



Speech by

Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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CORRECTIVE SERVICES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (5.03 pm): I rise this afternoon to contribute to the debate on the Corrective Services and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. I generally support the aspects of this legislation being introduced by the government. This legislation amends the Corrective Services Act, which itself has had several flaws which have been highlighted since its inception in 2006. In addition, the bill will effect related amendments to the Penalties and Sentences Act 1992 and the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000.

There are four key objectives of this bill. This bill amends the current act with regard to removing both forms of leave of absence available for prisoners. This refers to resettlement leave and reintegration leave. The purpose of this leave is to assist repeat offenders to re-establish relationships in the community with family and friends and prepare them for a return into the community. Existing leave programs that have been approved will still be granted but in both cases no new leave will be granted. These two leave entitlements are an example of how the Beattie and Bligh Labor governments have been soft on sentencing and soft on general prison management.

We have seen only last month when the state Ombudsman released his latest report that Queensland prisons need an urgent and major overhaul. The report stated that the Bligh government had failed to follow its own rules when dealing with prisoner classifications. Once again, this is another example of how this government sets the rules and then fails to comply. The government not only says one thing but legislates it, and then does another thing.

The second objective is that the bill seeks to amend the current act with regard to the sale of prisoner artwork. Prisoners will not be able to sell their artwork or any other person outside of prison will not be able to sell that artwork until the prisoner is released from corrective services. That is how it should have always been. We had a situation only a few weeks ago that was raised by the member for Gregory. The illegal theft of prison property in that instance landed on eBay. The fact is that these are prisoners and as such they forfeit such rights. If the amendment was not before the House today, we might have ended up with good old Labor Party friend Nuttall selling his paintings to the Premier and hung in this great hall. I welcome this amendment and cannot believe that it has taken this long for the government to amend the current—

Mr Reeves interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: It took a while to catch on to that. I am way past that. I welcome this amendment—

Mr Reeves: You put us to sleep you're so boring.

Mr BLEIJIE: We are not asleep on this side of the House. It has taken a couple of paragraphs over there. Wake up, troops!

I welcome this amendment and cannot believe it has taken this long for the government to amend the current legislation. Queensland prisons are increasingly becoming more and more like resorts. Those committed to prison are removed from society as punishment for breaking those laws which govern the

way we live and maintain law and order in society. The Premier has been big on tourism and recently we had this campaign for the 'best job in the world'. I think the tourism minister and the Premier's new tourism campaign will potentially be: 'Why go to the Hilton when you can go to a Queensland jail?' It is one thing to allow prisoners to have the luxury of being able to produce artwork and express their creative flair; it is another thing to encourage a cottage industry whereby these prisoners are actually making a profit from the time they have been given for committing heinous acts such as murder and rape.

The main clause of this amendment bill that I must object to is the watering down of prison visitor approvals and regulations for visitor approvals. The bill allows for interim visitor approvals without criminal history checks. The bill further allows for commercial visitors being granted interim access without full security clearance. I admit that both of these are at the discretion of the chief executive, but that is simply not good enough.

The fourth objective of this bill is with regard to the parole board decision-making process. The time frame for making parole board decisions will be increased from 120 to 180 days. This gives the board ample opportunity to make the correct decision and also allows the inmate sufficient time to put their case together and to be heard by the parole board. What we have to ask ourselves is why the parole board needs this amount of time. Is it that it is understaffed and underresourced by this government?

The CMC recently released a report finding that prison officers were reluctant to report misconduct because they did not trust senior managers. How can the people of Queensland have faith in the administrators of the prison system when their own staff have no confidence in senior management? As has been illustrated in recent reports by the Ombudsman and the CMC, Queensland Corrective Services has several problems to rectify. Responsibility starts at the top. A new approach is needed that focuses on effective management but also recognises the hard work of staff. This amending legislation further extricates the heads of our prisons from the staff they manage by giving them discretion on the visitor approval procedures that should be watertight if anything.

The state's corrective services system needs an overhaul. There are several horror stories out there. I will only mention two. It was reported in the *Sunshine Coast Daily* on 9 May that a long-serving prison officer at the Woodford prison, just outside Caboolture, had resigned after it was found she had been trafficking drugs to prisoners. An investigation into the matter was conducted and there was nothing illegal uncovered. However, a source had contacted the newspaper and said that the female officer had been escorted out of the facility after her alleged drug dealing was uncovered. The source named both the officer involved and the Finks bikie gang member to whom she had allegedly supplied narcotics. At Christmas last year several arrests were made of visitors attempting to bring contraband into correctional centres.

Now we have a situation that the senior officers at these prisons have the discretion to allow visitors quick and easy access to prisoners. Late last year the government promised to toughen up measures and stop drugs being smuggled into state jails, but these measures do nothing if not potentially make it easier. The estimates committee process showed how the Minister for Police and Corrective Services is failing to stop prisoners getting access to pornography and mobile phones in our prisons.

Since the Labor reign in Queensland, these prisons are more like holiday camps than correctional facilities, designed to rehabilitate offenders rather than just slap them on the wrist. Just a month ago, it was revealed that a convicted murderer had a mobile phone in jail, and earlier this year it was revealed that Lotus Glen prisoners were running around with pornography and mobile phones and even had access to a motor vehicle.

As advocated by the CMC, the Ombudsman and the shadow minister for police and corrective services, the member for Gregory, the Queensland prison system needs a complete overhaul, but this government is incapable of even acknowledging that there is a problem. The shadow minister would agree with the statement describing this government as all hat and no cattle.