




Speech by

Jarrold Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; CHILD PROTECTION (MORE STRINGENT OFFENDER REPORTING) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr BLEIJIE** (Kawana—LNP) (8.12 pm): I rise to contribute to the cognate debate on the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2010 that was introduced by the government and the Child Protection (More Stringent Offender Reporting) Amendment Bill 2010 that was introduced by the opposition. Again we see a debate in this House tonight with these cognate bills which the opposition has led the attack on. In April 2010 the former shadow minister introduced his bill. Then in August 2010 the Labor Party came trodding into this place and whacked down its own bill which deals substantially with the same issues as our bill and claimed it as its own. Ultimately, we know that ours will fail tonight and that the government bill will pass. Those opposite will go out to the media tomorrow and say, 'Look what we're doing for the victims, the children, in our society.' We will go out and we will say, 'The Labor Party always calls on the opposition for policies.' Time and time again we have come into this place and introduced bills, only to see the government get its act together some months later and introduce a similar bill. If you want policy, there it is. There is no clearer distinction than the cognate debate we are having tonight with an opposition bill that was introduced in April 2010 and a government bill that was introduced four months later in August 2010.

The debate on these bills focuses on the important task of protecting our children from predatory sex offenders who lurk in our community. Predatory sex offenders are the scum of society, the scourge and slime on our community. I was contemplating calling them rodents but that would be an offence to all of the rodents in our community. Long-term Labor mismanagement of Queensland sex offender laws has not served the community in protecting our vulnerable children. Simply, the reporting requirements under the government's system are not strong enough—they never have been strong enough. In fact, I put it that the Labor Party and its inaction on these sorts of laws over many, many years has put our children of Queensland at risk. Again the opposition has come in here with some foresight to debate laws that try to protect our children from these scum of our society, and the Labor Party has come in and virtually copied our legislation.

In my role as shadow Attorney-General and shadow minister for justice and corrective services I have met with various stakeholder groups to engage in discussions and open dialogue on policy matters. Some of the specific issues that were raised in these meetings obviously related to child protection matters. In particular, some of the issues that were raised related to sexual offenders and paedophiles and how certain aspects of our current system are simply not working. Between 31 December 2005 and 31 December 2009 the number of registered sex offenders who had breached their reporting obligations had soared from 18 to 545—more than 3,000 per cent. We need to send the message that any registered sex offender who fails to comply with their reporting obligations will face tougher consequences and be dealt with in a manner which maintains the integrity of the register.

Questioning from the former shadow minister revealed in estimates that some 99 dangerous sex offenders on the register have committed further sex crimes since being released back into our community.

Clearly, these figures indicate that the current system is not working. The introduction of the government's bill on amending the Child Protection (Offender Reporting) Act 2004 again follows the LNP's lead in this matter. We on this side of the House understand that the current system is not working and we have a real plan to strengthen the reporting requirements and bring veracity back to the register. The LNP's bill before the House seeks to strengthen the reporting requirements of sex offenders and provide police with the powers to name the sex offenders to assist in locating them in the community. Quite frankly, this is in the best interests of our community. The community should feel safe in knowing that registered sex offenders are identifiable and that the police know where they are living.

If a registered sex offender fails to report or update their details, as is their obligation, the LNP bill ensures that this is an offence. The key difference between the opposition's legislation and the government's legislation relates to the inclusion of a declaratory provision which establishes a lawful disclosure or release of personal information from the Queensland Child Protection Offender Register by the police to locate missing sex offenders who cannot be located on the register.

We on this side of the House put the protection of our children first. In discussions I have had with organisations such as Bravehearts, stronger sex offender registration laws are urgently needed to be able to monitor and manage the integrity of the register. I would like to take this opportunity tonight to commend the work undertaken by Hetty Johnston and Carol Ronken from the Bravehearts organisation. The mission of Bravehearts is to stop child sexual assault in our society. Its vision is to make Australia the safest place in the world to raise a child. The organisation also provides confidential counselling services, information and support to children and young people who have experienced or are at risk of child sexual assault.

Our courts can sentence sex offenders to community based orders which may include probation or intensive correction orders. As outlined in the bill, sex offenders who are under these orders are supervised by probation and parole officers for the duration of the order. Like any other offenders, sex offenders are able to apply to the parole board for early supervised release into the community. If a release is granted, the conditions of parole ensure that an offender must report and receive regular visits from probation or parole officers and may be tested for substance abuse. In research that I have undertaken there are a range of different methods of rehabilitation for sex offenders. In my opinion, good behaviour should not be an easily acceptable reason for a parole board to grant an early release from prison for convicted sex offenders.

In April 2010, the Bligh Labor government refused to publicly release a Queensland Corrective Services report on the effectiveness of the existing rehabilitation programs in this state. When asked to release the report on the effectiveness of the programs the minister at the time claimed cabinet-in-confidence. I ask the minister: what is the government trying to hide and will he now release the report in full so that an informed debate can take place? As part of this process the government needs to ensure that adequate penalties are in place to appropriately punish convicted sex offenders and enact a strong deterrent in the first place.

There also needs to be appropriate punishments for breaches of the reporting requirements for those sex offenders who are on the register. While the sex offenders are in prison, the government needs to ensure that sex offender rehabilitation programs are working effectively and reduce recidivism rates for such crimes.

Ultimately, it is in the best interests of the broader community and of our children to protect their safety from those who are prone to committing crimes of a sexual nature. It is also an important preventive measure to ensure that, when sex offenders are released back into our community, an effective rehabilitation program that reduces the recidivism rate is used to identify if a sex offender should be released back into the community. The research suggests that it is often the case that these people simply cannot help themselves. Whether there is a psychological deficit of some sort or an issue of sexual self-confidence, the government has an obligation to maintain the safety of Queensland children.

In the state of Texas in the United States, the Department of Criminal Justice has instigated two sex offender rehabilitation programs. These programs are the Sex Offender Education Program, SOEP, and the Sex Offender Treatment Program, SOTP. The SOEP consists of a four-month curriculum to assist sex offenders determined to pose a lower reoffence risk or who may be released to a lengthy term of supervision. This curriculum is provided in an instructive format, providing information on a variety of topics—healthy sexuality, anger, stress management, interpersonal relationships and cognitive restructuring.

The SOTP consists of an 18-month intensive treatment program to assist sex offenders determined to pose a higher reoffence risk. The SOTP involves three treatment phases employing a cognitive behavioural model. The primary goal of the program is to reduce the rate of reoffence and to move the participant towards a more prosocial lifestyle. All three phases occur in a community environment, providing necessary behaviour modifiers that allow offenders immediate feedback about their behaviour and treatment progress. The primary objective of these two programs is to reduce the potential for further

deviant behaviour. In 2007 the state auditor released a report indicating that sex offenders who completed the Texas SOTP were 61 per cent less likely to commit a new crime.

Although I am not advocating that Queensland adopt a Texas style model for the rehabilitation of sex offenders, it is important to review our system to ensure that successfully completing adequate rehabilitation courses should be a precursor to releasing the sex offender back into our community. The Parole Board should have confidence that the offender will be extremely unlikely to reoffend.

Other options in various jurisdictions around the world include chemical castration, which is reversible, as opposed to physical castration, which is obviously permanent. At the federal level, the Australian National Child Offender Register provides for the registration of child sex offenders residing in or entering Queensland. The Australian National Child Offender Register keeps details of all registered child sex offenders. A national register is vitally important to maintaining the interstate relocation of sex offenders throughout Australia. The offender must apply to their relevant state authority in order to transfer across state boundaries, and it is the responsibility of corrective services in each state to maintain the integrity of the national register.

An additional way to monitor and supervise released sex offenders is a prohibition order. For a prohibition order to be made against a child sex offender, the court must be satisfied that the offender has engaged in contact that poses an unacceptable risk to the lives or sexual safety of our children in our community. The conduct may not amount to a criminal offence. All offenders who are given a prohibition order are placed on the ANCOR. As of March 2011 there were 12,596 registered offenders across Australia. The register is the responsibility of the federal Minister for Home Affairs.

The Bligh government has neglected this issue over the past five years. The register is rendered impotent if it is not maintained and breaches are not rectified and are left to exponentially spiral out of control. The idea of a register is that sex offenders who are released back into our community can be monitored effectively by the police. If the police do not know where the offender is and the offender fails to report as obligated then the register is a waste of time. The collective interest of the community should be paramount and of the utmost importance in the minister's mind, particularly when we are protecting the most vulnerable members of our community, our children. As the father of three young children I want to know that they and their friends are safe in our community.

I am pleased to see that on this matter yet again the government has taken the lead from the LNP. I believe that the government's bill should also include the naming of registered sex offenders who have breached their reporting obligations in an attempt to locate them within the community. I would implore the government to revisit the issue and put the interests of child protection at the forefront of this debate and absolutely listen to the argument made by the shadow minister tonight.

As legislators, it is vital that we constantly review our policies and procedures in the interests of best practice and to observe other jurisdictional practices, both domestically and internationally, to see whether we can improve the way we operate our justice system and corrective services system. That is why transparent reporting is paramount. I fail to see why a report on the rehabilitation program undertaken in our correctional facilities would be shrouded in secrecy if there was nothing to hide.

We in this parliament are obviously embracing technology. Not only is this parliamentary broadcast online; it is saved in the record of *Hansard*. So I can say tonight that if the people of Queensland, if the children of Queensland, want to know what the LNP is doing about policy—if they continue to listen to the nagging and squawking from those opposite who ask, 'Where are your policies?'—I can tell them and the millions around the world who are watching the live broadcast that it is the LNP that continually brings private members' bills into this House and then months later the government brings in substantially similar legislation and claims the credit in the media.

Mrs Kiernan interjected.

Mr BLEIJIE: What was that, member for Mount Isa?

Mrs Kiernan: If you did not hear it the first time I am not repeating it.

Mr BLEIJIE: It was probably not worth hearing in the first place. That is why I did not take any notice of it. But I take whatever interjection—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! You might like to direct your comments through the chair.

Mr BLEIJIE: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I take the interjection from the member for Mount Isa and I say that you cannot argue with dates. In April 2010 the shadow minister introduced a bill into this place. In August 2010 the government minister introduced a bill into this place. How could any government member argue that the LNP was copying legislation from the government when the *Hansard* records what happened last year?

In closing, I say to the children and the parents in Queensland that the LNP is listening. The government—the Labor Party—is not. We understand and we can say that child sex offenders are absolute scum. We are prepared to stand up in this place and fight for the rights of the child foremost, above the rights of any sex offender.