



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 27 March 2019

**MOTION**

**Child Sex Offender Register**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.11 pm): I believe that parents should be able to find out the identity of child sex offenders living in their neighbourhoods, and that is why the House should support this motion tonight. A publicly available sex offender register will allow parents to check the background of anyone who has unsupervised access to their children. The plan, modelled on systems in Western Australia and the UK, would include safeguards to prevent vigilante action against sex offenders. Protecting children is more important than protecting the anonymity of paedophiles.

Queensland police run the Child Protection Offender Register, which requires sex offenders to keep police informed of their whereabouts. I say that we should show respect and a commitment to the woman who was raped at gunpoint by the notorious predator Robert Fardon when she was 12. Sharon Tomlinson knows the community has right to information about sex offenders in their community. Let's show support and commitment to the Queensland parents who need to know if an offender is living in their midst. Nothing is more important than protecting our kids from these sexual predators.

Let's support not-for-profit agencies like Bravehearts that support those affected by child sexual assault and who have been advocating for change for a long time. Let's show respect and commitment to the memory of 13-year-old Daniel Morcombe, who vanished while waiting to catch a bus to go Christmas shopping on 7 December 2003. It would be years before Daniel's grief-stricken family and the rest of the world learned that a cold-blooded killer named Brett Peter Cowan was responsible for their son's death. This predator previously spent time in jail for raping and bashing two boys within an inch of their lives, one in Darwin and one interstate. He should never have been on the street without people knowing where he was.

Let's support the Morcombes, who have said that it is quite simple to implement. At the end of the day it will make a massive difference to children right around our state. Parents will be able to educate their children on what these predators get up to, the numbers of these predators and where they live geographically in our midst. Mr Morcombe also said that it would be a great way to implement additional deterrence against those who attack our most vulnerable. If you are a person with a warped interest in young children, we need to know where you are. Mr Morcombe also said, 'They're not going to get a slap on the wrist through the courts, their name has the potential to be listed on this website forever and surely as a human being ...' and as a nation we need to know where they are there.

I call on the House tonight: let's become the first jurisdiction in Australia to make photos, regional locations and other details of convicted serious sex offenders available to the public online. That is why the LNP will enforce strong measures to protect against vigilantism. That is why, under the LNP's proposal, any person who accesses but misuses the information will face a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment. For example, any person who harasses or distributes a listed offender's name or photograph will be held to account. A person who makes a false application in an attempt to obtain information will also be held to account for up to seven years. These strong measures, which have been in place in Western Australia for over five years, are proof that they do deter vigilante attacks.

Will Labor ever trust the community to use the information sensibly and without misuse so they are able to make informed decisions with regard to their children's safety? It appears that tonight that is not going to be the trust the community can expect from Labor. What will it take for Labor to put survivors before offenders? Sharon Tomlinson, a survivor of Robert John Fardon, claims that not informing the community of an offender's whereabouts is more likely to cause vigilantism.

I remind the House that there have been over 40 different reports into child safety reforms in this state in the last 10 years which have all alluded to more protections and more reforms around child safety. On an ideologically based view why would you not at least give this a chance to be developed into a policy position that all sides of this House could be proud of. We talk so much about bipartisanship in this place and about those most vulnerable, but again we are playing to another political agenda here tonight. Just because it is us, you will not support it.

I say to you that my role will be to tell every one of those stakeholders exactly how disrespectful you have been to them. I will tell all of those stakeholders who engage with me in my portfolio responsibilities just how important vulnerable children are. If this place cannot take a stand on strong reforms against those perpetrators in our community, we must worry about what the future of child safety looks like and, more importantly, future convictions and dealing with those perpetrators. There is a strong argument for everyone in this House tonight to reflect and think about what the Western Australian model could look like for our great state. Let's not put politics above the most vulnerable in our community. The children of this state need our help.