



Speech by

**Mark McArdle**

**MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA**

Hansard Wednesday, 14 November 2007

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## LAW AND ORDER

**Mr McARDLE** (Caloundra—Lib) (5.31 pm): I move—

That the Bligh Labor government has failed to deliver on its 'tough on crime' stance and has placed the safety and welfare of Queenslanders at risk.

Since 1998 this government has lurched from crisis to crisis under a Labor government, firstly under the helm of ex-Premier Beattie and now under Premier Bligh. However, one of the ongoing problems has been this government's weak attitude to law and order issues. This government is weak on criminals being sentenced to real terms of imprisonment, it is weak on deterring criminals from committing further crime and it is weak on supporting the victims of crime. This government talks tough, but its record speaks volumes of how weak it is on one of the most important issues affecting society. Indeed, it affects every man, woman and child in this state, and this government has not come to grips with how to deal with it and how to protect the people of Queensland.

Across the range of law and order issues, this government has clearly failed the people of Queensland. Let us look at the number of police officers on our streets. Ask anybody in this state and they will say that that number is woefully inadequate and woefully unable to deal with the day-to-day issues that citizens and the police have to face on a regular basis. If one picks up any newspaper any day of the week one will see clear, stark evidence of this government's inability to provide protection by way of police numbers and to resource those police officers to enable them to deal with the concerns of Queenslanders. If we cannot get the basics right of providing the men and women in blue with what they want and what they need, this government is woefully out of touch with what our society is requiring from it.

The police minister comes into this place and in essence proclaims that this is the greatest government Queensland has ever seen. But talk to the people of this state—talk to the people who live in the suburbs, live in the regional cities and live in the country—and they will tell you the exact opposite. They will clearly tell you that police are not there in numbers to control crime, and that the people of Queensland are sick and tired of this government making hollow promises and hollow statements which it has neither the intention nor the capacity to keep. Police officers, as I have said, are front-line men and women and they are simply not being resourced. They still have to use their own mobile telephones because there are not enough hand-held radios to go round to have them communicate with one another in emergency situations.

As recently as this morning the Premier stood up in this House and admitted that phone tapping was a critical element in controlling crime, but at the same time she made it very clear that she would not give these same police officers, CMC officers and other law enforcement agencies the right to tap phones to stem the tide of organised crime, paedophilia and other major crime networks in this state. One only has to go to the 2006-07 CMC annual report to see the Chairman, Mr Robert Needham, on page 4 again ask for telephone interception powers that this government has denied. This government uses a ridiculous excuse that we need a Public Interest Monitor before we can put those powers into place. Every other state in this country has phone-tapping powers for its law enforcement agencies; Queensland does not.

Let us look at what is happening at this point in time in Melbourne at the police integrity hearings and the role that telephone tapping has played during those hearings combined with the evidence at the inquiry, leading to two assistant commissioners standing down. Let us look at what happened in Western Australia in recent times when telephone tapping was able to capture a number of politicians and others involved in corruption. This government should be implementing the appropriate resourcing of the CMC and police officers with telephone tapping to ensure that they can do their job properly. One really has to wonder what this government is terrified of if it were to give the CMC and the police the power to use telephone interception regulations. That can be done under strict guidelines.

In the last three weeks the opposition has proposed three reasonable bills—the Terrorism, Organised Crime and Anti-Corruption Surveillance Bill, the Criminal Code (Organised Criminal Groups) Amendment Bill and the Bail and Penalties and Sentences Amendment Bill. All of these bills go to the very heart of what is going on in this state and deal with the issues and the core reason for crime. On each occasion this government has turned its back on these new initiatives aimed at attacking the root cause of crime. This government has failed to understand its role in Queensland society and in rejecting the bills condemns itself in the eyes of Queenslanders. This government is soft on crime and soft on criminals, and that is to the detriment of the people of this state.

This government has failed to heed the words and warnings of the people of Queensland. They want our criminal justice system cleaned up and the criminals put away so that they cannot do any further harm. They want the revolving door of the court and bail tightened up. They want organised criminal groups and outlaw motorcycle gangs and their activities stamped out. This government for some reason fails to acknowledge or even understand the implications of what it is not going to do. This government does not have the intestinal fortitude to make it happen.

Then we turn to the issue of dangerous sex prisoners. This Labor government has had to amend this legislation five or six times, and still it cannot get it right! It makes admissions in this House that it can give no guarantee that a dangerous sex prisoner will not reoffend and then blames, as the police minister did this morning, the courts for allowing them out. This government put in place legislation that allows these people to be released back into the community. This government allows these men to continue to stalk the children of Queensland and it has the hide to say it is somebody else's fault. But that is exactly what this government does. When anything goes wrong, it is somebody else's fault, it is somebody else's concern. We, the people of Queensland, have to pick up the pieces at the end of the day. This government blames everybody but itself for its own mistakes. Again, that is exactly what is happening in the law and order debate here in Queensland. This government simply never, ever accepts responsibility.

Instead of going out and dealing with the issues, what does the government do? It issues a discussion paper. It looks at a review paper—another stack of documents—being prepared to consider what it will or will not do just to be certain that it does not run contrary to public opinion. It does not have the intestinal fortitude to take the hard steps and make the hard decisions in relation to law and order matters. This is a government bereft of backbone to put in place hard and long-term solutions to society's biggest problems and concerns. Not only that, when one considers some of the actions taken by the government, one wonders exactly where its mind was when it put in place certain pieces of legislation.

Going back to the CMC report published today, the chairman at page 4 raises a concern about the amendments to the Government Owned Corporations Act 1993 that all GOCs will convert to being corporate GOCs, which means that the CMC will not have the power to investigate these agencies and neither will employees have the protection of the Whistleblowers Protection Act 1994. This is one more example of this government's attitude to law and order. It is going to isolate itself from the control of its actions and interactions with GOCs to protect its own interests.

The CMC has now been excluded from looking at the activities of these GOCs, and employees of GOCs simply do not have the capacity to claim protection under the Whistleblowers Protection Act. That view comes from no higher source than the head of the CMC. This government should be listening to this man and taking heed of what he says. He has issued two clear warnings: give us phone-tapping interception powers and what you are doing with the GOCs is ultimately a recipe for disaster. This is a stark example of the government's attitude of protecting itself and looking after its own interests and not those of Queenslanders, as it is required to do.

The CMC is charged with combating major crime in Queensland, but I ask members to compare the arrest figures of 2006-07 with those of 2005-06. There are some startling comparisons. The number of people charged with organised crime activities has increased from 49 to 105. The number of charges laid has increased from 316 to 354. Those figures indicate quite clearly that the incidence of major crime in this state is on the increase. Again, I go back to the issue of why the government is not giving these police men and women the tools and resources that they need to deal with these very important issues which touch upon every single Queenslanders.

This week, in answer to a question on notice, the Attorney-General replied that, for 2005-06, 2006-07 and 2007-08 for the offences of drug trafficking, the production of drugs or the supply of dangerous

drugs, not one person has been sentenced under the Drugs Misuse Act to a maximum term for any of those offences. This is a weak government.