



Speech by

Jason O'Brien

MEMBER FOR COOK

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ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr O'BRIEN (Cook—ALP) (12.30 pm): At the outset, Mr Deputy Speaker Wendt, I want to congratulate you on your elevation to the position of Deputy Speaker. It is a very important role and one that you are already handling very well. I also congratulate the minister on his elevation to the ministry, and he too is showing that he is doing a sterling job in forging out a new role for the Environmental Protection Agency in terms of taking it in a 21st century direction. Congratulations, Minister!

I do not want to speak for particularly long on this bill because previous speakers in the debate have covered the substantial points quite adequately. However, I did not want to let this occasion pass without putting my support for the bill on the record. We all have our pet hates in life—little things perhaps that annoy us, that get under our skin and that we talk about at parties and at functions. Littering from cigarette smokers in particular is one of my pet hates and something that really gets up my nose and annoys me. That is why I am particularly pleased with the bill before the House. As the member for Greenslopes said, we cannot legislate for good behaviour. We can try. We can put fines into place. We can hope that we slowly bludgeon people into submission with fines which will eventually change their behaviour. But people either have respect for their fellow human beings and the environment which we all share or they do not.

That is the point that the member for Greenslopes made, and he made it well. We cannot legislate for common sense, but we have to try to change the attitudes and behaviour of people. We live in an environment now that is increasingly under pressure from all sorts of issues, not just tree clearing and other environmental damage but issues such as littering. That is why I am very proud to stand here to support this legislation, legislation which mirrors legislation from other states. The evidence from those states demonstrates that legislation such as this is starting to reduce the amount of litter on highways, streets and public spaces.

I represent an area of Queensland that is pristine. In many places it is untouched. My electorate has large areas of national parks and more coastline than any other electorate. Most of the time those beaches and areas are beautiful. I recently took a working holiday to Cape Tribulation during the school holidays and was amazed that there was just one piece of litter on the entire beach—just one cigarette butt. I have been to other beaches around the world where there is lots of litter. When I went to Bali when I was much younger there was a lot of litter on its beaches. If this is the sort of legislation that can keep areas like our beaches and public areas clean, then it should enjoy the support of the vast majority of people in the community.

I also want to pay tribute to those people who clean up other people's rubbish, not just on Clean Up Australia Day. There are people in my electorate who wander the highways in their spare time picking up litter or when they walk their dog in the morning they take a bag with them to pick up litter, and they assist the Department of Main Roads and councils in doing their jobs. Of course the Department of Main Roads would like to spend more resources cleaning up litter on our highways and councils would like to do a better job in cleaning up these areas, but the money can only stretch so far. The legislation before the House is important legislation. I am very pleased that the minister's predecessor introduced it into the House, and we should congratulate Lindy Nelson-Carr, the member for Mundingburra, for bringing this legislation to the House. I hope that it enjoys the support of all honourable members.