




Speech By
Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Safe Night Out Strategy

 **Ms SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (12.07 pm): The Labor Palaszczuk government can be called clueless for having no plan for government. However, ripping up the plans of the previous LNP government without having better ones in place is capricious and foolish. It is beyond belief that the Palaszczuk Labor government has threatened community safety on the Sunshine Coast and specifically in my electorate of Maroochydore by slashing the funding to the Safe Night Out Strategy and putting much needed local initiatives into permafrost.

After seven months of talk and no action from the Palaszczuk Labor government and putting the previous strategy into limbo, we are still waiting for action on the streets under their strategy. The Sunshine Coast is a great place to live, work and play, but like many other communities our area has been affected by alcohol fuelled violence which has tragically resulted in deaths. That is why I supported the Safe Night Out Strategy under the LNP, which was rolled out with a comprehensive, funded plan to address this.

Local community groups were part of identifying tailored initiatives to work with police and other agencies to achieve safer streets. One of their recommendations was the need for a taxi marshal and security at what has become the busiest taxi rank on the Sunshine Coast in Ocean Street. It is a fantastic entertainment area. The economic redevelopment in that space has seen people flocking into that area.

Mr Powell interjected.

Ms SIMPSON: Thank you very much. It is wonderful, but we want to keep it that way. That is why the safe-night precinct committee identified this as an issue. Now that it is the busiest rank—there are up to 1,500 people coming and going from that rank every night—I am calling on the state government to listen to this local group, to act urgently to fund this measure and others to ensure the safety of the public in a popular night spot of Ocean Street, Maroochydore as well as in other areas of need. The situation is becoming urgent.

Stakeholders have warned that the delay in funding for a regular taxi marshal and security guard to help facilitate the smooth departure of patrons is serious. Some nights, as I have mentioned, 1,500 patrons are coming and going just from this one rank. The funding measures to fix this have been put on hold since the new Labor government scrapped the LNP's plan for safe night out precincts. Actually, at first it put it on hold and then it said, 'Wait, we'll have our plan,' but people are still waiting to see that roll out. Meanwhile, the problems escalate. People are voluntarily trying to marshal people at this busy rank and that is not good enough. We do need a permanent and regular professional service to back this area up to keep it safe, and this is despite the fact that the police minister promised at the Sunshine Coast several months ago—I believe in May—that funding was on its way. That was May and now we are in September.

We have seen \$24 million in funding for the Safe Night Out Strategy cut from the state budget and local venue operators and stakeholders are still waiting to hear what the new government will do locally to tackle alcohol fuelled violence. I have asked the Attorney-General to urgently release funding to help keep people safe at this busy taxi rank. I am still waiting for a response, but I do urge her to support this measure. I also urge this government to support this measure. But it is simply not good enough that there has been this wait and, sadly, we have already experienced a tragedy nearby prior to the strategy rolling out due to alcohol fuelled violence. We do not want to see that happen again. Moving people out of a precinct in a timely way at the end of the evening is a critical part of that. Suncoast Cabs General Manager John Lobwein said that a security guard and taxi marshal were essential for public safety at the Ocean Street taxi rank on busy nights with groups of intoxicated people queuing for cabs. He said that this rank is a ticking time bomb, and I know that he has voluntarily jumped on the rank and marshalled people in his own time. He said—

I'm concerned that there will be a major incident in the busiest precinct on the Coast before Christmas. The consequences of such will affect everyone—not just Ocean Street traders.

Safe Night Precinct Chair Marcus Shimbela said that the Sunshine Coast committee was seeking funding to pay for a security guard and a taxi marshal earlier this year under the LNP's Safe Night Out Strategy but that this funding had been put on hold when the government changed in February. He said—

We were told that funding was available and put in an application, but the new Government has told us that this is now on hold and we don't know when the funding round will open again.