




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 24 October 2019

SUMMARY OFFENCES AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (12.07 pm): This government will always support the right to protest. The government will always support the right of people to have their say. These are bedrock democratic principles of this government. Those defining principles of our democracy are eternal. Those rights have shaped our society for the better. Adherence to those principles has made us who we are today as a community, and they are shared values that bind our society together. We have other shared values—values like supporting the safety of all members of our community. That is what this bill is about. It is about supporting the safety of people in our community. It is about protecting the safety of our first responders. It is about protecting our police, our fireys and our ambos, and it is also about protecting protesters.

We have seen the use of dangerous attachment devices. These devices are designed in such a manner that their removal presents a significant risk. They pose a danger to our first responders and to protesters. When our emergency workers go to cut these devices, they have to use high-speed cutting equipment in close proximity to themselves and to the protesters who are attached to the device. It is a situation that is fraught with the potential for serious injury. This bill will make it an offence to use one of these devices. The bill will also give police the power to seize these devices prior to their use. That is the intent—to stop the devices being used and thus to avoid the potential dangers to protesters and to first responders. This is the right and responsible thing to do.

As I said, this government will never do anything to interfere with the right to undertake peaceful, lawful protest. Once these laws are in place, the protests will continue. There will be just as many protests as there were before and, just as they do now, police will support the staging of protests. Only one thing will change: dangerous devices now will be targeted by these new laws with the aim of preventing potentially dangerous and harmful situations.

I know that first responders will appreciate this support. They do not like seeing protesters putting themselves at risk. It goes against everything our police, paramedics and firefighters stand for. Their job is about protecting the community. Their commitment is to keep people safe. Their dedication is to the welfare of others. Using high-speed cutting equipment in close proximity to a protester is something that they simply do not want to do—and nor should they. These dangerous attachment devices represent an unnecessary risk. In recent times, it has become increasingly clear that these devices are being used more and more. As the member for McConnel said, in the times I have been on protests this is something we had not seen before. The government is taking action.

This bill will support community safety. To be absolutely clear, this bill will have no effect whatsoever on the right to protest. Those protests will continue. That is a very good thing, but it would be grossly irresponsible for the government not to do what it can to protect those first responders who on a daily basis put themselves in harm's way for the benefit of others.