




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 8 November 2016

**LIMITATIONS OF ACTIONS (INSTITUTIONAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE) AND
OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; LIMITATION OF ACTIONS AND
OTHER LEGISLATION (CHILD ABUSE CIVIL PROCEEDINGS) AMENDMENT
BILL**

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumbidgee—ALP) (8.00 pm): I rise to speak in support of the government bill. Once again, I want to congratulate the Attorney-General on shepherding this bill through to this point. I think it will be one of the many achievements of this parliament and obviously for the Attorney-General as well. When it passes I think it will be something we can all look back on with some pride. I also want to acknowledge the good work of the member for Cairns. He is a very passionate advocate for the victims in this case. I acknowledge the work that he has done in getting it to this stage as well. I would also like to thank the witnesses and survivors, the people who have shared their stories of what they have endured. This bill is very important to them. I will talk very quickly about exactly why it is important.

The bill retrospectively abolishes the limitation periods that apply to a claim for damages brought by a person where their claim is founded on the personal injury of a person resulting from the sexual abuse of the person when that person was a child and the sexual abuse occurred in the institutional context. Importantly, the bill will create a more accessible civil litigation system for survivors of child sexual abuse and—the critical part—enhance access to justice. I think that is the key phrase: it enhances access to justice. That is what animates many of the people who have brought this issue forward and many of the people who have talked about this. In a broader context for many of us in this House that is one of the values or the things that drives us—that access to justice—especially those on this side. If we can ensure that more Queenslanders, especially those most in need, have access to justice that is a thing of which we in this House can be proud.

I say to the advocates and the survivors who will now have this access to justice that I know this may not be all that they want, but it does provide access to justice for so many more Queenslanders than before. I know that those advocates and survivors who are telling their story up and down Queensland will be thanked as they take the story of what has happened and talk about the bill that should be passed. They will be thanked and people up and down the state will acknowledge the fine work that they have done. I hope that does help them on their journey. I say 'journey' because I know that this is still a journey for many of those survivors and the people who have suffered. It is a journey. Maybe they will get there one day; maybe they will not. However, they will remember those steps along the way, and this is a major step.

I will talk briefly about one such advocate who is a friend of mine. I worked with this particular friend about 20 years ago. He was always a very good man. I was actually at the party where he first met his wife. I was there that afternoon. They married and had some wonderful children. I have met his

children. I have seen them on social media as well. They are very fine and wonderful children. Once people have such wonderful children in their care there are certain things that they think about. They start to think about justice and how they can best protect those children.

I have three young children myself now, the youngest under one year old. Listening to the debate tonight I am constantly thinking about how best to protect my children. That is something that many of us, if not all of us, in this House tonight who have children have been thinking about; we have been thinking about them when we have been listening to this debate today. I say to my friend that I understand him and I thank him for what he has done. Queensland will thank him as well.

I turn to the reasons we need this bill. Obviously we have read through a lot of the testimony and we have heard that some of the worst cases of institutional abuse happened here in Queensland. As a historian I can say that there are many good parts of Queensland history and there are some darker parts that need to be acknowledged as well. Those cases of abuse which happened in our institutions are something that must not be forgotten or brushed over. They must be remembered and acknowledged. I have been listening to some of this testimony, especially about Neerkol, and these stories are horrific. There are certainly things that we will not forget and that will propel us to act in the future.

One of the things I noticed about becoming an MP compared to a councillor is that I have people coming into my office imparting these stories of what has happened to children whom they know. That is something we are not quite ready for when we become an MP. However, it is something we must steel ourselves for—to listen to those stories and help them out with moving on that journey.

I want to pay tribute to the member for Pumicestone. He has worked closely with one of the survivors who has told their story in the passage of this bill. It is quite harrowing to read through the testimony of this particular person. I thank the member for Pumicestone for his support of his constituent. Some of the things that are mentioned in this—and I will only touch on this—are countless physical and sexual assaults; being photographed naked; being forced to watch inhuman acts; and he mentions a cattle prod as well as receiving a beating so bad it still haunts him to this very day. As I said, we are never quite prepared as an MP to hear these things. Because we are here and we are animated by access to justice, we are in a position in this parliament tonight to do something about that. It will be a great honour to take this action.

Finally, as we have heard, this particular bill also allows JPs to hear minor matters in QCAT. Once again, I want to acknowledge the great JPs who do their work in the electorate of Murrumbidgee, especially my friend Rob Shore. We are recognising the longest serving JPs in my area with a ceremony in the office. I am glad to tell the House that in my absence the former member for Murrumbidgee Dean Wells will be officiating, guiding and giving advice to all those JPs in Murrumbidgee who will be coming along. I have to say that once I said that the former attorney-general, who was an attorney-general under the Goss government, was going to be there we had a lot more people coming through and they wanted to chat to him.

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr WHITING: If I were there that would be a line-ball call. I would like to thank the Attorney-General once again. I commend this bill to the House.