




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Social Media

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.47 pm): In 2020 over 3.6 billion people were tapping away connecting, sharing, shopping and banking via the internet. With the joy has come heartache from the dark side of social media and its impacts on all that we love, including family and friends. Recent public hearings for the inquiry into vilification and hate crimes revealed that platforms and pages have emboldened users with anonymity, accommodating the victimisation and brutalisation of fellow Australians with vile and slanderous posts and comments which would never be said in person. This, combined with incessant bullying, harassment and misinformation in abundance, is failing our communities and impacting our young, whom we are supposed to protect.

Physical ailments from being hunched over phones and screens, anxiety, self-harm and heartbreaking suicides—this devastation is not relegated to our children alone. All ages, sectors and genders are targeted as well as businesses and charities through reputational damage. No-one is safe from these perpetrators and keyboard warriors.

Freedom of speech has spiralled into freedom to humiliate and bully. What is the answer? The High Courts have determined that organisations and individuals may be liable for any defamation made by them and comments by third parties on their posts. For those of us who have internet platforms, we now can either monitor 24/7 and delete harmful comments or turn comments off, which negates why we are online.

As adults, we must provide 100 points of identification to get a licence, passport, bank account or Medicare card, to enrol for courses or to open a phone or betting account. We even need it to pay road tolls. However, for a social media account, you need nothing. You can use a false name, or actually many of them. We can continue requesting, online and offline, for residents to converse and debate respectfully and responsibly. Thankfully, within my community the vast majority do this. However, we do have repeat offenders. Some of these avoid defamation through inference, as I experienced through a post awarding me with a sisterhood with a satanic organisation, complete with an old, unrelated photo as part of an ongoing campaign of harassment to get me to resign as an MP.

Freedom of speech comes with responsibility, which includes being held accountable for what you say and do online. Is it time to license users of social media, which has become a weapon just as a car is when driven with intent to harm? Or do we continue to just be bystanders to the devastation and do nothing? Fellow MPs, I do not believe this is a choice we have. For the wellbeing of all in Queensland, we must now act upon this.