




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NINDERRY

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CHILD PROTECTION (OFFENDER REPORTING AND OFFENDER PROHIBITION ORDER) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr PURDIE** (Ninderry—LNP) (6.25 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I intend to spend most of my contribution on that bill as it is something that I am passionate about, but I do want to put on the record the minister's long list of amendments which he tabled without any prior consultation or announcement only a few hours ago—a list of amendments that in length exceed the number of pages in the bill.

It was interesting that in the minister's contribution on the motion he talked about listening to the community and listening to victims. He talked about hearing them and working together. Yet only half an hour prior to that he tabled amendments that drastically reduce police powers in the PPRA in relation to prostitution enforcement and that drastically decriminalise offences in the Summary Offences Act which potentially could impact upon societies and communities across Queensland. I am not at this point indicating whether I or others are supportive of that because we have not had a chance to have a look at it. For the minister to get up here only half an hour ago and talk about listening and working together and hearing communities and victims but then table a long list of amendments which outweigh the length of this bill just flies in the face of what this minister said. It is just another example of a government that is in crisis and chaos.

I want to preface my contribution in relation to the CPOROPPO amendments that this bill was tabled earlier this year in the absence of input from the Crime and Corruption Commission, who were charged with the responsibility to conduct a review into the operation of the Child Protection (Offender Reporting and Offender Prohibition Order) Act 2004. Despite the completion of the commission's review and publication of their findings in June this year, the government has waited until today to make amendments. It is simply unconscionable that this government, which has had since June to announce or foreshadow the amendments off the back of the CCC report, has waited until the absolute last minute. Not only have these amendments been made on the hop; they have been made without any consultation. Where is the transparency and accountability? Where is the scrutiny? This is just another example of a government in chaos and crisis engulfing this tired and lazy third-term government. They have checked out and their appalling record on law and order and their failure to keep communities safe is being headlined in the media every day as more and more victims of crime muster the courage to speak out.

The CCC's report entitled *Protecting the lives of children and their sexual safety* contains 23 recommendations that seek to improve the 2004 CP(OROPPO) Act. Yet in a staggering display of arrogance, the government has not addressed or acknowledged the CCC's recommendations by way of a revised bill, rather it has wilfully wasted the commission's time at great taxpayer expense for what can only be described as procedural window-dressing.

During their review, the CCC dutifully called for submissions, interviewed specialist police who administer the act and prosecutors from the DPP. They collected official quantitative data from the Queensland Police Service, Queensland courts, Corrective Services and reviewed peer reviewed journal articles. They also examined the public submissions made to two recent bills that sought to amend the act—bills, mind you, that were essentially incomplete without the CCC's input and were tabled in parliament without the government's due diligence. This demonstrates a flagrant disregard for the CCC's importance and role. How insulting! How arrogant! Yet the government, day in day out, expect Queenslanders to believe they have their best interests at heart. How do they do this? Simply by selling half-truths masquerading as solutions to problems the government does not generally understand nor want to address.

The summary of recommendations by the CCC are grouped under four key areas that are set out to improve the operation of the policies and practices of the act, known as the scheme: improve the targeting and capture of the scheme; demonstrate the protective impact of the scheme, otherwise how do we know if it is working; improve the safeguards within the scheme; and improve the clarity about risk and response within the scheme. These are the cluster crucial adjustments and strengthening of amendments recommended by the CCC. Alas, ignorance is bliss for this lazy Labor government and remain just words on a page.

You just have to look at the lack of police resourcing to gauge the government's appetite for real change. There are currently 3,971 registered child sex offenders at large across Queensland and only 44 dedicated police officers to monitor them. My LNP colleagues and I, together with QPS officers, have repeatedly called on the government to address this shortfall. Police officer numbers have fallen well below historic police-to-population ratios, and without addressing this reality recent amendments to the CPOR bill will place approximately 1,700 extra reportable offenders on the register by 2028, taking the total to 5,722, making it even harder for police who are already struggling to monitor dangerous sex offenders. Senior police admitted during the committee hearing for these amendments earlier this year that they had not requested that legislative change and that it was a decision of government. Perhaps this government could start listening to frontline police and experts and maybe even listen to the recommendations made by the CCC before legislating announcements that may sound good in a press release but fail to enhance law enforcement's ability to better protect our kids.

The Queensland Law Society is also on record as stating that the amendments proposed to the offender reporting scheme are inextricably linked to matters being examined in the CCC's review, which we now know have been ignored and filed away somewhere. Put simply, the police powers and resources available to monitor compliance are simply not there. Tougher laws are nothing without the ability to enforce them. We must protect our children with real laws that are backed up with real resources. Anything less is a fairytale.

There is nothing more heartbreaking, more heinous and more unthinkable than the sexual exploitation and abuse of innocent children. There has been a harrowing increase in the incidents of online and device offending since the start of the COVID pandemic. In 2020 the then home affairs minister, Peter Dutton, reported there had been a 163 per cent increase in downloads of child sex abuse material in just three months between April and June that year. Advances in technology have provided new ways for child sex offenders to engage, groom and offend against children without leaving their home. Online device offences include: using the internet to procure children under 16; possessing child exploitation material; trafficking in children; grooming a child to engage in sexual activity outside Australia—which is an offence in the Commonwealth Criminal Code; and possessing child exploitation material, to name a few. It may surprise many mums and dads to know that, under current child protection laws, police are prevented from entering a convicted child sex offender's home to inspect a device without the offender's consent. Little wonder police in this state feel powerless to keep their community safe.

The ability to forensically inspect an offender's digital footprint is crucial to stop or interrupt reoffending. The eSafety Commissioner told the Community Support and Services Committee that nearly one in three children aged between 14 and 17 years of age have experience in the practice of sexting, in which children publish intimate images on their phone. Thus is the nature of the world our children find themselves in today—so vulnerable, so unwitting and so exposed to the underbelly of adult crimes. We seem to be losing the battle of retaining innocence, privacy and safety for our children, and we are fighting the war on multiple fronts.

The LNP federal government called on all states to sign up to a national register of child sex offenders to help stop perpetrators from going undetected in different states. Premier Palaszczuk said that Queensland would not sign up because greater sharing of information about these criminals would force them further underground. Really? How much further underground can they go? Queensland's

first register of child sex offenders was established in 2004. Of the 3,982 reportable offenders in the community, 55 are considered high risk because they have been subject to a dangerous prisoner sex offender order.

It is a vital priority of government to keep pace with emerging trends and crime patterns, and feedback from frontline personnel like police provides timely and important data about new threats to our safety. Changing offender patterns and behaviours have placed our children at significant risk and we must act quickly, but we must get it right. Even though the CCC found holes and recommended important improvements to our child protection system, the government has not listened and still has not mandated further checks and balances to better protect our children in the best possible way. As I mentioned at the outset, the appropriateness and efficacy of the bill's amendments have not been considered by the CCC prior to the CCC's much anticipated 2023 review. Whilst I do support some of the specific amendments in relation to the CPOR bill, due to the number of amendments that were tabled without notice by the minister I am not in a position at this stage to support this bill.