




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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NATIONAL REDRESS SCHEME FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE (COMMONWEALTH POWERS) BILL

 **Mr MOLHOEK** (Southport—LNP) (2.57 pm): It is, indeed, a very sobering piece of legislation that we are here to debate in the House today. I am glad that both sides of the House have indicated their support for the national redress scheme as proposed. I feel it is important to bring some context to the debate. I think it would be remiss of us to assume that in passing this legislation we have indeed addressed the problem for all time.

When I was first asked by Campbell Newman to be the assistant minister for child safety back in 2012, I took it on myself to read the findings of a number of inquiries over a two- or three-day period. At that point there were only two: there was the Forde inquiry of 1998 and then the subsequent inquiry that was initiated by the Beattie government via a CMC report of 2004. Then when we came to government in 2012 we launched a commission of inquiry, the Carmody commission of inquiry. I want to quote directly from the original report that was prepared by Leneen Forde. The terms of reference for that initial inquiry were that the inquiry—

... make full and careful inquiry without undue formality with respect to the following matters—

The priority matter of course was an inquiry into—

... any government or non-government institutions or detention centres established or licensed under the *State Children Act 1911*, *Children's Services Act 1965* or the *Juvenile Justice Act 1992*.

I note the observations of Leneen Forde in her report to the parliament. In the forward she says—

I urge all Queenslanders to contemplate the experiences of children in institutions, how it came to pass that many of them were abused and mistreated, and why it has taken so long for their stories to be told. It was society that failed those children. In acknowledging that, we must ensure that the same wrongs are not repeated, and that this Inquiry has a positive outcome.

Those words were penned some 20 years ago. She goes on to say—

This is no ordinary report. This was no ordinary Inquiry. For the Commissioners and staff of the Inquiry, the experience has been deeply moving and deeply disquieting.

I think that is a significant word to sum up the challenges and feelings that all of us have when we try and get our minds around the fact that anyone would want to sexually abuse a child. I stand in the House today as the proud grandfather of my first granddaughter—

Mr Brown: You're too young, mate!

Mr MOLHOEK: Thank you. My son sent me a video clip this morning of Zoe May's first attempt at crawling, so it is a very poignant reminder for me that, as members of parliament, we are entrusted to protect our most vulnerable and precious Queenslanders. Some of the challenges that the Forde inquiry faced were daunting. The inquiry reviewed practices from as far back as 1911. The review looked into the behaviours and operations of some 150 orphanages and detention centres across the state of Queensland.

It would be remiss of me not to remind the House that we have made a number of attempts to address the plight of victims—or survivors, as many of them prefer to be called. There was an apology to those Queenslanders harmed in institutions during their childhood back in late 1999. Subsequent to that there was an apology to those children who had been in the care of the state of Queensland and suffered in any way as a result of mistreatment in adult mental health facilities. Then in our time in government, the Newman government, there was a further apology. While it is not completely relevant, it is still significant. There was an apology to those children, families and parents for forced adoption policies and practices.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Kelly): Pause the clock. Members, there is far too much audible conversation. If you want to have conversations take it outside, please. Please listen to these speeches with the respect they deserve.

Mr MOLHOEK: These are incredibly deep matters of the heart. Again I quote from the Leneen Forde inquiry, where she raised the question how the abuse was allowed to happen. She said—

How was it that numbers of children, while under the guardianship of the State and in the care of some of our most esteemed denominational bodies, were able to be abused? This has been a difficult question to answer. There are a range of factors that have contributed. Until the early 1960s there was little understanding of the emotional needs of children, and even less understanding of the impact that harsh emotional and physical treatment has on children in later life. Ignorance played a role: both the Department and society in general believed that if children were in the care of trusted religious organisations or ‘good upstanding citizens’, they would be safe. There was also the lack of awareness or belief that sexual abuse could occur.

Institutions were under-funded, short-staffed and generally closed environments with limited opportunity for meaningful interaction with the local community. Isolation from the wider community and the lack of external scrutiny places an institution at high risk of harbouring abusive practices. Physical isolation also makes it difficult for professionals or relatives to visit.

As I stand in the House, I am pleased that this is no longer the case. Prior to and during the 1960s we had very limited legislation, disclosure or accountability around the treatment of our children but now, three inquiries on, we have much more rigorous practices in place.

Our job is not done; there are still too many concerns being raised. I pulled these statistics today from the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women website. We continue to see an increase in the number of child concern reports to the department. We see an increase in the number of children living away from home. We know that, while there are many great carers out there, not all children living away from home are well cared for. This continues to be a challenge both for us in government and the Department of Child Safety.

I note that in her report Leneen Forde particularly expressed concern about Indigenous children. At the time of the inquiry in 1999 it was very difficult to secure evidence from witnesses in Indigenous communities. Sadly, as we stand here today about 56 per cent of all children in out-of-home care in Queensland are in fact Indigenous children. Our work absolutely has a long way to go and there is still so much more to do.

In the few minutes I have left I want to talk about someone whom I want to honour. You may have heard of the ‘mower man’, Claude Harvey. Claude is a wonderful gentleman from the Gold Coast who I had the pleasure of meeting 12 years ago at Hope Island, when he did his first mower push from Hope Island to Coolangatta to raise money for Bravehearts. It was around the same time that I had the pleasure of being invited onto the board of Bravehearts. Apart from my 12 months in child safety I have continued to work with the organisation, and I remain a director. In the 12 years that Claude Harvey has been pushing that lawn mower for Bravehearts—and this is remarkable—he has raised \$1,073,090 just for Bravehearts. He has pushed his mower some 24,500 kilometres around Australia.

Last Friday night I had the great pleasure of standing with him at Club CSi in Southport. He was there with the mower, and I promised I would buy him dinner and together we would collect a few dollars for Bravehearts. When I grabbed the microphone to interrupt the bingo and other games that were going on throughout the evening to tell people that Claude Harvey was there, almost everyone in the house stood to their feet and gave Claude Harvey an incredible standing ovation. I do want to pay homage to him because he is such a tireless and hard worker for the cause of child safety. He stands with me and others in the fight against child sexual abuse in our state and in our nation.