Speech By

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MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

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CHILD PROTECTION REFORM AMENDMENT BILL

Dr ROBINSON (Cleveland—LNP) (5.50 pm): I rise to speak to the Child Protection Reform Amendment Bill 2017 and to make a very brief contribution due to time constraints. The LNP will not be opposing the bill. There is much that I could say, but time constraints mean that I will make only a few brief comments on a couple of selected areas.

The stated policy objectives of the bill have already been canvassed and much has been said about them. I support all of these objectives for the children of our state and the Cleveland district of Redland city. Broadly speaking, the primary purpose of the bill is to amend the Child Protection Act 1999 to implement key recommendations of the commission of inquiry into child protection to provide better long-term outcomes for children entering the system and safe connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with communities and cultures. The changes will also allow for improved information sharing that is focused on the child's safety and wellbeing.

I turn now to permanent care orders. The purpose of the new permanent care order is to offer a more permanent arrangement than a long-term guardianship order without permanently severing a child's legal relationship with their birth family. It offers other features as well that are important and I do generally support that measure. However, there is one note of caution in terms of one aspect of permanent care orders. The intent, as I am led to believe, is not for permanent care orders to replace all long-term guardianship orders, current and future. This is important particularly when there are cultural considerations. My point is this: when the committee visited Mount Isa, Palm Island and Townsville—I was not there for Mount Isa but for Palm Island and Townsville—to gain further regional and Indigenous cultural feedback on the bill, some Indigenous leaders and organisations expressed high levels of concern about what might be the result of permanent care orders in Aboriginal and Islander communities and with Aboriginal and Islander children.

The fact that an Aboriginal or Islander child might be placed under a permanent care order and never be reunified with their family caused some concern. This is understandable given the history in past generations of the removal of children from their families. Further, on Palm Island the feedback was that the island community wanted more say with respect to children being removed from the island and taken to the mainland as opposed to finding other long-term solutions on the island for their own children. The view was that the children who remained on the island were more likely to be reunified with their own family on the island at the appropriate time, where possible, provided that the safety and protection of the child was still guaranteed in remaining on the island. The principle of self-determination and more flexibility and options with the selection of recognised entities may assist with this. Requiring the case plans for Aboriginal and Islander children to include details about how the child will be supported to develop and maintain connections with the family, community and culture will also help. Cultural sensitivity should be further aided by facilitating the participation of the child and the child's family in decision-making.

My support of this bill is in part conditional upon the permanent care orders being sensitively and cautiously used when it comes to Aboriginal and Islander children and families. Should the department not use this measure wisely and with due cultural care, I will reconsider my support for the use of permanent care orders in Aboriginal and Islander cases at a future time in this House. Generally speaking, I support the bill.