




Speech by
Bill Byrne

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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POLICE SERVICE, RECRUITMENT

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (2.48 pm): I rise to address the matter of police recruiting. This government has committed to 1,100 new and additional police officers. Mostly these are likely to be inexperienced junior officers. I am not going to mention the very modest prospects of delivering this number or retaining them thereafter, nor whether the real costs have been revealed in support of this program. I am very concerned about the LNP's proposal to potentially recruit very young people, in the main, directly from school.

I have considerable experience in training young men, particularly 17- to 21-year-olds, to be soldiers. It is no surprise that armies across recorded history are made up in the main of men under 25. The reasons are many and varied, from the role of young males in traditional societies to the fact that young males are the most emotionally malleable. My experiences suggest a few things: firstly, 17- to 21-year-olds are much easier to train than 28- to 35-year-olds. In general terms, the majority of youngsters will believe virtually whatever they are told by their 'tribal masters', and this occurs largely without question. They are desperate to fit in and be accepted, to conform and succeed, whereas men over 30 tend not to accept much on face value and are much more comfortable and likely to question and test positions. Essentially, they are mature and much more aware of their own vulnerabilities and real dangers. The 18- to 20-year-olds possess a reduced sense of personal risk. That is why they are more likely to be irresponsible behind the wheel and take other lifestyle risks. The 17- to 20-year-olds tend to bond with their teams and groups and corporate cultures more willingly, more comprehensively and more absolutely. There are many historical examples of this.

It is the knowledge of these characteristics that must have influenced the Fitzgerald inquiry recommendations specific to this matter. Fitzgerald recommended—

A related issue is the relative youth and inexperience of cadets and some probationaries, many of whom come straight from the classroom. High attrition rates during and in the first year after training, indicate that their expectations of police work do not accord with the reality, and that they are not prepared for the unpleasant aspects of policing.

A better recruitment practice would be to select men and women with more maturity who have education or work experience beyond high school which will give them a better grounding for police work.

There are, therefore, compelling reasons to scrap the cadet system which directly recruits Grade 12 school leavers.

My point is that, if I were seeking to train a battalion of paratroopers, I would go for youngsters. If I were seeking to train individuals to operate in isolation or in small teams in highly volatile situations under enormous scrutiny, then 28- to 35-year-olds or at least more mature people are the best choice.