



Speech By  
**Scott Stewart**


**MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 March 2017

## **MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

### **Operation Oscar Merchant**

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (12.13 pm): I would also like to acknowledge Harmony Day today, particularly as my wife has Maltese heritage. Queensland and Malta have a very close connection and affiliation. In fact, the Maltese cross is emblazoned upon our state flag and also is on our crest. It is a great day for all the Maltese families, particularly those in Mackay.

I rise today to provide an update to the House on the Townsville Stronger Communities committee headed by Inspector Glenn Doyle of the QPS. Before I provide the latest information on how the Palaszczuk government is driving down crime rates in Townsville I will retrace the journey so far on the raft of initiatives undertaken to make the streets of Townsville safer.

After initial community consultation, 30 additional police were activated across the city of Townsville in Operation Oscar Merchant as an immediate response to the increasing rates of crime. The Palaszczuk government also mapped out long-term strategies to address community safety, service delivery, housing, education, training and health. It developed a five-point plan to integrate all these government services operating together and sharing information about families to provide a whole-of-government wraparound service. Why did the Palaszczuk government go down this path? Not because it was easy. In fact, it has been a difficult path to travel. However, it is the right path to travel. Those opposite want to travel the easy road. 'Lock them up and throw away the key,' were the howls from the opposition.

Every bit of evidence based research around the world was telling us to invest in whole-of-government wraparound services that teach families how to be families, that teach parents how to be parents and that teach parents to take responsibility for their own kids. That is exactly what the Townsville community wants: parents taking responsibility for their own kids.

In the first 30 days of Operation Oscar Merchant, police across Townsville made 803 arrests and laid 1,808 charges. The majority of those charges related to drug, property and traffic matters for adult and youth offenders. The Townsville community told us that juvenile offenders needed to be accountable for the crimes that they committed. In response the Palaszczuk government introduced a new specialist high-risk youth court which deals with young repeat offenders who see the same magistrate each time they go before the court. That means that that magistrate will apply penalties that fit the crime knowing the intervention work that has already been done with the offender.

We knew that more needed to be done so an additional \$7.3 million announced by the new police minister, Minister Ryan, reiterated that the Queensland Police Service led project, supported by the Palaszczuk government as well as the PCYC, targeted criminal behaviour and the attitudes of at-risk young people through Project Booyah. Many people have spoken in this House about those successes. In addition to this, the Palaszczuk government provided more than half a million dollars to fund additional case managers as well as psychologists, a team leader and five youth and family support

officers at the Townsville youth justice centre. The case managers address the causes, motivations and attitudes that lie behind offenders' actions and emphasise the need for young people to accept responsibility for their criminal behaviour and the direct impact it has on others. We know that children who have appeared in court multiple times and/or who have substance addictions are at a high risk of future offending. They will be among those in the target group.

The latest plank in our efforts to reduce the number of kids wandering the streets after dark as a way of reducing youth crime was the opening of the city's first after-hours drop-in centre for kids. The Palaszczuk government dedicated \$482,000 to the Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Services, or TAIHS, to operate this pilot service in Garbutt at nights and on weekends. Police in Townsville estimate there are upwards of 30 kids walking the streets most nights. Clearly some of these are using the cover of darkness to break into homes, businesses and cars. The message from the police, Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group and youth support groups across the city is that a safe after-hours place is a priority. The outcomes that we are seeing from the Townsville Stronger Communities Action Group are that youth crime is decreasing significantly in the areas of break and enters and stolen vehicles, which were the two common focus areas of concern. I will quickly say that work is not finished by any stretch of the imagination, but the Palaszczuk government is committed to keeping the streets of Townsville city safe.