




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

Record of Proceedings, 21 April 2021

YOUTH JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (6.43 pm): Youth crime is one of the biggest challenges facing Queensland. It is ripping communities apart. My part of the Gold Coast has felt that more than most. In Parkwood and Arundel having cars stolen, tools taken out of the back of utes or getting your house broken into seems to be happening more and more often. In Labrador people are being terrorised by groups of young thugs who know they face few consequences. It has become so bad in Biggera Waters that the residents have banded together to hire a private security company to patrol their Harbour Quays estate. Let us think about that: that community has gone through so many incidents and they feel so unsafe in their own homes that they have hired security to patrol their streets at night.

There is one main aspect of this bill that I would like to focus on. It has come before this parliament as a direct result of a tragedy in my community, which is the loss of 17-year-old Jack Beasley—Jacko—in December 2019. Because of the advocacy of those closest to him, these laws will trial giving police the powers to conduct searches with metal detector wands and hopefully find any hidden knives. This delivers the foundational purpose of the Jack Beasley Foundation, which started with the campaign motto 'Detect knives, save lives'.

Belinda Beasley spoke so bravely at the Gold Coast public hearing as part of this inquiry. Standing up in front of a parliamentary committee to talk about the trauma you have gone through is hard enough, but by some heartbreaking coincidence the hearing was held barely 100 metres from where Jack was allegedly murdered. To tell her story his mother had to walk past the place where her son lost his life, but she did it and I want to get her words on the record of this debate because they are powerful and important. Belinda said about that devastating night—

This is something that should never have happened and has affected so many people and will continue to affect them.

Jack and Ariki had been stabbed and had been taken by ambulance to Gold Coast University Hospital. We raced up to the hospital as soon as we got the call. Sitting in that hospital room that night was just the beginning of our nightmare—not knowing if Jack was going to make it or not, constantly being updated on his condition by the great staff at Gold Coast University Hospital and then the cardiac surgeon walks in the door and says one word: 'Sorry.' Our world shattered with that one word, and seeing our son Mitch fall to the floor at being told Jack, his little brother, did not make it through surgery was heartbreaking. There are so many traumatic images that we have imprinted on our minds forever. Ariki was so very lucky to survive, but he has to live with those images and what happened to him losing his mate. He is still trying to come to terms with it.

Jack was 17. He was three months off turning 18. He was a character, always the life of the party. He was the energy in the room and he was loved by everyone. He had got his first car, his licence and completed his first year of his flooring apprenticeship and had such a bright future ahead of him. We will never get to see him finish his apprenticeship, travel, get married, have kids and so much more. Jack had so many plans. He loved life and he loved his family and friends.

Our lives will never be the same and many others have also been affected by this senseless act of violence.

Tonight I reaffirm my commitment that Jack's death will not be in vain. His name will mean something and it will lead to change. We will do everything we can to stop any other family or community from going through this. The broader part of what the Jack Beasley Foundation does is so important too. It is about cultural change. They have already been meeting with young people who have been

caught with knives to talk to them about the impact that knives have had on their lives. They have put together an education program to explain to young people the consequences of their actions and to urge them to think before taking a knife when they head out.

We could have the toughest laws in the world but they mean nothing if we do not fix the toxic and pervasive knife culture that exists among some young people. The Queensland Police Service has provided outstanding support for this but they need more resources. I have written to several ministers asking for this, and I urge the government to assist the Jack Beasley Foundation to make sure that as many young people see their cultural change program as possible. I place on the record my sincere thanks to the exceptional Mark Wheeler. For the past year and a bit, just before his promotion, he was the Gold Coast chief superintendent, and these changes would not have happened without the huge amount of work he put in behind the scenes.

Yesterday the *Gold Coast Bulletin* reported that in the 12 months to June 2020 there have been 4,323 people charged with possessing a knife in a public place or a school. One of those was aged under 10 years, 241 were aged 10 to 14 years and 495 were 15- to 17-year-olds. Those are staggering numbers. The overall number of people caught carrying knives has increased 40 per cent in the past three years. Another submitter to the Gold Coast hearing on this bill shared that kids often feel they have to carry knives as protection because everyone else is carrying one.

In response to that, the bill before us proposes a two-year trial of handheld scanners in two safe night precincts on the Gold Coast, being Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach. Within this trial, a senior police officer will need to authorise the use of the scanners for no more than 12 hours at a time without further authorisation. There are safeguards in place to make sure officers follow a clear procedure and provide an explanation to those being scanned. I understand that there are some who have been uncomfortable with the wands, but they are unobtrusive and, ultimately, if you are not carrying anything illegal on our streets then you should have no cause for concern. There is no reason to take a hunting knife into the middle of Surfers Paradise.

I seek further clarification from the minister on how this trial will be assessed, what data will be collected and how it will be deemed a success or failure. Will this look into who the police have scanned and what they find? How will the public be made aware of the trial so that it can work as a deterrent? It is unfortunate that it will take a two-year trial and a further 12-month review before we see this potentially expanded into other areas, as I believe it is especially needed in our transport hubs like Helensvale station. I am proud of the role my community has played in making these changes a reality. I again urge the government to provide more resources towards preventive education programs.

Hooning continues to be a major problem in my part of the Gold Coast. I hear it most nights of the week on the street where I live in Parkwood. That is probably because we are one of the more densely populated parts of Queensland. It seems that, no matter where you are, you will see or hear one of these hoons driving recklessly and very loudly at least a couple of times a week. Some of the hotspots are Turpin Road in Labrador, Marine Parade, Frank Street and Parkwood Boulevard. I find it staggering that the minister himself said that hooning traffic complaints received by police have increased by 132 per cent in the past five years. It should never have been allowed to get so far out of control.

More broadly, I note the concerns regarding the presumption against bail and that the prescribed offences cover over 100 different offences. Submitters raised that this will reach beyond the 10 per cent of offenders whom these changes seek to address. I think that is valid, because it is on this small number of offenders causing the majority of issues in our communities where our focus should remain. What I want to see change are the stories we hear of kids being charged with their 50th, 60th or 70th offence only to be given a slap on the wrist. I have heard from police officers locally who are sick of spending their time finding offenders only to have them immediately released to reoffend.

Youth justice is complex and we need to look at the longer term outcomes for young offenders and to have better preventive measures. Right now our community has very little faith in our justice system to deliver these outcomes. With few consequences for some of these offenders, they will just keep reoffending. We need change. This mishmash approach is a start, but it falls well short.

I place on record my utmost support for my local police officers. In addition to everyone at the Southport and Runaway Bay stations, we are very proud to have in my electorate the Arundel Police Beat as well as the massive Arundel police facility, which I think holds around 130 staff. It has capacity to fill that to 200 and I would like for that to happen as soon as possible. We are so proud to have all of them protecting us and serving our community.