




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Child Sexual Abuse, Statute of Limitations

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.34 pm): For too long in the state of Queensland our laws when it comes to the statute of limitations in child sexual abuse cases have not reflected community expectations. For too long, our laws have prohibited victims of child sexual abuse from pursuing personal injury claims. This is because, under our current statute of limitations, when survivors of child sexual abuse turn 21 years of age they are no longer entitled to make a claim. Under the Limitation of Actions Act 1974, damages in respect of personal injury cannot be brought forward after the expiration of three years from the date on which the cause of action arose. In child abuse cases, this means three years after a victim turns 18. For many, this means justice is never served. This is not good enough and this has to change.

As members of this House should be aware, countless studies have been conducted into child sexual abuse in recent decades. This is an issue which has generated national attention in recent years, particularly with the investigations of the child abuse royal commission. Across all studies, it is broadly understood that only about half of child sexual abuse victims come forward and tell anyone. For every child who does report to authorities, three to five cases are not being reported. These remaining victims often never come forward, leading to social and emotional issues throughout their lives.

In child sexual abuse cases, acceptance and validation are crucial to the emotional and mental health of victims. In many cases, coming forward about child sexual abuse can take place decades after the abuse takes place, when the victim has finally reached a point where they feel they are mentally and emotionally strong enough to take action. As a society and as a parliament, we have an obligation to ensure that, when victims of child sexual abuse speak out, they are not only heard and understood by those around them but also able to pursue appropriate action. This needs to be done free of blame and, most importantly, free of an arbitrary time limit in the form of a statute of limitations.

The LNP understands that we need to act now to address this issue. Child sexual abuse is a blight on our society. The scars this abuse leaves are not just physical. Victims are often left to struggle with depression, fear, anxiety, anger and shame. A clear relationship has been shown between child sexual abuse and lowered self-esteem. These issues stay with victims for the rest of their lives. No longer can we continue to allow victims of child sexual abuse to go unheard in our legal system after 21 years of age. It is the right thing to do for the victims, for their families and for our Queensland community.