




Speech By
Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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**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 NICHOLLS** (Clayfield—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.34 pm): Let no-one underestimate the importance of this bill for this parliament not just for this year and not just for the 55th Parliament, but over the history of this place and what this bill will mean to so many people. This is legislation that puts the focus of this debate sharply on the survivor and it is long overdue. When the bill we are debating here today was first introduced into the parliament there was a reception held in the Undumbi Room in the Annexe in honour of the occasion. Those in attendance were regular, everyday Queenslanders. They could be our neighbour. They could be the person sitting opposite us on the bus. They could be the person standing in front of us at the coffee shop. We would not recognise them if we passed them in the street, but they all have one thing in common: they are all people who have had the terrible misfortune of being in the wrong place at the wrong time to have trusted the wrong person and they have suffered immeasurably for that terrible misfortune. Today we come together as a parliament to recognise them as long overdue in deserving of our attention, our compassion and of this legislation.

This bill is about standing with those survivors in their corner and fighting for them when so often in the past they may have felt that everything was stacked against them, that they were fighting against the system. This bill is about fighting for their ability to seek justice in their own time and recognising that they deserve to do so because of the emotional and often physical trauma they have suffered from child sexual abuse. They have all suffered in different ways, from different circumstances and often at the hands of people who were supposed to be the most trusted in their life, expected to be there to guide them through what can be an emotional time in anyone's life, particularly for those people who are teenagers.

As a father of three teenage children myself—two boys and a girl—I certainly appreciate the changes, both physical and emotional, that they are going through in their lives and the trust that they have for those who are often the closest to them. These are important relationships at what are important and transformative times in young people's lives. I cannot imagine what it must be like for those who have suffered in the past, but we owe it to them to allow them to seek justice in their own time. As the royal commission has acknowledged, there have been some horrible past societal injustices carried out against young Queenslanders. The changes we are debating here today will hopefully go some way towards restoring their faith in a system that was supposed to protect them but failed to do so.

I do not want to spend too much time dwelling on the past today because, as bad as that past is and as important as it is that we acknowledge it, this is about the future, learning from the past, helping those who are most in need and trying to get the system right. When I walked around the Undumbi Room that day and met many of the survivors of childhood sexual abuse it was hard not to get emotional because we could see how emotional the news of these impending changes was for them. For many it will be as painful as it is welcome because it will drag up old memories. At least now those survivors will have the ability to seek justice for the past abuses in their own time and to try to right the wrongs of what has happened to them. This is about empowering those survivors and breaking down the legal barriers to the justice that they are entitled to.

It ought to be a proud day—and it is a proud day—for this parliament. I am proud of my LNP colleagues for taking part in this debate and of the shadow Attorney-General for his contribution to it. That pride is not for any sense of political triumphalism—indeed it ought not be. However, it is pride because we came together as a party; this parliament has come together as a group of men and women who saw a gap in the legislation of the state and a group of vulnerable Queenslanders who needed our help.

There are still a couple of holes in the government's legislation, and I note the speech by the Attorney-General today. We are seeking to amend this bill because we do believe that it can be made better. At the heart of our amendments is fairness. Firstly, we think it is vital that we overcome the unfairness of a situation which effectively creates two schemes to help child sexual abuse survivors depending on where your abuse occurred. The second issue deals with previous deeds of settlement and giving the courts the ability to reopen claims that may be seen to have been unfairly settled at the time because of the time period limitation and the fact that the survivor had no bargaining power. We are moving these amendments because we think it is the right thing to do. This has been our position from day one and we have not varied from it. We said it when we announced our policy on 24 July, and we reconfirmed it when we responded to the introduction of this bill on 16 August.

I want to acknowledge the efforts of our shadow Attorney-General and member for Mansfield, Ian Walker, for his voice in the LNP and his leadership in this community over many years. I also want to acknowledge the member for Cairns for his compassion and contribution to the debate, and we thank him for his efforts in that regard. I want to acknowledge the role the Premier played in bringing this legislation forward. As I say, this is a day for which all in this parliament can take some credit.

Most importantly, I think it is important that we thank those survivors who had the quiet courage to come forward, to explain their circumstances, to dig up past painful memories and to tell us what it is they need and what it is they want to see happen. From day one this has been all about putting the survivors first and doing what we can to make the system what it should be. I would encourage all members to give our amendments the consideration they deserve. We move these amendments in the right spirit and with the steadfast determination and focus on doing what is right for the survivors of horrendous past sexual abuse. Today is a historic day for the parliament, and we owe it to those who are relying on us to make these changes, to get it right, and to make the system the best it can be.

We cannot erase or change the past, but we can change the future. We can support our survivors and ensure that we give them every chance to have their day and seek justice in their own way.