



Speech by

## Rosemary Menkens

MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

---

### LIQUOR (RESTRICTION OF SUPPLY TO MINORS) AMENDMENT BILL

**Mrs MENKENS** (Burdekin—NPA) (7.41 pm): I rise to speak in the debate on the Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007. I am very happy to support this amendment bill. This bill seeks to make improvements to the Liquor Act 1992 to limit the potential supply of alcohol to minors in private places. Existing legislation fails to include any stipulation relating to the providing of alcohol to teenagers in private residences. This allows it to be legal for an adult to provide a minor with alcohol as long as it is not in a public or licensed premises.

I commend the member for Surfers Paradise for bringing in this private member's bill because it is a responsible piece of legislation. This is about under-age drinking. I have no doubt that everybody in this chamber tonight is aware of the problems of under-age drinking. I can actually see no reason at all why any member in this House could in all conscience oppose this bill unless they themselves are totally irresponsible. I ask any member who will stand up and vote against this bill along party lines to genuinely examine their conscience.

I would like to take the minister to task on her speech. I have read her speech. I have a lot of respect for the minister but the minister spoke about this bill alienating parents. That is totally fanciful. The minister said in her speech that the bill seeks to intrude in family relationships by dictating to parents what decisions they may make about their teenagers and alcohol. In opposing this bill she says the government respects the right of parents to make informed, responsible decisions about their children and alcohol.

That might be fine but, through the chair to the minister, this bill is not about the feelings of parents, it is about protecting our youth. This bill is about youth. It does not just talk about parents, it talks about youths who have turned 18 or 19 who are legally adults but may not be behaving like responsible adults. This bill is about making them aware that they are responsible adults and that they cannot supply their mates with alcohol. That is what is happening. It is not just parents who are supplying these youth with alcohol; it is the just turned 18-year-olds who are conned into supplying their mates with alcohol. I see this as a most responsible bill.

The bill will append the existing limitation on the supply of liquor to minors under the Liquor Act 1992. All relevant provisions presently in the act in relation to the limitation of supply to minors are maintained. However, they have been redrafted to contain the changes to be implemented. The bill seeks to further heighten the restriction on the supply of liquor to minors by broadening the guidelines that apply to the offence of supplying liquor to minors or juveniles found consuming liquor or in possession of liquor. Also it relates to the selling of liquor to a person who is knowingly buying it on a juvenile's behalf. That is the actual principle behind this legislation. It absolutely evades my rather small brain why members would be against this bill.

Drinking by minors is a major issue facing not only Queensland but the whole country, with a constant loss of life on our roads every week due to alcohol. These are our future generations. We must act now to stop the unnecessary loss of young life—not just on the roads but in terms of the other things that they are doing to themselves. Our young people are our heritage. As we know, our young people still require our protection. Everybody has rights but our young people still require responsible protection.

We see this over and over again at the end of each year as we approach schoolies week celebrations. This is not just about schoolies week but every day and every week of the year. We are seeing young people having wild parties on the weekends. They arrive at apartments and have lots of liquor and goodness only knows what else. Too often we hear of tragedies resulting from these alcohol related wild parties. It is unbelievable and it is a sad fact that the majority of teenagers receive their alcohol from older people. They could be their parents or family members but more often than not it is their adult mates—that is, those mates who have just turned 18, 19 or 20 but who are not behaving like adults.

Alcohol impairs judgement and teenagers are more likely to engage in such things as unsafe sexual practices when they have been drinking. They open themselves up to the sad associated risks of date rape, of sexual intercourse without a condom leading to exposure to sexually transmissible infections, and possibly pregnancy. It can be the ruination of young lives.

Some people believe that alcohol is less dangerous than other drugs. There is evidence to suggest that parents are so alarmed at the thought of their children using harder drugs that alcohol is considered a lesser and therefore a more acceptable evil. It was estimated in 2001 that just over 3,000 Australians died due to alcohol use. There were 64,782 alcohol related episodes that needed care in hospital. Both of those figures are more than those attributed to illicit drug use. It is necessary that we bring in tighter legislation regarding the sale of liquor to protect our minors from binge drinking. It is clear to everyone that we must address this potentially dangerous practice. Binge drinking can lead to serious health problems.

What is binge drinking? It is generally known amongst young people as getting smashed. Sadly and seemingly it is becoming the thing to do. It can be defined in two ways—firstly, as having six drinks or more in a row or, secondly, as drinking large amounts every now and then and losing control. There are two kinds of binge drinking—drinking a lot over a few hours or drinking over several days or weeks. The second type is actually more harmful to the body and is often a repeated behaviour.

Binge drinking can lead to death, permanent brain damage, alcohol poisoning, violence, sexual assault, accidents and drowning. It is a tragedy and a travesty on our young people. Although binge drinking affects people of all ages studies indicate that binge drinking is on the increase among young people with one in six people having more than 20 drinks a day at least once a month.

Clause 4 substitutes the description of 'responsible adult'. This definition is updated to reflect the current definition used in the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1998. It removes the element of a person having parental rights or responsibilities only while a minor is on licensed premises or in a public place. I believe it is essential to amend this clause by making it illegal for adults to permit children to drink alcohol without due care and guidance. There is a high level of concern in the community at under-age parties without parental supervision, and even with parental supervision terrible things happen so often at parties for young people. Drunken brawls and teenagers consuming dangerously high levels of alcohol and so on really are a recipe for disaster.

I am genuinely concerned about the issues that have been raised by this bill, and I ask members in the chamber tonight to look seriously at the purpose of this bill. Do we really care about our young people? Are we really trying to assist our young people? I commend members to vote for this bill. I fully support the amendments contained in the Liquor (Restriction of Supply to Minors) Amendment Bill 2007. I commend this bill to the House.