




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HERVEY BAY

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**CRIMINAL CODE (SERIOUS VILIFICATION AND HATE CRIMES) AND OTHER
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr TANTARI** (Hervey Bay—ALP) (12.44 pm): I rise to speak on the Criminal Code (Serious Vilification and Hate Crimes) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. In doing so, I want to thank the Palaszczuk Labor government for having the strength to introduce this legislation into the House—some of the strongest in the country. This legislation will have a profound effect and will send a signal to our communities, wherever they may be located around our state, that consequences will be imposed on those who choose to seriously vilify or incite hate against individuals or groups of individuals in our state. In report 22 of the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, the committee chair, the member for Toohey, stated—

While each of us have a moral responsibility to ensure that our conduct is appropriate, and to ensure that we teach our children to behaviour properly towards others, the unfortunate reality in our society is that there will be some people who will traverse the bounds of proper behaviour. For those persons, a deterrent sanction is needed.

We know the words of the member for Toohey are always profound, but in this instance they are more so given the growing prevalence of new tools to spread hate amongst our community at the click of a button. Once again, I will use the words of the member for Toohey, who said—

Social media is a powerful communication tool in modern society. While it is frequently used for good, it has also unfortunately provided a platform for those who seek to do harm to others, very often without fear or real threat of consequences. Heartless, foolish, unintelligent, damaging content can be posted by cowards, who cloak themselves in the anonymity of the internet, knowing that they will likely never be held accountable for what they say, or the damage that they do.

In the multicultural landscape of Queensland, we have become a melting pot of diverse cultures, languages and traditions but, while diversity often enriches our society, it can also create space for fear, division and hate. The world is increasingly interconnected. Whilst this brings incredible opportunities for understanding and collaboration, it also emboldens the capacity of individuals to project harm through speech and symbolism.

Vilification and hate speech are not just about offending or insulting individuals. They incite contempt and prejudice against certain people based on their race, religion, sexuality and any other characteristic. The effects of vilification are insidious and cause harm throughout our community. Hate speech targets not only individuals but entire groups which, left unchallenged, can undermine social cohesion, fracture relationships and inspire physical violence. It fuels the spread of stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, putting the targets at risk of social isolation and exclusion.

The issues we are speaking about today in this bill address the concerns that are not only troubling our society but threatening its social fabric. It is the issue of the propagation of hate speech, the spread of vilification and the ever-growing presence of hateful symbols. Can you imagine, as a target of vilification, what it must be like to be confronted by the normalisation of hate speech? Imagine turning on your TV or going onto a social media channel and finding hate speech being normalised or even celebrated. Would you feel safe in such a society seeing your streets littered with symbols that have historically been associated with hate, discrimination or even genocide?

The consequences of hate speech and vilification are not just psychological. These actions affect our community, not only by perpetrating harm against targeted groups but by cultivating an environment of fear, hostility and division. They erode the mutual trust and respect which serve as the foundation of a healthy, functioning society. When a group is subject to serious vilification or hate speech, it can marginalise them from the rest of society. Over time these groups feel alienated, treated as 'other' or 'less than', leading to decreased participation in social, economic and political life. The victims are left feeling unwelcome in their own community and the perpetrators are emboldened to continue their hateful rhetoric, creating a vicious cycle.

The broader society is also affected. In a climate of hate and fear, people start to view their fellow citizens not as neighbours but as potential enemies. Society becomes polarised and every disagreement escalates into an 'us versus them' confrontation. Community cohesion is undermined, replaced by deep divisions and animosity.

I understand this. I come from an ethnic minority group. I have seen in my past how debilitating race hate can be, as it was to me and my family, and the effect of allowing perpetrators the freedom to discriminate and, yes, hate you, simply because you are not from the majority—simply because you look a little different, you eat different food, you talk a different language, you express your sexual preference in your own way, you see the world through different eyes—and, the strangest thing of all, you tolerate their discrimination and their hate as normal.

I want at this stage to acknowledge the member for Jordan's contribution a little earlier in this House—her experience growing up. I know how hard it was for her to talk about the vilification and the hate that we wore as children, even discrimination in its subtle forms. My experience was similar, be it a little earlier in the mid-sixties and through the seventies—abuse and name-calling repeated every day. As some of the many hundreds and thousands who suffered through those times are still suffering today, we endured and we forgave to become stronger, and today we are here in this House, with this bill, to call out our past experiences for what they were—hate speech.

Why, then, are we seeing such an increase in hate speech, vilification and the proliferation of hate symbols? It is because they are often not criminalised. The perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions and they continue unchecked. Many perpetrators think that in our country, built on the backs of the working class and migrants, they have a right to say whatever they please because we are a free country. I, for one, respect the rights of individuals to freely advocate for their beliefs. I have always lived by the adage that you can do whatever you like in your life as long as it does not hurt others. Your freedoms are yours to keep, not use to destroy and ridicule others.

It is important to remember that freedom of speech is not an absolute right—something the member for Hinchinbrook may want to reflect on and consider, given his background. Freedom of speech comes with responsibilities. Freedom of speech should never be an unlicensed weapon to harm others, to spread hate or to incite violence. It should not be used as a tool to dehumanise or marginalise others based on their race, religion, gender, sexuality or other characteristics. We should be clear here: criminalising hate speech and hate symbols is not about policing thought; it is about preventing harm. When individuals cannot sleep at night out of fear, when they avoid public spaces and social interactions because they do not feel safe, we have a social and moral responsibility to act.

The law—this bill—serves as the minimum standard of behaviour in our society. When we criminalise hate speech and symbols, we demonstrate as a society that we value respect and dignity over hatred and division. We show that we will not be silent in the face of intolerance. While legislation plays a crucial role, it alone is not sufficient. We need also education—education that fosters understanding, empathy and acceptance, education that allows us to celebrate diversity rather than fear it. As Nelson Mandela once said—

No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Serious vilification and hate speech pose significant harm to our Queensland community. By criminalising hate speech and symbols, we not only prevent harm but also actively promote a society that is fair, inclusive and respectful.

I want to again thank the Palaszczuk Labor government for introducing this legislation. I want to thank the committee members—ably led by, can I say, a blood brother, the most honourable and most compassionate member for Toohey—who gave their considered time and effort to review this legislation, and the committee secretariat for their enduring work.

Sometimes in this place we get a little lost with what we do here—that is my observation, having only been here a short time—and sometimes there are debates that may at the time seem a little innocuous, but with the passing of time this bill will be seen as profoundly making a difference to our social cohesion. I believe that this is one of those occasions. As a migrant son who has lived through

some of the challenges of our country's past, this is without doubt a momentous step in ensuring that the Queensland community is seen in the eyes of world as a place of acceptance and unity—that we stand together against hate, that we love our multicultural mosaic of different cultures and that we are one people with a shared future. As a multicultural person, I want to thank the opposition speakers for their support in saying 'no' to hate and vilification, and I commend the bill to the House.