



Speech By  
**Scott Stewart**


**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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**MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Social Cohesion Implementation Committee**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (12.26 pm): I am pleased to inform the House on the progress of the work of the Queensland government's Social Cohesion Implementation Committee. The committee was appointed in June and has been tasked by the government with developing a draft action plan to strengthen the cohesion and resilience of our communities and reduce the risk of antisocial behaviours and associated violence. We have seen an enormous amount of antisocial behaviour and associated violence not only across the world, in places like Turkey, more recently in France on Bastille Day and also in Belgium, but also in Australia. Recently we have seen it in Melbourne, we have seen it in Parramatta, and on the weekend we saw it in Sydney. This is real. This is on our shores. The Queensland government is committed to a fair and equitable society with a strong focus on harmony, unity and inclusion. The government is also committed to seeing a safer Queensland. This is an important part of that work. Having strong social connections is also important for building a strong economy, tackling crime and being resilient to natural disasters.

As chair of the committee, I am honoured to be leading this body of work with the support of one of Australia's leading social work and disability scholars Professor Lesley Chenoweth—Professor Chenoweth is also deputy chair—and a committee membership with representation across a range of areas, including academia, community services, sport and youth. I am pleased to report that the committee has been out listening to members of the community on how we can strengthen our social cohesion. As honourable members appreciate, Queensland is a diverse and culturally rich community. While here in Queensland we have a remarkable degree of social cohesion given our diversity, maintaining this cohesion requires effort, and joint effort at that.

Last month the committee held consultation round tables in Townsville and on the Gold Coast. The committee has also heard from community members in other regions, including Logan and Toowoomba. We have also met with government agencies and community service providers. We have heard from a diverse range of people: people from different faiths, different cultures, different abilities, different ages and the LGBTI sector about what social cohesion means to them and how together we can build the cohesion of our communities.

The committee's work is also being formed by research support from Griffith University. We have heard how crucial it is for the members of our community to have a sense of belonging and to have opportunities to participate and to be engaged with the community, whether this be through training, employment, volunteering or social activities. Pathways to employment through volunteering, support and art were also recognised as important to building confidence, skills and social networks. We have also heard how important it is to bring people and communities together, to open up dialogue, promote understanding, create connections and, more importantly, break down fears, stereotypes and prejudices that may exist within our very own communities. This might start with getting to know just one new person. It might start with getting to know the family living right next door to us.

We also heard about the impact of education and media. Education needs to start early, building an understanding of the benefits of differences and positive relationships. Mainstream media needs to be cognisant of providing a balanced impartial view and we also need to use social media to link in with young people and hear their stories. It is clear that there is already a lot of work being done by government and within communities that we can build on to create more connected and inclusive environments. It is also clear that it is at the local or grassroots level where we need to invest our efforts.

The committee is in the process of identifying possible strategies to recommend to the government, to strengthen community cohesion and resilience and reduce marginalisation in our communities. This may include initially focusing on one or more communities so that we can centre our efforts on learning and building.