05 at an average of nearly seven officers a day. More than 750 of these incidents were serious assaults and 73 officers were the victims of assaults occasioning bodily harm.

It is a very comprehensive article, and I would recommend it to anyone who has an interest in this area. In considering the number of assaults against police, we must look beyond the obvious and maybe drill a little deeper into the issue, which I guess can be summed up as a general lack of respect for authority. It is very easy to ask the question: why is there a lack of respect for authority and how can we reduce the number of assaults against police—indeed, assaults against people such as domestic violence? It is a little harder to supply a definitive answer and a solution, although I strongly suspect that

the answer to this question lies in the education of our children and not just in the pages of this legislation before the House.

While I welcome the legislation increasing the legislative protection for police, I will, however, add this cautionary observation: the best strategy for the protection of our police is a comprehensive increase in our police numbers and resources. Page 144 of the Police Statistical Review for 2004-05 shows some very relevant and pertinent figures. In Bundaberg there is an estimated population of around 87,000. As of June 2005, for those 87,000 people there were 132 police officers plus 37 staff members. There were 840 reported offences against the person, 3,665 reported offences against property and 3,153 other offences reported. That comes to a total of 7,648 crimes reported in the Bundaberg-Burnett region.

Interestingly, it appears that the Bundaberg district has lost five full-time police officers. Comparing the 2004-05 figures with the 2003-04 figures, the police numbers were reduced from 137 to 132. The figures show that the police-to-population ratio is now 1 to 663. That is the second worst in the north coast region. I note that Gympie, with an estimated population of 70,000, actually has more police numbers than Bundaberg but with less crime. Bundaberg police should receive a helping hand from the state government as far as extra resources are concerned.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Fouras): Order! I suggest the member gets back to police powers.

Mr MESSENGER: Speaking to the police powers and responsibilities legislation, I would also like to canvass a local situation in relation to the South Kolan Police Station. I can remember that I left South Kolan as a 15-year-old and when I came back it was known as South Columbia because of the huge increase in the prevalence of illicit drugs.

Ms Spence: That is not relevant to this legislation. Our speakers have been relevant and you are just raving on about things that have nothing to do with this legislation.

Mr MESSENGER: I would think that illicit drug production is addressed in this legislation, Minister. We need to make every effort to make it comfortable for our police officers to perform their duties. In that regard, I would echo Mayor Duffy's call for an extra house to be supplied to the police station in South Kolan.

Another pertinent and relevant issue relates to Moore Park. Members of the Moore Park Beach Community Association have alerted me to a serious law and order issue. Russell Stewart, the vice-president of the Moore Park Beach Community Association, has written me a letter asking me to put his association's concerns before the police minister. The letter states—

Our Recent Community Survey showed police presence to be the main concern ie. Lack of frequent police patrols, no permanent police presence and poor response times (up to 2 hours) to reported criminal incidents.

Mr O'BRIEN: I rise to a point of order. Standing order 236—relevance.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I have asked the member for Burnett to come back to police powers—not the numbers and not the housing; it is police powers and responsibilities that we are debating.

Mr MESSENGER: I welcome your direction, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to direct my comments to illicit drug activity, which of course is addressed in this legislation. Mr Stewart says in his letter—

Our principal concern is the apparent illicit drug activity here. Following please find a list of addresses where this is believed to be occurring and a list of car registrations seen coming and going to these addresses.

In order to protect the identity, the basic civil rights and the presumption of innocence of those residents and motorists mentioned in this letter, I will not table the complete letter; I will table a censored copy from the Moore Park Beach Community Association. I will, however, pass on those censored details in confidence to the police minister and I ask that she investigate as soon as possible these serious accusations. The vice-president of the Moore Park Beach Community Association also writes—

Mr Reeves: When did you get this?

Mr MESSENGER: I think it was received in my office on the 19th of this month—quite recently. The vice-president states—

Residents adjacent to the suspected drug houses are frightened therefore our Committee is hoping you can get some action on this problem.

I also ask the police minister to provide my community of Moore Park and, indeed, Burnett and Bundaberg with action and extra resources.

Speaking to the issue of illicit drug use mentioned in the police powers and responsibilities legislation 2006, the manufacture of illegal drugs and the sale of pseudoephedrine, or speed, is addressed in this legislation. As we have heard, it is a scourge on our society. Too much of this drug is being consumed in our modern society with the obvious serious and tragic flow-on effects: ruined health, antisocial behaviour, an increase in assaults for the police and breakdown of relationships and families in

society in general. One of the main culprits in the manufacture and distribution of illicit drugs as far as I have been made aware is outlawed bikie gangs and ethnic gangs. I ask the minister to redouble her efforts in cracking down on these thugs. Queensland streets and schools are now becoming the battlegrounds for renewed gang activity, and the government's attitude of denial, of pretending this is not happening, is not helping the problem.

Tabled paper: Letter dated 18 May 2006 from Russell Stewart to Mr Messenger relating to police presence in the Moore Park area