




Speech By
Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

CRIMINAL LAW (CHILD EXPLOITATION AND DANGEROUS DRUGS) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (4.56 pm): Today I rise in support of the Criminal Law (Child Exploitation and Dangerous Drugs) Amendment Bill 2012. This government has made a commitment to Queensland families and children: we want Queensland to be the safest place in Australia to raise a child. This bill increases maximum penalties for child exploitation offences and affords further protection for Queensland children. I am proud to be part of a government that continues to recognise the importance of protecting our children's innocence. We have already introduced tougher penalties for sex offenders and established the Carmody inquiry into the Queensland child protection system.

This bill introduces new maximum penalties for child exploitation offences, including further protection for vulnerable children with an impairment of the mind. The legislation also introduces a new offence of grooming a child, placing significance on the intervention and charging of offenders before a sexual act or offence can occur. This bill also removes the distinction in penalties between possessing and making child exploitation material, increasing all maximum penalties to 14 years imprisonment. This is an important part of the legislation recognising the influence that market demand has on the production of child exploitation material.

As the internet has allowed predators and offenders to access child exploitation material with increasing ease, it becomes crucial that the legislation reflects the social link between child pornography and child sexual offences. What this bill acknowledges is the clear links between the viewing of pornography and sexual offending against children. Bravehearts research and policy development manager Carol Ronkin has been gathering years of evidence on this subject and has taken on an important advocacy role in the child protection space. According to Carol and fellow researcher McCarthy, pornography influences sexual offending against children in a number of ways. It sexually arouses the offender. The role of sexual fantasies is important. The offending cycle illustrates the place of sexual fantasies about children in sexual offending. No offender molests or grooms a child without some level of inappropriate sexual fantasy having preceded their offending. Not all of those who sexually fantasise about children actually go on to offend, but many, especially over time, find that this unfortunate habit increases the likelihood. The viewing of inappropriate material may also be used by offenders to groom potential victims by apparently normalising sexual contact or conversations between adults and children. Offenders can often gauge the likelihood of their success by the child's reaction to exposure to inappropriate material.

The use of inappropriate material, as referred to, may also often be used by offenders to blackmail children by threatening them against informing their parents or others about their viewing of pornography. Offenders may often take photographs of victims and post or trade these on the internet. Offenders often view, and in some cases digitally manipulate, adult pornographic images or otherwise normal pictures of children to create sexually explicit images of children. While there is no proven causal link between the viewing of pornography and sexual offending, there is evidence to suggest that the viewing of pornography negatively impacts upon the attitudes of the viewer. Viewing child pornography reduces the inhibitions of child sex offenders by normalising sexual activity with

children and by feeding the cognitive distortions about the children's sexuality, such as 'She started it,' 'He wanted it,' 'She came on to me.' Clearly, the links between child pornography and offences against children are clear. They are abhorrent and highlight just why this legislation and the tougher penalties proposed are so important in dealing with and acknowledging the heinous nature of the offences against our children and young people.

Also in the research notes provided to me by Carol from Bravehearts the issue of sexualisation of children is examined. The context for children and young people's exposure to pornography includes a highly sexualised cultural environment. The frequency and explicitness of sexual content in mainstream media has increased steadily. More widely, there has been a pornographication of popular culture. In tandem with these trends, shifting information and communication technologies have allowed for new forms of pornography production and exchange. A porn aesthetic pervades culture—in fashion, music, entertainment and behaviour. This is evident in billboards, music videos and designer stores that shape the desires and imaginations of a younger and younger demographic.

It is not just that culture has become more sexualised; it is the imagery of the pornographic erotic that has shaped the sexualisation of culture. There are certain porn insignia now that are more and more commonplace within mainstream culture, like the use of porn labels and messages on clothing. The pervasiveness of this porn insignia throughout popular culture provides a kind of legitimacy to porn itself. If you grow up seeing Playboy bunnies on T-shirts, pencil cases and car windows, then these symbols are likely to seem familiar and inoffensive. This is very effective branding for both the particular companies concerned and for the pornography industry more generally.

Another example of the exploitation and normalisation of inappropriate attitudes to sex and sexual behaviours is the ongoing series of Sexpo conventions being more and more popular in Australian culture. Well-known researcher Melinda Tankard Reist has investigated the effects of the three-day festival. She notes—

According to its website, 'this show will increase your attractiveness and sexual drive. It contains beautiful women, hunky men, nudity and crankin' entertainment.'

In her words—

Call me fussy. Say I'm hard to please. But if I what I witnessed is supposed to promote a healthy, happy sex life, then I think I just saw the death of sex.

Tankard Reist sums up Sexpo—and all forms of pornography—as—

A celebration of the vandalism of the human body and the objectification and subordination of women.

In the end, Sexpo is anti-intimacy, anti-connection, anti-warmth. It just leaves you feeling cold.

In this society where we are seeing more and more boundaries lifted, where we are seeing more and more inappropriate behaviours legitimised by a society that in many respects has lost its way, it is important that we stand up in this House and that we support this legislation to ensure that there are tougher penalties, tougher laws and a higher regard for the protection of our children.

Recently, I had the privilege of meeting with some of my colleagues at Logan City Council with Mayor Pam Parker. The member for Logan was there, the member for Springwood, Michael Latter, was there and the member for Stretton, Freya Ostapovitch, was there. We were there to talk about the need for greater education in our community. Hetty Johnston, who has been a longstanding friend and a great advocate in Australia for our children, highlighted the need to start educating, empowering and protecting our children. On this occasion she presented us with a particular curriculum. Although that is a great thing, I think it is such a sad reflection on where our society has reached that we now have to run education programs to protect the innocence of our children, that we now need to introduce laws in the name of decency simply to look after our children and ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up with a degree of innocence.

It also saddens me that recently the federal government has had to announce a royal commission to look into the issue of institutional abuse. Although I wholeheartedly support the need for such a commission, it saddens me that this commission will fundamentally look at about five per cent to 10 per cent of the problem, because most abuse in Australia occurs in the home, in a neighbourhood or in a club of some kind. In fact, about 92 per cent of abuse will happen anywhere but in an institution. So the challenges before us are great.

I note also that this legislation looks at new penalties in regard to drug offences. I note that it also makes some important amendments to our blue card system, which is designed to provide greater protection for our children. As the former assistant minister for child safety and the former president of Bravehearts and now the member for Southport, I am very proud to stand here today and speak in support of this bill. I commend this bill to the House.