




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

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CHILD PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (3.31 pm): I rise to speak in favour of the bill. I start by paying tribute to all who work in child protection in Queensland. As we heard earlier, we have about 3,000 workers looking after approximately 11,000 kids in care. These are workers like the member for Cook. I pay tribute to her role in this parliament and to our government's achievements in passing the meriba omasker kaziw kazipa bill. This is a huge reform that recognises traditional practices and people's birthright and also contains safeguards. It is a very important part of our reform in this area.

I want to deal with some of the issues raised by members opposite in this debate. This bill is partly in response to the coroner's recommendations following the death of Mason Jett Lee. This tragedy happened in the area where the member for Morayfield and I live, in Caboolture and Burpengary. When looking at issues caused by profound poverty, disadvantage, neglect and family breakdown, it is fine for LNP members to drop into our communities, harvest this information, then come in here and pronounce their opinions, but quite a few of us on this side of the House live with these experiences. It is happening to the families around us. It is happening to the kids who play with our kids at our local schools. It is happening to the people we talk to at the school gate. I say to the member for Scenic Rim: do not say to us, 'Don't politicise this.' I live these issues every day; they happen around me and our family all the time. I emphasise that we do not pass through these communities just to harvest information about people's personal stories.

One matter that is crucial and well emphasised in this bill is the issue of safeguards. It is really important, especially with regard to our First Nations people and to the issue of permanency of care and adoptions. The LNP have been making it clear from their speeches that they want to see more adoptions. With regard to adoption, caution is always needed. We need to be very careful to avoid breaking any links between birth parents and their child.

I point out that caution is needed because we know what happens with coerced or forced adoptions. I refer, of course, to the stolen generations. The federal department's website states—

Since colonisation, numerous government laws, policies and practices resulted in the removal of generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities across Australia. Thousands of children were removed by governments, churches and welfare bodies to be raised in institutions, fostered out or adopted by non-Indigenous families, nationally and internationally. They are known as the Stolen Generations.

... The removal of children broke important cultural, spiritual and family ties and has left a lasting and intergenerational impact on the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Affecting anywhere from 1 in 10 to 1 in 3 children, there is not a single Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community who has not been forever changed.

We know that that led to, on 13 February 2008, then prime minister Kevin Rudd finally giving an apology to the stolen generations—probably one of the greatest moments we have seen in federal politics in recent times.

Caution is always needed when dealing with the issue of adoption, as I said, not only because of the coerced or forced aspect of it but also because of the secrecy that used to surround it. That is equally damaging. This is part of my family's lived experience as well. I know two people who, as adults,

found out they were adopted. One of those is my aunt, Sandy Griffith, who found out at the age of 58 that she was adopted. It happened like this: when my grandfather lay gravely ill, he asked my father to keep her adoption a secret and to never tell her. My father then became an integral part of that secret; however, he had known since he was a child. He had been sworn to secrecy all those years. Then I found out as an adult, so I became part of that secret as well. After my friend's experience, I told my father, 'You need to tell your sister and tell her everything.' I made him go down to where she lived and tell her the true story of where she came from. I am so proud of my Aunt Sandy; she handled it so well. One of the benefits of being told is that she has discovered a whole new family.

That illustrates the result of the adoption system as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries, when we saw the forced adoptions of the stolen generations and systematic secrecy. These adoptions happened to people of my age. They may have been the children of teenage mums. That led to devastation not only for the birth parents who never really recovered from it but also to the children who do not know their history. That underlines why safeguards around adoptions are so hugely important.

In the past, those in charge were quick to pass judgement on working-class people and how they should be raising their children. They were all too quick to take away the children, yet they were not too quick to try to address the real causes of family dysfunction: poverty and disadvantage. Turning that around is the real battle—the abuse, the poverty and the disadvantage, but always the poverty—changing the structure of our families in our communities. We need to ensure that all Queensland families have jobs, decent wages, great schools, hospitals and health care around them. The most lasting impact we can make is to help and protect children who are at risk of disadvantage, abuse and neglect.

Finally, I pay tribute to all of the foster carers in Bancroft who selflessly open their homes, their families and their lives to children who really need love and care in their lives. I mention in particular Veronica, who comes into my office quite regularly, sometimes with a new foster-child she has in her home. She tells me the stories of what her foster-children have been through and the stories of what her family and household are going through. It always impresses me and never fails to remind me who the real heroes are in our community. I say to all of the child protection workers and foster-parents throughout Queensland: you are as important as anyone else in this state. I commend the bill to the House.