




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Drug Law Reform

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (2.48 pm): I, like many others, was excited and impressed last week to see the Queensland Productivity Commission recommend that cannabis and MDMA should be decriminalised and legalised within a health and regulatory framework. It was an incredibly courageous and trailblazing report for a government body. The commission joined Queensland's retired prison chief Keith Hamburger and retired AFP commissioner Mick Palmer in clearly acknowledging the fact that the war on drugs and locking people up for using drugs does not work. It does not make people safer, nor does it reduce drug use or supply.

Unfortunately both the LNP and the Premier immediately announced that they would not be listening to the experts and the countless families affected by drugs who want to see a new approach. Instead, they ruled out legalisation or any drug law reform. What is the point of commissioning a report if you are just going to ignore one of its key recommendations? I started to wonder whether the Premier even bothered reading this part of the report, so here are a few highlights.

The number of possession offences has quadrupled in Queensland since 2012. In 2018, we had 1,423 people locked up with drug charges as their most serious offence. That is more than 16 per cent of the total prison population in Queensland. For 313 of those people, possession or use was their most serious offence. In Queensland we imprison more than twice as many people for drug possession or use as the rest of Australia combined. We are responsible for 70 per cent of the national figure.

Even if you do not care about the undeniable and lasting harm that comes from contact with the prison system then maybe you should care about the wasted money. Queensland spends \$500 million a year just on drug law enforcement. The commission says the net benefits from decriminalisation of cannabis alone would be \$850 million. If we legalised and regulated cannabis and MDMA, we would take around \$4.3 billion out of the black market. In other words, we save money, we save lives and we put drug dealers out of business. Instead, they are wasting public money that could be invested in education, treatment, support and harm minimisation because they lack the political confidence to try something new.

Sixty-six per cent of Queensland's total drug spending goes on prohibition and enforcement compared to 21 per cent on treatment, 10 per cent on prevention and just three per cent on harm reduction. We are spending more money punishing people than helping them. It is past time that we began treating drugs as a health issue, not a criminal one.

I have spoken in the past about my personal experience, having seen loved ones of my own struggle with addiction. I am so sorry to anyone else who has been affected by this, and especially those who have lost a loved one, just because our lawmakers are stuck in a 1950s 'war on drugs' mentality. I am forever grateful to the people and organisations working to provide people with the help they need and the advocates who continue to fight for a sensible harm minimisation approach.

I will continue to support them including by calling for pill testing, safe injecting centres and legalisation, starting with cannabis. Once we achieve those aims, we will begin work to repair the damage, starting with expunging the criminal records of people previously convicted for possession or use of illegal drugs. I call on the Premier to listen to the experts, grow a spine and leave the war on drugs behind.

(Time expired)