



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES COMMISSION BILL

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (6.06 pm): In rising to support the Family Responsibilities Commission Bill 2008, I acknowledge the contributions of a number of members. This bill, as is stated in the explanatory notes, is quite a departure from previous policies and in many regards a departure from some of the philosophies of members on the other side.

I think there is a growing recognition that the policies of the past have failed Indigenous communities and failed to truly allow people to have self-determination. How can a child who is not safe in their own bed at night and growing up in alcohol fuelled, violent surroundings ever truly know self-determination? How can a community with hopes and aspirations for a better way forward truly see those recognised if the very basic elements such as safety and security and the health and wellbeing of children are undermined by such social dysfunction? Those hopes and aspirations can never truly be able to be fulfilled.

One of the very legitimate concerns raised in bringing forward such different policy and such different legislation is that none of us wants to see the stereotypes of the less than savoury aspects of dysfunctional remote Indigenous communities actually institutionalised by yet another piece of legislation before this parliament. No-one wants to see the high morbidity rates of Indigenous people, the high assault rates against children and the high rates of imprisonment actually continue to be the labels that hang around the necks of a few and in many regards distort so totally the true richness of the culture of our Indigenous people. It undermines the hopes of young people growing up in those communities that they will ever be viewed as people of worth and ability to determine their futures.

This legislation basically acknowledges that there has to be a greater platform for intervention when there is high social dysfunction. There is a concern that where there is high social dysfunction in non-Indigenous communities we do not close our eyes and say, 'It is only because there are people who are black and living in isolated communities that there is an issue that requires this type of legislation.' I think that is legitimate. People might say, 'Don't forget that dysfunction exists across communities.' We have people living in isolated places where these rates are concentrated and this distorts the picture of Indigenous life. That is an additional tragedy.

I want to acknowledge the very fine and good work that has been done by many Indigenous leaders in promoting a need for change, in promoting a need for a new way forward, and saying, often at great risk to their own community popularity, that the welfare platforms of the past were failing their people. I acknowledge the work of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and particularly the work of Noel Pearson, who has championed a number of the provisions put forward in this legislation. I know that there are many others who worked behind the scenes in order to promote a need for fundamental change in the way that remote and isolated communities with severe issues are handled by government.

One of the problems with isolation is that when the people making the decisions are so far away they often do not understand the full impact of those decisions. Some will say, 'Isn't that what this legislation is seeking to achieve?' I believe in good faith that this legislation is actually seeking to listen to those communities that have signed on for these partnerships in that they will still fundamentally have an involvement in the implementation of this legislation to try to get a more practical approach and a more practical understanding of the way that laws interface with their communities so that the outcome is one

that allows those children to eventually be safe in their beds at night and the streets to be safe as the dysfunction of alcohol abuse in the community is broken.

To those who have championed change, to those who have stood up to lead others down a different pathway to self-determination and who still cry out for understanding from across the broader community: we salute your persistence but also say that it cannot stop with our words in this place. We have already recognised in this place that in the last 10 years a lot of things have been said about how to break the cycle and do things differently, and we do not want this legislation to be seen as just another way of appeasing our consciences that something is being done about a serious issue.

The support services and the money that has been allocated to resource this plan certainly have to be acknowledged. However, as we heard in this parliament this morning, the people who go forward to work with these communities—our public servants, whatever their background—must also know that they are safe. I have a concern that we are still awaiting sufficient answers to ensure that the resources are not just on paper but that our people resources—those who have a heart to help, those who go forward to work in Indigenous communities as doctors, nurses, police officers, child safety officers and others across a range of areas—are safe and that they know they are not at the end of a long bureaucratic chain a long way from help when they need support, care and attention.

It is not easy going in and working with people in what may often seem like a domestic war zone. It is time we recognised that those at the coalface, those working with communities in these isolated areas that we are talking about today in this parliament, deserve some of our support and assistance, because legislation alone is not enough. We need people on the front line who know that their passion and their vision to make a difference in these communities is not going to be wasted or abused because when they need help they are not listened to. Let us continue to listen and act in supporting our Indigenous Queenslanders, but let us also support those who support them and make sure that that terrible incident with the nurse who faced this alleged rape and the follow-up with regard to that incident does not happen again. Unfortunately, as we know, there are many issues in terms of support services that must also be addressed if these communities are to truly make a difference and implement meaningful change for the sake of the future of their children.