




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NANANGO

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Rural and Regional Queensland, Rainfall; Ice

 **Mrs FRECKLINGTON** (Nanango—LNP) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.00 pm): The rain that we have received over the past few weeks has been wonderful. Today, many drought declared communities are celebrating impressive and very welcome rains. A huge swathe of Central and North Queensland has been soaked. One of my daughters is on a property located about 180 kilometres north-west of Julia Creek. Let me tell the House that she is loving the puddles and being flooded in, because she knows what that means for the future of that place. I hope that those heavy falls will bring an end to the long drought. There is flooding in places, but rains such as this are all part and parcel of living in regional Queensland. Although the wet weather has brought relief to many Queenslanders, many areas are still crying out for rain. The rainfall has been heavy, but it has been patchy. Sadly, properties east of Ilfracombe out to Jericho missed out and some places in the central west are in their seventh dry year. I am thinking of those communities and I hope desperately that more wet weather systems will bring some relief to the bush.

There is no more destructive problem facing Queensland today than our ice epidemic. Every week—or, it could be said, every day—I hear stories of what this terrifying drug is doing to the people of Queensland. I hear stories of families being torn apart, crime rates increasing, and police and hospitals struggling to cope. Across our small towns and big cities, ice is attacking every part of the fabric of our communities. This drug does not discriminate; it decimates.

Addicts talk about how ice is much worse than heroin, coke or marijuana. The police talk about how addictive ice is and how the crooks provide free samples to get people hooked. We need to end the scourge of ice. It is destroying addicts' lives but it is also destroying the lives of their families. The ice crime wave is threatening thousands more innocent victims in our communities. We cannot afford to sit back and lose a whole generation to this epidemic that has spread across Queensland.

Sadly, under the past three years of Labor little has been done to address this nightmare. Labor has watched as this epidemic has unfolded and it has sat on its hands. The Liberal National Party has taken a different approach. We are in touch with the communities we represent and we understand the problems they face. Those problems do not get any bigger than ice, especially in regional Queensland. The major drug dealers deliberately target regional Queensland towns, because they are easy pickings. Drug gangs know that they can run ice through country towns easier than they can in cities as it is harder to contain. In regional areas there are fewer police, people are more isolated and there is more economic disadvantage. In many parts of regional Queensland, youth unemployment is at a crisis level. In Western Queensland, the youth unemployment rate is above 50 per cent. Regional Queensland is fertile territory for ice and, once it gets a foothold, it spreads like wildfire. Ice continues to damage towns such as Roma, St George, Maryborough, Bundaberg and Gayndah just to name a few. The Warrego and the Bruce are known as ice highways.

I do not want our regional towns and our regional people to suffer anymore. The evidence is clear. The scourge of ice is only getting worse and we need a comprehensive, multifaceted response. After three years of this do-nothing Labor government, enough is enough. Rather than endless reviews and the blame game from those opposite, who continue to blame everyone but themselves, and more talk, we need action.

I am proud of the comprehensive ice strategy that we have put forward. We want to establish four new drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres in North Queensland, Wide Bay, Toowoomba and Caloundra. We want a dedicated treatment plan to provide additional addiction services in remote Indigenous communities. We want a dedicated police ice task force to work with the federal agencies to restrict supply by targeting organised crime.

Increased prevention is also a key to tackling this scourge. That is why we want to partner with sporting bodies to educate young people about the dangers of ice. We want a statewide education and awareness campaign with a focus on those most at risk. We also want highly targeted mental health and drug awareness campaigns. I especially want the victims of ice to be heard. No-one knows what this drug does better than they do and no-one knows what this drug does better than their families.

At this juncture, I would like to thank the member for Condamine for sharing with many people across Queensland his personal story and that of his son. The LNP decided to hold ice forums across Queensland to give those victims of ice a chance to be heard and they were desperate to be listened to. In Toowoomba, three courageous, heartbroken mums told me about their adult sons who had become addicted to this drug. Their children had become violent, selfish and abusive. Families were torn apart and children were potentially put at risk. The strength of those women who spoke was astonishing, but their stories made me more determined to tackle this problem.

In Townsville, we had addicts who told us how ice had shattered their lives and how they had turned their lives to crime. In Nambour, we heard the heart-wrenching story of a young mum who had battled ice herself for 20 years. We heard the story from a nurse who had battled addiction. She is now recovering, but her children went through hell. In Bundaberg, I was joined by the city's new member. As a former police officer in Bundaberg, he is only too familiar with the violence, the crime and the death that ice leaves behind it.

Everywhere I visited people expressed their support for the LNP's stance against ice. The only answer that those opposite give is around cutting to funding in the last government before them. I put it to this House: what have they been doing for the past 20 years? My head will not be in the sand on this issue. We must stand up and fight.

Those courageous men and women stood up in those forums to talk to us about a problem that is not going away. We need to acknowledge that ice is an issue and not continue the blame game. This ice epidemic is above politics. It is an issue that should have bipartisan support.

We have had overwhelming feedback from the plan. This is more than just going to one region in Queensland and saying we will build a rehabilitation centre and have more beds. This is about acknowledging there is an issue and listening to those Queenslanders who are screaming out for help. They want the government to listen to them. They want more detox centres. They want more rehabilitation centres. We cannot just throw money at this issue and hope it goes away. We actually need to listen to the Queenslanders who are affected by this. We need to give support to the front-line services, mums and dads and the children who are struggling with this addiction on a day-to-day basis.

Ms Fentiman: Why didn't you make a submission to our strategy? Where was the LNP's submission?

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): I warn the Minister for Employment and Small Business.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: How embarrassing that that is the response of this government: where was your submission? What the people of Queensland would say to you, Minister, is where is your action?