




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

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**TACKLING ALCOHOL-FUELLED VIOLENCE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL;
LIQUOR AND FAIR TRADING LEGISLATION (RED TAPE REDUCTION)
AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr CRAWFORD** (Barron River—ALP) (8.52 pm): I rise tonight to talk about alcohol fuelled violence and to support the government's bill before the House this evening. I have stood in this House a number of times and referred to my 15 years as a front-line paramedic with both the Queensland and the Victorian ambulance services. I feel to date that there is no speech that I have done that is more relevant, more important and more pertinent to my background than this one. There are very few people in this House who have literally seen what happens on our streets in the middle of the night—who have been there and not only witnessed it but who have had to put up with it, who have had to see it, who have had to smell it, who have had to touch it, who have had to put their hands in people's chests to try to keep them alive, who have had to deal with bystanders who have been trying to assault you and threatening to cause you harm, and who have had to deal with other agencies and the like.

For 15 years I worked an average of four to six shifts per week and probably two or three of those were night shifts, and generally it is fair to say that when we are debating this bill we are talking about the middle of the night. I have read the reports. I have heard the evidence. I have heard what has been said tonight. I have heard a lot of statistics.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: Thank you. I take that interjection. There were a lot of statistics, but I have heard nothing that has convinced me. We have heard that task forces and local efforts have worked to reduce the amount of violence, and that is great. I heard the Attorney-General say that the number of alcohol related assaults in Cairns has reduced from 266 down to 257. I have heard people say how fantastic that is. That is 257 people who still got assaulted. That is 16 alcohol related sexual offences that still occurred—and this is just Cairns. Over the years that those statistics came from—2014 and 2015—I attended many of those cases myself. I was there. No-one else in this House was. I was there. I dealt with it. I put up with it. I saw it. How many assaults per night are we going to decide as a House is acceptable? Is it 100? Is it 50? Is it one? I say it is none, because my fellow comrades—and I will call them comrades; the paramedics out there working right now on the streets of Brisbane and across Queensland—are out there dealing with this right now. How many is enough for us to say enough is enough?

I want to commend the Attorney-General, Minister Lynham and the Premier for the stance they have taken on this. I support this 100 per cent. Governments must take the lead. We must set the bar and we must set it at a standard so that others will follow.

I have been verbally threatened with my life. I have been threatened physically, often by a drunk, most times by a drunk, well-meaning friend of an intoxicated person often found lying in a gutter. I was there to help you. I was there to sort you out. I was there to patch your wounds and pick up the contents

of your handbag that had been strewn all over the pavement—your lipstick, credit cards, money and everything. I was there to cover your exposed personal areas from the dozens of onlookers who were there for a cheap look. I was there to help you call your mum because your phone was broken or stolen or you had no credit, so I used my phone to call your mum only to find out you were 17 years old and your mum did not even know you were out, yet you had a whole heap of nightclub stamps on your arm. What is the answer to that?

Why is it that when your friends arrive on the scene they want to punch me instead of trying to help me? They want to abuse me. They want to threaten me. One of them even said that they will find me and kill me, that they will find my kids and kill my kids, that they will find my home and hurt me. Why is it that people do that? And I am speaking from actual memory. Why is it that people would spit on me or try to encourage the crowd that has developed around us to jump the ambos and teach them a thing or two when I was called there to help you, called there to try to sort this out for you? The next day people have a great excuse; they blame the alcohol, 'I'm sorry. I didn't really mean it. I was drunk. I had too much to drink. It wasn't really my fault.' I am sick of apologies. I have had enough.

As I said before, I have done hundreds of night shifts on the streets of Cairns, and I heard the many references to Cairns earlier and I thank honourable members for those. However, I am the one here who can speak with credibility about the streets of Cairns because I have been there more times than anybody else. I want to address Cairns for a second. We do have a problem. I heard a statement before that Cairns does not have a problem. Cairns does have a problem. The Cairns streets are dangerous. I would not walk them late at night. Many of my friends are police and they say to me that they would not walk them late at night. This misbelief that Cairns is a safe place after hours—it is not. The Cairns I know and the Cairns I want to know is one that embraces tourism: one that embraces overseas and domestic visitors, families, couples and groups. It is not marketed as a drinking destination for people who want to do shots until 5 am. If that is what people want, I urge them to not come to my city but to go somewhere else; they are not welcome. I do not want to have to walk the footpaths where the blood drips from their broken noses line the streets at 3 am like a breadcrumb trail to find them. I do not want to step over their vomit in the doorway of a business that takes on a fine aroma once the sun comes up.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: I heard someone say that every town has that, and that is exactly what we are talking about. Those people should go somewhere else so I do not have to step over them lying dangerously in the street at sunrise covered in their own urine, luckily, maybe finding that their wallet has not been stolen.

Mr Rickuss interjected.

Mr CRAWFORD: I am not saying that we should close business at eight o'clock at night.

I want to recognise the Leader of the Opposition for a statement he made in 2010. The Attorney-General commented a bit on this before, but I want to pull out a couple of sentences. He stated—

Through my travels around the state I have been horrified and disgusted to see the results that a night of alcohol and crowds has on local communities. The rubbish, the stench and the general disarray that greets people as the sun rises the morning after a night out is disgraceful and is not something that anyone should have to confront.

...

That happens in not only Townsville but also Mackay, Cairns and our major provincial centres. Tourists and a range of people are out there trying to enjoy the morning and they are confronted with that. They are confronted with something like that, and it is not a pretty sight.

That was the Leader of the Opposition. In 2016 things have not changed much, yet we are essentially having the same conversations as he had in 2010.

Let me conclude. I want to give huge praise to everyone who is out there on the streets right now and who will be over the coming days, weeks and months working or volunteering to curb this scourge: the ambos, the fireys, the coppers, the Salvation Army, the chaplains—everyone out there—especially the ambos who do a great job. I support them 100 per cent. I say thanks to the police who try to be everywhere, pick up the pieces night after night and try to keep the streets safe knowing that the next night they will have to go back out there and do it all over again; and to the emergency department staff—not just the doctors and nurses, but the administration staff, the security and the cleaners—who deal with endless alcohol abuse and aggression night after night in every single one of our emergency departments. They then go home to their own families and try to enjoy some sort of normal family life.

Alcohol fuelled violence cannot be reduced in stats by a few digits so we can give ourselves a pat on the back and move on. We must end it. We must end it soon. Around the corner is the next

punch, king-hit, coward punch or rape. It is simply a matter of time. I joined the paramedics to save lives and for 15 years I did that with my hands. But tonight I get to be part of something special: making a larger difference to save countless lives and prevent incalculable carnage. All I have to do is sit in my seat and vote with the government on this bill, a government which I commend for taking this bold step of change. I commend the bill.