



Speech by

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LIQUOR (RESTRICTION OF SUPPLY TO MINORS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (7.50 pm): I am certainly pleased to speak to this bill because our shadow minister for health has put a lot of thought into it. It is about due care and consideration for young people who are at a very vulnerable stage of life as they transition from teenagers at school into working life or university student life. As the member for Surfers Paradise, the shadow minister does have some experience of what happens in his electorate in what is famously known as schoolies week, which started in the 1980s and has built up to be the major event it is now. This bill does not just apply to schoolies week. This is a very sensible and a very responsible bill that is about encouraging parents or other responsible adults to look after teenage children in their care so that any drinking that occurs in a private residence simply for the purpose of socialising with their family or friends is carefully supervised so that those children learn to drink in a socially responsible way. That is not to say that that is encouraged, but it does happen and many families make the choice that they would like their children to have a sip or a half a glass or whatever it might be to carefully and sensibly introduce them to drinking. It is probably far better for them to learn responsible social drinking in that regard than to go out the back of some hall with their mates somewhere and do it in a very subverted way.

One of the pleasures of being a dairy farmer was at the end of the night—we would finish milking at about seven—we would sit on the back steps of the house looking over the Mary River, which sadly will be flooded by the dam, and because of the cattle slump we could afford one stubbie every second evening. The boys would say, 'Can I have a sip, Dad?' I would let them have a sip and a bit of a sniff—a quarter of a mouthful and that was about it. We had time together sitting on the back steps of the house. That is what a lot of parents like to do when they sit around the table when their kids are 17 or so. Those kids are going to be able to have a drink on their own in another year's time. It only makes sense for them to be able to be a part of the family socialising and having a small drink with their family or friends so that they see that it is something that can be done in a very sensible way.

The legislation proposed by our shadow minister is attacking what is a real problem. It is probably hard for many responsible parents to understand how this could happen. I have been told that it does happen, particularly in schoolies week when adults will take students down to the coast, put them in units, give them a couple of slabs, stock the fridge and then jump in the car and go home. Those kids are there in high spirits. They have just finished their many years at school and they are left on their own without supervision. That is the nub of this bill—that is, if they are under 18 and they do want to have a drink, if they have a drink under the supervision of their family or a responsible adult then it is allowable but not under any other circumstance. This bill has a lot of common sense and will be good for young people.

It is not just schoolies week that we should be looking at when talking about this issue but other parties that get out of hand in streets and in suburbs and so forth. This bill is looking to combat the genesis of that problem as well. If there is going to be a party and kids turn up of all ages from 16 through to 19 or 20 and there is no proper supervision and no proper responsibility taken, that is when these parties turn ugly. This is a terrible trend of our time. There are so many good kids in our community. The vast bulk of kids are just wonderful. We go to school speech nights and shake our heads in awe at their ability, their talent, their responsibility and their self-discipline. But these other events are occurring more and more

often—events to which the police are called, the police are outnumbered and fights start spilling out onto the streets. I have spoken before in this parliament about one that occurred in the suburb of Kearney Springs in Toowoomba where neighbours were hit with palings and all sorts of things happened.

In the past, drinking parties have got out of hand where there has not been enough parental supervision. Now of course in the electronic age with mobile phones they can ring or SMS and before you know it 10, 20 or 30 car loads arrive and the whole thing gets out of hand. It is up to families and adults to be responsible, but sadly the reason we often need to pass laws in this parliament is that people do not bear that responsibility. Laws are there in an endeavour to get, if you like, the percentage of error down. It is a bit like Rugby League in that there is always going to be a certain number of errors in the game. Even Jack Gibson could not coach errors out of Rugby League. There have to be rules and guidelines to try to get to the absolute minimum in terms of the number of errors and indiscretions that occur, and that is what this bill is about.

Most importantly, this bill is about giving our young people at that vulnerable age around the 17-year-old mark some protection so that they can make the transition to adulthood safely and carefully in order to reach their potential and so that they do not fall off a balcony, that they do not get knocked over and end up in a spinal ward, that they do not have an unwanted pregnancy and that they do not have a terribly unhappy schoolies week or an unhappy party they attend, but rather they have a good time and a safe time through their later teenage years guided by responsible adults and responsible parents. That is what this is about. Sometimes it takes an amount of discipline that is applied through legislation to make that happen.

We all know that sometimes policing of these issues can be exceptionally hard. It is hard enough to control policing in a licensed environment. Generally speaking, publicans are very responsible. However, the policing of this sort of thing in a home environment or a private party environment is even more difficult. Where a party gets out of hand and the police are called, I believe this legislation would be a deterrent. I believe this legislation would be a great asset to schoolies week, particularly for all of those good organisers who endeavour to provide other activities so that the kids have a great time celebrating the end of their school years in a safe way. Also, this sort of legislation would be another way of making parents and the system of parenting that much more responsible.

We often hear of parenting courses and how important they are. People might ask themselves, 'Why do we have to have parenting courses?' It is a fact of life that many young people do not grow up in the circumstances of having a mother and father who can teach them and show them good ways of growing up. Instead, they grow up in a system that is dysfunctional and so they need the parenting course. Those sorts of things are good to assist our society and to assist young families.

Something like this is an excellent idea. I would like to ask everyone in this parliament to give it proper consideration. It is about protecting our young. It is about enabling our young people to have a happy, enjoyable and celebratory time. It is sensible legislation. It is practical because it is based on legislation in other states. It has the support of the Drug and Alcohol Foundation. It has the support of the people who organise schoolies week and I am sure this would have the support of all good, responsible parents and adults throughout Queensland who want to do the right thing by our young people. I urge the House to give this every consideration.