



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard Tuesday, 26 August 2008

SUMMARY OFFENCES (GRAFFITI REMOVAL POWERS) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (5.58 pm): The Summary Offences (Graffiti Removal Powers) Amendment Bill is a copy of Victorian legislation that gives powers to local councils and government departments such as Queensland Rail to remove graffiti from private property that is visible from public areas. According to the minister in her second reading speech, from 1 July 2006 to 31 December 2006 the number of reported graffiti offences was 9,202, dropping to 5,546 reported graffiti offences for the same period in 2007 following the introduction of legislation restricting the sale of spray-paint cans to minors. However, despite a percentage increase the clean-up rate is actually less in numbers. A clean-up rate of 35 per cent in the 2006 period compares to a clean-up rate of more than 44 per cent in 2007. There may have been fewer incidents but there were also less clean-ups. Perhaps that is because graffiti offences nearly always involve considerable repair bills.

I bring to the attention of the House incidents of vandalism and graffiti that have caused considerable financial burden to local residents and organisations in my electorate. The Moranbah State School P&C Association is continually frustrated at ongoing break-ins occurring in the school. Since the beginning of this year they have experienced numerous break-ins and arson attempts in their classrooms and sports sheds. They feel that their school will be burnt down and/or seriously damaged before they have the opportunity to make the necessary security arrangements.

Since the beginning of this year they have had to replace tyres on the school utility, replace shade cloth torn down from shaded areas, replace a roller door on the tuckshop, replace numerous louvres and clean up graffiti around the school. They have had their main power switch turned off. They have had fires lit inside the school building. They have had fire extinguisher foam sprayed in toilets and classrooms, broken alcohol bottles throughout the school grounds and keys stolen from the administration building resulting in the replacement of locks throughout the school. Teachers and cleaners are fearful of working late because of the continued destruction. They are currently seeking quotes for motion detectors and the replacement of security screens for the tuckshop and administration building, but these will be expensive and their funds have been drained repairing damage and replacing locks. This money should be spent on the children but it is being spent on cleaning up and preventing further damage.

In the meantime, I have written to the police minister and the education minister requesting assistance. I understand that the department will undertake a security audit in mid-September, identifying areas that can be more suitably secured. The P&C are not flush with funds, and their attempts to clean up after the vandals attack have exhausted their limited funds. It would be appropriate for the government to be assisting schools with their costs associated with the clean-up, especially when safety and security in schools is the government's responsibility. It would also be appropriate that when the vandals are caught they participate in assisting the school and other vandalised areas in the clean-up.

Moranbah State High School has become another target for vandals, with smashed car windows, giant slogans and sexual graffiti smeared across the school. Distinctive tags have been left by the perpetrators. Moranbah is a wonderful community filled with hardworking people who give their free time

readily to the community and educational organisations. They are devastated at the mess these vandals have caused to their schools and park areas.

Clermont skate park is another apparent hot spot for vandals and graffiti. Isaac Regional Council recently had to replace an electrical box with a stainless steel tamper-proof electrical box. In the past 18 months the council has spent in excess of \$4,000 to repair and clean up after vandals had attacked the skate park. Since the skate park was built over six years ago, the repair bill has exceeded \$10,000, which is an added burden on the local ratepayers. People are tired of having to foot the bill because some louts have no respect for the property of others.

If a pilot program involving using low-risk offenders to clean up graffiti established in Mackay in 2001 has saved the Mackay council \$40,000 in graffiti removal costs, why has the program not been extended to all areas? We need to be conscious of the financial burden graffiti places on organisations that clean up. We need to be harder on the perpetrators and make them responsible for the clean-up. The cost of the clean-up should not be borne by the taxpayer and local residents but by the vandals themselves. If they can afford to purchase equipment needed to wreck the buildings and facilities then they can be responsible for cleaning up their own mess. I wanted to bring that issue to the attention of the House.