




Speech by  
**Bill Byrne**

**MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON**

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## **YOUTH JUSTICE (BOOT CAMP ORDERS) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BYRNE** (Rockhampton—ALP) (10.27 pm): I rise to speak on the Youth Justice (Boot Camp Orders) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2012. It has certainly been a long time in coming. I wish to confine the majority of my comments regarding this bill to the issue of boot camps. As the committee observes, this is effectively an omnibus bill and a controversial one at that. The LNP's fixation with boot camps was flagged by its Rockhampton candidate more than 12 months ago. But allow me to start by reflecting on the contributions made by various LNP members leading up to the last state election. What is important is the impression these comments provided. I particularly recall the comments of the member for Mirani. His comments 13 months ago created a very particular impression in the minds of Central Queenslanders about what the LNP was going to do if it was elected to government. At the time the member for Mirani said—

Labor has had years to tackle this and has done nothing but focus on the rights of criminals.

He said that these young offenders needed to be rounded up, taken off the streets and kept off them. He stated—

We need to look at stronger, direct action to take these young criminals off the streets and send them to boot camps where they will learn respect for other people's property and other people's rights.

The Rockhampton LNP candidate at the time said publicly that the LNP had developed a policy that was all about boot camps. Well, here we are, eight months since this government was elected, and this bill has finally been brought to this House. What is the bill all about? I can tell you one thing it is not about: it is not about implementing a developed policy and it is not about taking comprehensive action to address the issues of youth offending in this state. At best these trial camps are nothing more than experiments. These experiments will do nothing to address the core issues of youth offending in this state. Boot camps are the only shot in the locker that this government has to address juvenile offenders. It has taken eight months since the election to bring the bill to the House and what a shocker it is.

I fondly recall the Premier's launch of this policy in Cairns shortly before the election. My recollection is that the Premier was unable to provide a single example of where these sorts of programs have been successfully implemented anywhere. The LNP deliberately ran this boot camp policy to create a certain impression in the minds of Queenslanders about what they were going to do. There was no substantive detail provided and the vast majority of Queenslanders assumed that this would be a quasi-military set of arrangements. I submit that the LNP had no idea before the election and clearly has no idea today. When their Premier announced the boot camp policy he said, 'This program will be devised if we become the government.' All the Premier knew was that it was going to cost \$2 million over two years and murderers would not be entitled to attend a boot camp. There was no cost-benefit analysis and no measurable outcomes for reducing recidivism; just populist policy on the run. That is why it has taken eight months to try to construct something around this 10-second sound bite policy called boot camps. And what do Queenslanders get? Queenslanders get an experiment that is only going to touch a tiny percentage of offenders if they are willing to participate. That is hardly what was being touted by the LNP prior to the

election. This problem is escalating in our communities and none of this legislation is going to change the on-ground situation in Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Maryborough or any other regional centre suffering from this affliction.

It is not as though this is a new idea. In previous decades the idea of youth boot camps has been toyed with in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, as well as overseas. Guess what? It did not work there and it will not work here. Is there actually any prospect of success in the first term of this LNP government? I would submit the answer is absolutely not. Of course, the source for this boot camp idea, like so many others from the LNP, is the good old republican United States. Various arms of the United States government have expended millions and millions of dollars in an effort to prove that these concepts work. Most of those camps were set up to deal with out-of-control youth and most featured residential components constructed around military-style environments, focusing on respect for authority, isolation from social norms and intense physical activity supported by a degree of intimidation.

Part of the government's program suggests that it is going to instill discipline and respect. The Attorney-General said, in a media release of 21 August, that the boot camp will provide discipline, structure and physical training and a community focus component of family education and social issues. The 4 July issue of the *Fraser Coast Chronicle* had the Attorney-General photographed visiting a boot camp where young men were dressed in camouflage, talking about the government's commitment to boot camps. He was at a boot camp talking about tough-love approaches and how it transforms lives. Of course, members would note that the date of the article was 4 July, good old US Independence Day. Who is running the strategy for the LNP headquarters? Are they blindly following US republican party mantra? Has the Attorney-General followed the script a little too closely by being photographed with young men in military uniform or has he been caught out promoting a boot camp as a military style activity? On 19 September, the Attorney-General said—

We have made it very clear from the out-set ours will not be military-style boot camps.

Of course, that was in response to criticisms by Dr Troy Allard that appeared in the media informing the Attorney-General that military style boot camps do not work.

The big question is: when the LNP was researching and developing this policy, why did it not realise that this trial will not work? The Attorney-General and the Premier either have no plan or they are making policy on the run. I suspect the latter. I am concerned that it was only on 15 November that the successful tenderers were announced and that they have to set up boot camps from scratch, including the provision of staff, training, housing, use-of-force methods, security, alert systems for escapees, counselling, mentoring, cultural programs, education requirements and the list goes on. I am wondering how the money will be spent and what is going to be achieved with only \$2 million.

While we are speaking about what works and what does not, and it is worth speaking briefly about this because it forms part of the bill, the cuts to the court referral conferencing, which everybody acknowledges had a 98 per cent satisfaction rate, make no sense whatsoever. The committee recommended that the court ordered youth justice conferencing be reinstated because it was good policy, but, no, that was not accepted. Around the world, in places such as the UK and here in Queensland, we have seen a move towards restorative justice, not just for juvenile offenders but also for adults. It is only in the good old USA where they have a three-strikes policy in many states. I am waiting for an LNP three-strikes media release, ready for the next election. When we look at the Newman government policies we must look at what drives them and it is the dollar sign.

It is my contention that this government has further politicised the issue of juvenile crime, dumbed it down with the one-shot-in-the-locker solution of boot camps and sold it mercilessly to an ill-informed and frustrated community as evidence of its stated tough stance on crime. The only problem with all of this is that it will not work. All of the research across the developed world absolutely demonstrates that there will be no benefit to boot camps in any of their various guises whatsoever. There is not a single set of performance metrics that lend weight to the prospects of this program. Rates of recidivism are not affected by the use of boot camps in any form. All the research identifies that, states it and everyone who understands it knows it.