




Speech By
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PROTECTING QUEENSLANDERS FROM VIOLENT AND CHILD SEX OFFENDERS AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (6.29 pm): I rise to add my contribution to the Protecting Queenslanders from Violent and Child Sex Offenders Amendment Bill 2018. This is a bill introduced by the LNP because we understand how much of a threat child sex offenders pose to local families and their communities across this state. We on this side of the House understand that this is an issue that needs to be addressed immediately and directly to protect innocent Queenslanders from sexual crimes. We want Queensland to be the safest place to live, work and raise a family—and that does not just happen by accident. It takes a party that is prepared to make the hard decisions to introduce tough policies and to take real steps to stamp out sexual violence in our state.

There is nothing more disturbing than child sex offences. Every child in Queensland has the right to feel safe. It was the LNP government that introduced some of the toughest sex offender legislation in the country. In government, the LNP introduced legislative amendments to keep the worst sex offenders behind bars indefinitely. Under the LNP government, planned new laws were set for sex offenders to face mandatory jail time if they tried to remove or tamper with their tracking bracelet. Under the LNP, the maximum penalty was set to be increased from 14 years to 20 years imprisonment for sex offenders. Under the LNP, offenders would have had to serve 80 per cent of their sentence before being eligible for parole.

The LNP has always committed to introducing a public sex offender register to allow any member of the public to check for violent sex offenders who reside in their neighbourhood. Under the plan, parents can also check the background of anyone who has regular unsupervised access to their children. These new laws were about strengthening the justice system. These new laws were about rebalancing the scales of justice, but now under Labor we can see the scales shifting back. The number of sex offenders has skyrocketed 21 per cent since 2015, but there have been no new stringent measures put in place by Labor. In fact, there are an alarming 3,690 reportable child sex offenders in Queensland. Today, from opposition, it is the LNP which is leading the way towards stamping out these acts of depravity and throwing the book at child sex offenders. This is a bill that will strengthen existing laws around violent and child sex offenders.

The LNP believes that these measures are necessary in order to crack down on the thousands of sex offenders who roam Queensland's streets unmonitored. Sadly, it remains unclear how the government's proposed amendment will make any real difference to keeping our kids safe. The first priority of any government should be to keep its people safe, but we are not seeing that under the Palaszczuk Labor government and Labor's proposed amendments.

Like all Queenslanders, I was disgusted when in late 2018 under this government we saw a notoriously dangerous sex offender, Robert John Fardon, left free to roam unsupervised and terrorise the community. There was no plan B from Labor until the LNP raised the issue in the parliament and in the media. This was despite his well-documented violent history of rapes and serious sexual assaults.

He is one of the most dangerous offenders this state has seen. As a mother, I was horrified to find out that these types of dangerous criminals are so carelessly allowed back into our communities, living next door to everyday Queenslanders raising their children.

I was horrified when photographs emerged of Robert John Fardon frequently using the state's train system. This system needs fixing. Someone like Robert John Fardon, one of Australia's most notorious sex offenders, should never be able to walk our streets unsupervised. Labor's post-conviction monitoring laws are an embarrassment. It is an honesty system that puts all the onus on criminals—the worst of the worst criminals—to do the right thing. That is why the LNP took the lead on sex offenders where this government had let down the community and proposed stronger legislation to protect our children.

The LNP's amendments significantly strengthen the existing Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act 2003 by ensuring each offender's case is properly reviewed. A key component of the LNP's proposed amendments is to grant the Governor in Council the power to determine when a supervision order ceases. This is designed to ensure dangerous criminals such as Robert John Fardon do not end up back in the community simply because the government loses the bid to extend the supervision order. We simply cannot trust a government to protect our kids from violent sex offenders if it does not have the power to do so. This bill draws on the High Court decision in 2014 which established that parliament can legislate for indefinite detention in certain circumstances. Obviously this would only apply to a handful of Queensland's worst offenders, those who pose an unacceptable risk to the community.

We do not want to see dangerous criminals walking the street, as we have under the Palaszczuk Labor government. It is not good enough to rely on an appeal process when we are talking about sex offenders in places where our children and families are. The Labor government has dropped the ball yet again and the LNP again is forced to clean up more rushed amendments. After 3½ years of inaction from those opposite, it took the LNP's proposed amendments to force the Labor government to wake up and take action. As usual, its amendments were rushed and do not get the job done. Labor's laws do not automatically impose supervision on child sex offenders upon their release from custody or when their supervision orders expire. This is a major flaw and does not address the real issue. The supervision only comes back into effect when a released sex offender engages in concerning conduct. Why should our local communities be forced to wait for a sex offender to rape or assault another innocent person before they are put back on a supervision list? Waiting for another crime to occur is a dangerous game to play. The LNP believes in a preventive framework for criminals, not a reactive one.

Under the LNP, repeat dangerous sex offenders would be GPS tracked for life. Under Labor, they may be GPS tracked but only for a short while and if they committed concerning conduct. Under an LNP government, child victims of violent sex crimes such as Sharon Tomlinson would have at least had some peace of mind knowing their offender was being monitored. This is the least this parliament can do to help victims of crime. Labor's reactive supervision order makes no sense and the LNP cannot back Labor's rushed amendments to this bill.

It is also concerning to see the new monitoring arrangements proposed by those opposite. Labor's proposed monitoring only applies to a child sex offender coming off a DP(SO)A order, which is basically legislating an honour system. It is laughable that the Labor government simply expects repeat sex offenders to check in with police and voluntarily provide information. In fact, in 2019 some 562 reportable sex offenders were fined or imprisoned for breaching their reporting obligations. The LNP supports mandatory GPS tracking of offenders from the day they are released until the day they die. Paedophiles cannot be trusted to self-report to police, and it should not be up to the police to use their resources to lodge a prohibition order application when a sex offender reoffends. Even if this application is successful, under Labor's amendments the prohibition order only lasts five years before the paedophile is again a risk to Queenslanders.

As the shadow Attorney-General said during the introduction of this bill, repeat sexual offenders pose a degree of risk until the day they die. A repeat offender's history says it all. There should never be a day when a repeat offender is considered risk-free. This is why the LNP proposes greater safeguards to protect against repeat offenders and to make sure those criminals with a history of sex offences are properly supervised to stop them from causing harm to our loved ones. The LNP wants each case to be properly reviewed by professionals before any supervision is lifted—not just when the timer runs out, as we have seen under the Labor government's amendments. Not all criminals are the same and they should not all fall under the same time lines. It is not good enough to assume that a criminal is a new person when they are released.

The LNP believes in protecting Queensland communities from these people, and this can only be achieved with tougher laws and better supervision orders. Sex offenders should not be anywhere near areas where children may be present or anywhere near our loved ones. We need a proper

procedure in place to prevent criminals walking unsupervised in our communities. We need supervision and harsher penalties. We need the power to detain those who present an unacceptable risk to our friends and family. Rushed amendments do not cut it. The LNP will always support more laws and stronger penalties aimed at child sex offenders to send a message that these types of crimes against children are not tolerated by the community.