Speech By

Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr MILLAR (Gregory—LNP) (6.50 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to this bill, particularly as it relates in a couple of aspects to the interests of the people of Gregory. I move first to the amendments that allow for the disclosure of the identity of adults charged with a prescribed sexual offence prior to the finalisation of committal proceedings. I realise this change will bring Queensland into line with most other jurisdictions, with the exception of the Northern Territory. I also fully appreciate that it allows for those adults accused of sexual offences such as rape to be treated the same way as those accused of other serious offences, up to and including murder.

The amendment has come out of a recommendation of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce's *Hear her voice* report. The intentions here cannot be questioned, but there may be unintended consequences, especially for those Queenslanders and their family residing in Queensland's many smaller towns and even Indigenous communities such as Woorabinda, in my electorate. There is no anonymity in small towns and feelings can become very heated. The person has been accused but not convicted. I urge the government to actively monitor the outcomes caused by this amendment to ensure it achieves the outcomes sought without causing negative outcomes. I accept that it is a change that has been called for by victims, but I urge the minister to amend the bill and also set a date in the legislation for the impacts and outcomes to be properly assessed by the Queensland parliament's Legal Affairs and Safety Committee.

I can imagine a person accused of such an offence may become the subject of focused vigilante action on social media and even physically, even if they are later found to be innocent. We need to monitor this. In small towns they could easily be at risk physically. Such fallout will also impact their families and businesses or employment.

For these very same reasons, but from the opposite point of view, I am also concerned that, for some victims, knowing that their case will be publicly reported in the local media with the accused being named may be a disincentive for rural women to report sexual and domestic violence. In small communities, naming the offender will also make the complainant readily identified. The potential impact on their children and themselves will be real and may create an obstacle for rural women needing protection and justice. For these reasons, a legislative requirement for the timely assessment of the real-world results of the change is crucial if we are to be sure the change is a positive one for victims.

Secondly, I am very disappointed to see that once again the government is amending laws without having completed all its homework. In recommending this change, the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce firmly recommended that such a change should not commence until the Queensland government has developed a guide for media to support the responsible reporting of sexual violence.

In its submission to the committee inquiry, Legal Aid Queensland drew specific attention to the adjunct recommendation. It is especially important for local media in rural and remote communities such as local radio stations and publications like the excellent community papers in the Gregory electorate, including the *Barcoo Independent*, the *Longreach Leader*, *Emerald Today* and the *Northwest Star*.

Having lost government advertising revenue due to the digitalisation of many legislated public notification requirements, and fighting for their life in a social media age, these excellent local news outlets are to be congratulated on not just surviving but for the important service they provide to their communities. They are the go-to source, but they do not have the financial resources of News Limited or Nine media for legal advice around their reporting. Such a major change represents a real legal challenge for the diverse media outlets. They simply do not have the resources to seek legal advice on how an amendment will change what they are allowed to report on, let alone on a case-by-case basis. In the worst case scenario, inadvertently doing the wrong thing could put them out of business. With the possible amplification of local feelings in the given community, it is vital that these local media have access to a government issued guide for reporting such a case in a way that is safe, ethical and legally secure.

I note that the department told the committee that the change will commence from the date of proclamation, which will give them time to develop a guide for media. I ask that in developing the guide they give consideration to the circumstances for women and the media in Queensland country towns and not just consider the issue from the point of view of a large media outlet. I also think it is reasonable to ask the department to give this a high priority and seek feedback on any draft guidelines from country journalists to ensure the guide is easily understood.

I now move to the amendments to the Electoral Act concerning electoral boundary redistributions. Gregory has been affected by redistributions of its boundaries in the time that I have represented it, and such redistributions are always of great interest to Gregory voters as they can impact the access they have to their local member and even the way geographically aligned local governments work together.

In my experience as an MP, the Queensland Redistribution Commission does an excellent job in an area that is fundamental to the trust that Queenslanders have in our democracy. They always take notice of stakeholder and local submissions, and even in the state's most remote parts we have felt our concerns relating to electoral boundaries are heard. In an imperfect world, where not every decision pleases everyone, they are fair and very professional in exercising their authority.

However, the amendment in this bill does raise a valid concern for political participants at all levels, even voters. It removes all reference to the 60-day time frame associated with the Queensland Redistribution Commission's finalisation of boundaries in an electoral redistribution. Instead, it applies the phrase 'as soon as practicable'. This is not to say that this will lead to untimeliness, but undeniably the change will allow a new electorate boundary being declared within 60 days of an election. Under the change in this bill there is nothing to prevent such an occurrence. There is no doubt in my mind that if there were ever such an occurrence it would disadvantage all candidates, but the disadvantage would be much greater for candidates standing as independents or candidates standing for smaller parties.

With Queensland now having fixed four-year terms such legislative vagueness is completely unjustified. Working from the fixed election dates, we can improve certainty within the electoral redistribution process by legalising the date for the finalisation of the electoral redistributions prior to the date of the next scheduled election. I imagine that would also assist the commission in scheduling its workloads and resourcing to address the task. It would also decrease any possible confusion for voters over which electorate they should be voting in. While this is beyond the scope of the bill, it is something I urge the government and the committee to examine in the interests of fairness and certainty.

The term 'omnibus bill' is one that now carries dread because we have seen it so overused in this term of parliament. This bill amends acts on a variety of unrelated issues. Even without the government guillotining debate as a normal way of conducting the business of parliament, no MP is ever going to be able to address all changes. I know the Attorney-General will defend this bill as just concerning housekeeping and administration, but the amendments I have been able to speak to do not fall into that category.

This constant use of the omnibus bill absolutely reduces the scrutiny of the individual laws being changed. It makes it very difficult for stakeholders to be forewarned and engaged in public consultation. It makes it difficult for members to report important changes back to their constituents. Indeed, it robs millions of Queenslanders of the right to be properly represented in this House. Most of all, bills like this one speak to the total incoherence of the government's policy process and legislative agenda.

Before I finish, it is only right that I welcome the amendments which make special provisions for the recognition of a death of an unborn child resulting from a criminal act. These amendments will allow for such a death to stand as an aggravating factor in the sentencing provision for relevant serious offences. They also expand the criteria for allowing victim of crime impact statements so that in such a case the impact on the family, the siblings, the grandparents and other close relations can be recognised.

In debating this bill, all members should respect and honour Sophie Milosevic and her parents, Peter and Sarah. Peter and Sarah lost Sophie six days before Sarah's due date when a driver slammed into their car. They have worked tirelessly to see today's changes made law—Sophie's Law—and they are to be commended for the courage and the effort they have shown. These changes will be a lasting legacy for Sophie. I also honour the hard work of their local MP, the member for Lockyer—and a good mate of mine—who fought alongside Peter and Sarah to see these changes through. Today you can say, 'Job done,' and I say to you, 'Well done.'