



Speech by

Vicky Darling

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard Wednesday, 20 May 2009

MOTION: DRUG FREE AUSTRALIA REPORT

Ms DARLING (Sandgate—ALP) (6.21 pm): Mr Speaker, I would like to start by letting you know that I listened very carefully to your wise words of counsel this morning, as I always do. I was very keenly ready to participate in an active debate. I listened to every speaker in this evening's debate very carefully ready to rebut, but I am not sad on this occasion to say that I actually agree with every previous speaker. I am sorry this is perhaps not the debate we were expecting for a Wednesday night, but it is with great pleasure that I recommend that all members of this place support the motion put by the member for Nicklin.

Let me tell the House some of the things that speakers on the other side of the chamber have said that I agree with. I definitely agree with the member for Nicklin's recommendation that we refer this to the Social Development Committee so they can have a much closer look at the entire report. It is certainly worthy of bipartisan consideration. I agree with the member for Gladstone that cannabis in particular has a lot of impacts on mental health and is quite devastating to the community. I agree with the member for Caloundra that the term 'party drug' is a terrible term and a very misleading term and I would love to scrap it from our vocabulary.

I agree with the member for Nanango that there is plenty of research out there on the impact of marijuana, and it is important that people take heed of it and that we pool our resources together to do all we can to protect the community. I agree with the member for Maryborough that community safety is a real concern and we need to look at the impact on kids. What struck me as a mother was that the information in the report shows that the age of the first use of cannabis is actually decreasing—and that should be of concern to everybody—and that the potency and popularity of the drug is increasing. I have to say that I am a bit of a control freak and that half a cold and flu tablet sends me into a spin. I think it is important that kids not only develop self-discipline but that they have a really good respect for themselves and their bodies and understand how to get, I guess, a natural adrenaline high.

The government is concerned about not just cannabis but also alcohol, tobacco, ice and a variety of other drugs that are starting to dribble their way into the community—actually it is becoming more of a flood, isn't it. The Ice-Breaker Strategy, for example, was launched by the government in November 2006, with \$4.8 million going towards programs that target methamphetamine use. There have been intervention teams in the Cairns, Gold Coast and Royal Brisbane hospital emergency departments treating over 350 patients per month. What is distressing is that in 2007-08 Queensland Health's alcohol and drug services treated 2,292 people as a result of amphetamine type substance use. That is almost 10 per cent of all presentations.

I want to also mention the *Queensland Drug Strategy*, which has some distressing statistics. It states—

It is estimated that 80% of dependent drug users experience some level of mental health distress or problems. In particular, the misuse of alcohol, cannabis and psychostimulants is associated with affective, anxiety and psychotic disorders.

I recommend that members look at the *Queensland Drug Strategy* so they can see some of the programs we are putting in place.

The Bligh Labor government acknowledges that there is a huge job and that we cannot do it on our own. It is the dedicated work of the non-government organisations who work with alcohol and drug treatment in Queensland that really supports us through this. Queensland Health has a number of agreements with non-government organisations, with an annual investment of \$18 million to the NGO sector. I want to take the time to make sure we recognise our unsung heroes who are working day by day on a case-by-case basis to support people through drug rehabilitation. There is obviously an enormous cost to families, hospitals, police services and healthy communities. I am pleased that the Social Development Committee will receive its first referral. I have faith that those committee members will treat this with the seriousness it deserves. I commend the motion to the House.