



Speech by

**Jarrod Bleijie**

**MEMBER FOR KAWANA**

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## **CRIME AND MISCONDUCT AND SUMMARY OFFENCES AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (4.58 pm): I rise in this House today to discuss the Crime and Misconduct and Summary Offences Amendment Bill. I will limit my comments to part 3 of the bill, which relates to amendments to the Summary Offences Act 2005. As members would know, this bill creates an act specific offence with respect to rock throwing and laser pointing. I am particularly pleased to see this legislation debated in this place, as rock throwing and laser pointing have unfortunately been on the rise around the state.

I welcome the government's effort to tackle the problem of vehicle and passenger safety when travelling under a road overpass. Motorists travelling along these busy freeways throughout Australia have been pelted with objects such as rocks and bricks from pedestrian overpasses and bridges for some time. This legislation will go some way to acting as a potential deterrent from engaging in this type of activity. We must, however, understand that this legislation, although assisting, will not stop instances of rock throwing or laser pointing. This is based on a few reasons.

The first reason is that as a society there will always be those who wish to disrupt and cause harm to others. The second reason is that in general terms I would say that these reckless acts of stupidity have, more often than not, been committed by juvenile delinquents who have nothing better to do with their time than launch an object from an overpass into the path of oncoming traffic and watch the carnage that it may cause.

That being said, the problem that arises here is that our justice system for juvenile offenders is very much a slap on the wrist approach. Unfortunately, prankster movies such as *Jackass* and *The Dudesons* sanction and promote this type of behaviour. With the help of the worldwide media outlet known as YouTube, our youth are encouraged to commit these reckless acts and then publish them on the internet as a means of self-promotion. While we cannot control what people watch, to a certain extent we can legislate against these criminal acts. We can protect the innocent people who are affected by this road trauma which can seriously injure, if not kill, motorists.

Statistics indicate that road traffic fatal crashes and fatalities increased between 1998 and 2008. Last year 293 fatal crashes occurred on Queensland roads, killing 327 people. This year, our 150th as a state, the government has set a target of 299. That is, the government will try to implement measures that will decrease the number of fatalities on our roads from 327 to fewer than 300. I hope this is a government target that can be achieved.

While I do welcome this piece of legislation from the government, it seems to be a reactive initiative rather than a proactive one. Various states in Australia have had similar pieces of legislation for some time. As well as outlawing these dangerous acts, we as a parliament should look at what can be implemented to prevent these dangerous acts from occurring in the first place. Recently a motorist in my electorate was driving along Nicklin Way from Caloundra to Kawana. While driving under the Sugarbag Road overpass, a rock the size of a soccer ball had been thrown from above. Fortunately, the rock only hit the bonnet of the car, but had my constituent been only half a second in front, there would have been serious consequences

possibly resulting in death. This story was reported to the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 2 April 2009. My constituent is quoted as saying—

I drove to a nearby service station to inspect the damage to the car and then returned to the overpass. When I got back to the site, rocks covered the road.

She called the police and while she waited for them to arrive she said the teenagers continued to throw rocks at passing cars. They thought it was hilarious. They were laughing and yelling out things. When police arrived on the scene, the teenagers ran into the bushes and could not be found. On the same night, another person was the victim of this act. In the same *Sunshine Coast Daily* article it was reported that a man's car was also hit by a large rock. That article states—

The rock was as big as his head as he drove home along Nicklin Way on Tuesday night. He said he would need to pay for the damage because he did not have comprehensive insurance. 'I heard a large bang as a rock that was thrown landed on the roof,' he said. 'I have a soft-top Suzuki and it put a hole through my roof. Luckily I had a roll cage or it would have hit me in the head.'

He said that the teenagers needed to find something better to do with their time.

I mentioned earlier that as a parliament we must look at taking a proactive stance on these issues. To this end, in a letter to the Minister for Main Roads about this issue I recommended a number of measures that could be implemented on overpasses throughout Queensland, in particular, the overpasses that have had rocks thrown from above within and around my electorate. These measures include the installation of a cage or wire fence around the pedestrian way to discourage dangerous practices. This safety mechanism would prevent any missiles being thrown on to the main road from overpasses and is one proactive measure the government could implement to protect the safety of motorists on Queensland roads. I note that the government rejected this idea late in 2008, but I call on the government to conduct an urgent safety audit of all state controlled bridges. In fact, in probably the first time in my life and possibly the last I will ever agree with a union, I note that the TWU called on the government to conduct this audit late last year to no avail.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BLEIJIE:** We hear interjections on such an important issue. We are talking about motorist safety and we are being interjected on. Another issue is the lack of lighting on some of these road overpasses. Installing lights and having these areas appropriately lit would provide some deterrent.

The third proactive approach would be to educate our young people in our schools. I was pleased to announce in the House last night that next month I will be launching the Kawana electorate schools road safety awareness month. For the purposes of this program we will look at traffic safety, pedestrian safety and teaching young children. It is during the pedestrian and traffic safety week that I intend to hold various forums around my electorate with schoolchildren, including presentations from some victims of rock-throwing incidents.

Teenagers do not understand how serious their actions are when they throw rocks off overpasses. At the time of the act it may all seem like fun and games, but the reality is that it is far from fun and games. Even in the event that a large rock is thrown which does not impact a car, it can then cause a driver to stress, to cause the driver to swerve, which can lead to personal injury or far worse if a car enters the wrong side of the road.

I mentioned my assumption earlier, but it pains me to mention it again, that it is said predominantly youth are responsible for these vicious and cowardly attacks. I can say that witnesses in my own Kawana electorate would testify to that. However, this issue stems from a far wider issue than just throwing rocks. It stems from a downhill slide in the respect that the youth of today have for their parents, elders, teachers and their community. In part that is due to teachers and administrators of schools losing control of disciplinary measures and powers for fear of prosecution—so much so that I suspect in schools around Queensland under this new term of government we will see children given red cards. When the students feel intimidated or the teacher raises their voice or uses a red pen, the student can hold a red card to the teacher or tell them to sit in the naughty corner for time out.

There are always exceptions to this youth assumption, and it is pleasing to see young people elected to this parliament on both sides of the House. It is our job as young parliamentarians to protect the teachers, the parents and the principals and help the youth of today to respect their community and the people in it. Hopefully, in some way that will change the growing trend of disrespect and build a society that we love and appreciate, therefore having a positive effect on our youth and discouraging this type of antisocial and dangerous behaviour. This legislation is a start, but I do hope the government takes on board the proactive approaches to this major issue, as has been called on by me, the victims and even the TWU. I commend the bill to the House.