



Speech By  
**Aaron Harper**


**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 February 2017

**MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

**Townsville, Crime**

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.53 pm): It is a good start to the year that in the first sitting week I can rise to inform the House that whilst there is more work to do, we are heading in the right direction in tackling the crime issues in Townsville, as reported in today's *Townsville Bulletin*. The irony of following the member for Kawana is that if he paid as much attention to youth crime during his time as attorney-general as he does to his hair we might not have inherited the mess that we did. He was more interested in helicopter rides to failed boot camps. He was bloody hopeless.

**Mr SEENEY:** I rise to a point of order. It has been a longstanding convention in this place that members do not refer to another member's appearance. I think for the benefit of us all we should preserve that. Mr Deputy Speaker, I would ask that you ask the member to withdraw that.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Crawford): Order! I am inclined to agree. Member for Thuringowa, will you withdraw that statement?

**Mr HARPER:** I will withdraw. We know that the worst and most prolific recidivist offenders need to be held accountable. A number of those offenders are now behind bars thanks largely to the outstanding work of our men and women of the Queensland Police Service. Locking these worst offenders up is finally giving Townsville some reprieve. Yes, we are heading in the right direction. I was talking with Inspector Joe Kitching only yesterday. He leads the Rapid Action Patrol hub in Thuringowa. Whilst we are not exactly popping the corks, we know that since commencing Operation Oscar Merchant, a police operation, in September last year they have arrested 1,348 people on a staggering 3,395 charges. Locally, QPS has been bolstered with extra police that we called for and we delivered. We know that having these QPS resources in place in Townsville is having a positive effect on reducing crime rates. As the good inspector said, we are seeing some reductions in offending.

There is always more work to do. We are beginning to see the overall positive effect of the suite of initiatives and programs our government has instigated on the issues around youth crime that has caused our community so much grief. We know the issues around the causes of crime are complex and, in turn, this requires a complex suite of initiatives and programs to address the causes of re-offending and to ultimately break the cycle of crime. However, we are also cognisant of the fact that we need to be tough on crime and ensure that those who choose to break the law are held accountable, experience consequences and are locked up where appropriate and also repay the community for the damage they have done.

That is why our government has instigated the magistrates Specialist Courts in Townsville to ensure consistency and appropriate sentencing is applied to those recidivist offenders. Young offenders will now appear before the same magistrate who will be familiar with the background of the offender and the issues impacting them and their family. This will allow the court to now more effectively monitor young offenders' progress in the orders made against them and determine the sentences that will be most effective in addressing ongoing offending behaviour. This may include detention, participation in

a range of programs such as community service or work that focuses on making reparation to the community or the victim. I know through our many and varied interactions with community groups and many concerned constituents that our community has a clear expectation that offenders are held to account, as do I as the member representing Thuringowa.

Along with our government-led Townsville Stronger Communities team, a first for Queensland, we see a whole-of-government approach to addressing the issues around crime through the sharing of information between agencies, and they are making real headway. In particular, it is having a positive impact on local families, with intensive case management strategies for those recidivist offenders. Due to this group's work, I remain confident that we will see offending rates decline in Townsville. We also know that other programs such as Project Booyah and Transition to Success are making real change in young people's lives. As one of the three MPs in Townsville who called for more funding for Project Booyah, I was thrilled with the recent announcement of \$7½ million to ensure this outstanding program continues over the next four years.

Finally, I want to commend the work of the Indigenous elders Uncle Alfred Smallwood, Uncle Rusty Butler, Wayne Parker and Noel Gertz for their unwavering desire to see that their 'Yinda' Back to Country Indigenous elder-led program proposal recently received by government is being considered for funding. They want to be part of the solution. This group of men have my 110 per cent support for this initiative, which is yet another important part of our work to tackle youth crime issues in Townsville. As honourable members can see, we are not hanging our hats on a single rushed, failed policy like the LNP boot camps. No, we are working with the entire community on all levels to deliver real change for our community on this important and challenging issue.