



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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CRIMINAL CODE AND OTHER ACTS (GRAFFITI CLEAN-UP) AMENDMENT BILL

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (7.54 pm): It gives me great pleasure to support the Criminal Code and Other Acts (Graffiti Clean-up) Amendment Bill 2008 moved by the shadow Attorney-General. The stain of graffiti costs hardworking Queenslanders millions of dollars each year and is an ugly eyesore on our landscape across the state. Just about everywhere in Queensland that has public and private property exposed to the elements is a target for these vandals.

I would like to bring to the attention of the House incidents of vandalism and graffiti that have caused considerable financial burden to local residents and schools in my electorate. The Moranbah State High School has been hit hard with graffiti and vandalism, with giant slogans and sexual graffiti smeared across the school. Distinctive tags have been left by the perpetrators who have finished off by smashing car windows.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr KNUTH: I know that you would be very concerned about this. You will visit the Moranbah State High School with me and share your concerns. I am sure you would show compassion for the students.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr O'Brien): Order! Member for Charters Towers, you should refer your comments through the chair.

Mr KNUTH: This mess takes countless hours to clean up, yet there is little to no punishment for the perpetrators. Members of the Moranbah State School P&C Association are continually frustrated with the ongoing break-ins that have occurred in the school. Since the beginning of this year, they have experienced numerous break-ins and arson attempts in the classrooms and sports shed. They fear that their school will be burnt down 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 the graffiti around the school. They have had their main power switch turned off, fires lit inside school buildings, 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 replacement 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 means that what should be spent on the children is being spent on cleaning 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 to identify areas that can be more suitably secured. The P&C is not flush with funds and its attempts to clean up after the vandals attack have exhausted its limited funds. It would be appropriate for the government to assist

schools with the costs associated with the clean-up, especially when security and safety 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 is a wonderful community filled with hardworking people who give of their free time readily to community and educational organisations. They are devastated at the mess these vandals have caused to their schools and park areas. I know of Charters Towers traders who are forced to use pig mesh over their shop windows to prevent break-ins. Almost all of the culprits have not much else to do in their lives but roam the streets at night making people's lives a misery.

An organisation called Green Corps is taking youth from the Centrelink lists and training them in very useful rural based skills. The trainees are taught chainsaw skills, weed identification and poisoning procedures, various landcare issues and skills to reduce land related problems. My suggestion is that these graffiti artist vandals and juvenile criminals not only be responsible for cleaning up their own mess but be placed in existing structures of the department of primary industries, Landcare or Green Corps to address the ever-increasing problem of land degradation and noxious weeds. This will keep problem youths occupied. They will be less inclined to roam the streets, and their input would be beneficial in reducing the advancement of feral weeds, which is alarming.

The impact of small gangs of weed eradicators to combat Parthenium, nagurra burr, thornapple, Parkinsonia, Mimosa, Chinee apple, Rubber vine, thistle, Bellyache bush and Castor oil bush could be enormously beneficial to the long-term health of the bushland of our environment and little cost in the overall picture. It is time to stop being soft as the less evasive approaches do not work. It is time that the vandalism and graffiti artists are made to pay for the damage they cause by undergoing strict community service obligations and clean up the mess they have created. That is why I support this amendment bill, because it targets perpetrators. I call on government members to change their position and to support this important legislation.