




Speech By
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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Junkuri Laka, Avoid Program

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (11.53 am): I rise to talk about the Junkuri Laka association on Mornington Island and it relates to the township of Gununa. It is pleasing to see the minister here in the House because I look forward to discussing this same issue with his staff and working with them on this issue this week. The Avoid program, which is promoted by this justice group, is a program that targets crime and addiction rehabilitation on Mornington Island, and it has shown very positive results over time in crime management and prevention through culturally specific programs. However, there are funding shortfalls at the moment that need to be addressed. It is a response to a lack of initiatives to provide employment opportunities for residents on the island and difficulties they have in dealing with alcohol management—problems that have been there for a long time and many of them are very difficult to solve.

The rise of home-brew on the island is particularly relevant to Mornington Island. It is something we have all had to deal with. Alcohol restrictions came in in 2003 and bans came in in 2009 which had a lot of positive effects. But one of the inadvertent negative effects was that people developed the ability to make home-brew and home-brew has become highly prevalent on the island now. You can have the situation now where someone who most of us would consider a law-abiding citizen wants to have a drink at home while watching the footy and they have home-brew are liable to be charged. Dealing with this problem is not easy and it has given rise to a lot of court cases, and it is an expensive process to have people incarcerated for what I think most of us would call minor offences.

The Avoid program aims to provide a locally derived solution and also to address a rise in these occurrences in a lot of these communities. In trying to get the staff to roll out this program, they have developed a culture where FIFO staffers come in. With the best intentions they do a good job as far as their charter is concerned, but the locals just see someone who is not there permanently and who flies out over the weekend so they do not get that continuity and they are not a local. So that is another issue that needs to be dealt with.

The Avoid program deals with this in the following ways. The first initiative is the returning prisoners through care project. This addresses things like communicating with detainees and their families before they get out. A lot of them cannot read or interpret the terms and conditions of their bail before they get out. A common occurrence is that they have a party when they come home from being incarcerated and that will often be against the terms of their parole. So they offend against their parole straight up. So simple education and communication at that early stage can help these people from being continually sent to prison.

The second part of the program is probably the biggest, and that is the Bentinck Island rehabilitation and parole project, which is a diversionary project for offenders—the large proportion of whom would have committed what we would consider to be minor offences—who would typically be incarcerated for three to four months. They would go across to Bentinck Island, which is another

island near Mornington Island, where they have 15 existing small housing units that are partly maintained but need to be upgraded, and that is probably where the largest capital expenditure would be required. You would be looking at \$500,000 all up for the capital expenditure on the Avoid program. Most of that is existing infrastructure. If people go there instead of being sent to prison it would save the state a hell of a lot of money, which I think is probably the most pertinent issue to raise here.

The third initiative is drop-in centres. It goes back to the old way that people were dealt with. They are akin to camp sites or outstations that are far from walking distance from town. Mornington Island people are dropped out there until they dry out and settle down. That keeps them away from harm and keeps them from offending.

The fourth initiative is community service work. They are trying to initiate some programs through the Junkuri Laka program so that these people can get into positive work programs.

This very important initiative is key to moving forward. Junkuri Laka needs that help, and I look forward to working with the minister to make this happen so that we can turn around this occurrence of people going to prison and they can become proactive members of their community.