




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 28 March 2019

JUSTICE LEGISLATION (LINKS TO TERRORIST ACTIVITY) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (11.46 am): I rise to make a brief contribution to the Justice Legislation (Links to Terrorist Activity) Amendment Bill 2018. As we heard, the main objective of this bill is to support the national framework to ensure that there is a consistent national effort to prevent and respond to terrorist threats. I think it is really important that we in this place note that it is a consistent national approach. A terrorist threat is an attack on all of our civil liberties. It is an attack on everything that we stand for in a place such as this and in other parliaments around Australia. It is an attack on our way of life, our customs and our beliefs. It is designed to bring fear and intimidation to our populace, whom we are supposed to defend and protect. We are supposed to make sure we have legislation so that the various arms of government have that capacity. I think it is very important that we recognise that. It will implement the Council of Australian Governments agreement that there will be a presumption that neither bail nor parole will be granted to those persons who have demonstrated support for, or have links to, terrorist activity. Again, these are some of our most fundamental freedoms.

We have heard that there are stakeholders who are concerned about any reduction in those freedoms for us here in the nation, particularly today for us here in Queensland. I agree with those concerns. These are fundamental cornerstones that make our democracy and our society function. These are things that have been built up over centuries and generations to ensure that we are a free society, to ensure that we have a right to privacy, to ensure that we have free speech, to ensure that we cannot be arbitrarily detained. There are many places in the world where governments will wield that power for their own ends. It is very serious when we come into this place and discuss legislation that will increase the government's ability to interfere with someone's civil liberties and personal freedoms, but make no mistake: a terrorist's intention is to take those freedoms from us, to have us cower in fear and be afraid to live the lives that all Australians and all Queenslanders should be able to lead.

Whilst I recognise that we are looking at those fundamental freedoms, I think the only way we can counterbalance the threat of terrorism in this nation is to, under strict guidelines and with the democratic parliament and its arms of government such as the police, the Federal Police and other elements, create a legislative framework that is robust and can be used to prevent that attack on our freedoms, because that is what terrorists are doing when they act: attacking our way of life.

Unfortunately, we have seen around the world at different times that when people use terror, free nations have to respond. As many people would be aware, I grew up in the UK. I saw changes to their way of life. I saw the influence on the culture of the UK when the IRA created terror. I was a young lad working in London. Quite often the public transport node we needed to travel through was shut down because of a terrorist act. The British parliament had to change legislation so that it could protect people's freedoms against those terrorists act.

There is a perpetual balance between our civil liberties and our community's safety. It should weigh heavy on everybody in this place when we reduce a civil liberty. I will say it again: it should weigh heavy on everybody when we reduce a civil liberty in our state. It should also weigh heavy on people

to ensure we have community safety legislation at the forefront of our minds and to ensure that, in our case, the police and anti-terrorism organisations can act to protect us so that the majority of the citizens of Queensland can go about their normal way of life almost oblivious that this threat exists. If I had my way, people would be completely oblivious to this.

As we walk down the Queen Street Mall we see concrete bollards to stop trucks driving down the mall. They were not there in 1988 when I first came to Queensland. Maybe I was young, but when I went to Expo I did not see any of the restrictive barriers or protections that we now see as commonplace in our society to protect us against a terrorist threat.

In the same way that we have to have those physical barriers, we have to have people trained and we have to have people with more sophisticated weaponry. We have to also make sure we have a legislative framework that allows the government to be pre-emptive and protect our civil liberties by reducing everybody's civil liberties just a fraction to address the serious threat of terrorism in our society. I do not want to see Queensland arrive at the place I saw in the UK when I was younger, whereby bins were removed and we were constantly worried and checking to see if there were any bags left around for fear of an IRA bomb. I do not want to see people afraid to walk the streets because a truck might come thundering down and kill them. The best way to prevent that is to make sure our intelligence and law enforcement communities have the legislation they require to protect us against those things.

I support the presumption against parole and I make no apologies that terrorists should remain behind bars. I also support the presumption against bail for the same reasons. Make no mistake, these are serious decisions we are making here today because they reduce the freedoms of everybody in Queensland so that we can ensure community safety.

I think it is important to recognise that we need to act in a timely fashion when it comes to this. Terrorists are very smart online. We have seen that. Social media and the internet have allowed them to gain prominence, members and capacity very quickly.

It is disappointing that it has taken a couple of years for this legislation to come before us. I say to the minister that, going forward, if there are other pieces of legislation that are as serious as this, we should take those on board in a much more timely fashion because this is way above politics. When we start talking about our freedoms, it is way above one side of the parliament or the other. It is about the future of Queensland and what sort of Queensland our children will inherit, what freedoms and liberties there will be restrictions on because of community safety, and where the balance of those things is.

I thank the committee for the work they did on the bill so that we could better understand it. I thank the submitters on the bill who raised very serious considerations for us to weigh up and balance. I believe that this bill does not go too far. I believe that it reaches a balance.

Certainly for my part and that of the LNP I can say that we will always support stronger measures that will make sure our community is safe. We should take a strong stance against any form of terrorism in our community. We have seen the atrocities that happened recently in Christchurch. We need to make sure that we can prevent such an act from happening here. The law is the law. This is a good addition that will empower our community to make sure we are kept safe from threats of terrorism.