




Speech By  
**Hon. Meaghan Scanlon**

**MEMBER FOR GAVEN**

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Record of Proceedings, 22 February 2023

**DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION (COMBATING COERCIVE CONTROL) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Hon. MAJ SCANLON** (Gaven—ALP) (Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef and Minister for Science and Youth Affairs) (11.42 am): I rise to support the Domestic and Family Violence Protection (Combating Coercive Control) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I want to respond to some of the comments made by the member for Hinchinbrook yesterday. To be clear, nobody in this House is disputing the fact that there are men who are victims of domestic and family violence. Any victim should be protected. However, refusing to accept the data that domestic and family violence is overwhelmingly a gendered violence is irresponsible because it denies the facts and reality that allow us to actually treat and deal with the causes of that very offence.

The fact is that one in four women over the age of 15 have experienced violence at the hands of a current or former partner. On average, every week a woman in Australia is murdered by a current or former partner. Some of those women were members of our community on the Gold Coast. All of those cases are shocking and behind those high-profile cases are thousands of victims who are silently suffering. There are many reasons why women do not come forward to seek the support that they need, from being unsure how to access services and the justice system to fearing that they will not be believed if they do make that step in coming forward.

Domestic and family violence has always existed. However, it is only relatively recently that governments have treated it with the seriousness that the issue deserves. I acknowledge the work that both the Attorney-General and the committee have been doing in this space. Is the system perfect? No. That is why we are listening to the experiences of victims with our criminal justice system. I particularly thank the women and domestic violence services from the Gold Coast who bravely and sincerely shared their stories. Their voices have led to important and necessary change. We have heard them and now we are taking action.

The Palaszczuk government is, of course, committed to stamping out domestic and family violence from our communities and this bill takes another step on that journey. Coercive control is an insidious form of violence and is often the most common factor leading up to an intimate partner homicide. This bill is the first step towards criminalising that behaviour. It lays the foundation for important and essential changes that update and modernise our legislation and our response to domestic violence. It changes definitions because words matter.

The bill will update legislation to recognise the use of technology in stalking and further harassing and abusing victims. The amendments will broaden the definition of 'domestic and family violence' to include a pattern of behaviour. This amendment acknowledges that sometimes you need to consider more than one incident in isolation and, instead, look at the calculated nature of repeated behaviour. Importantly, the bill will also update sexual offence terminology in the Criminal Code. It will replace 'carnal knowledge' with 'penile intercourse'. Another significant step is changing 'maintaining a sexual relationship with a child' to 'repeated sexual conduct with a child'. The words 'maintaining' and 'relationship' soften criminal conduct and suggest a consenting association between the victim-child

and the offender. These amendments will make clear the gravity of the offending and remove outdated language that minimises or trivialises those horrific offences. I acknowledge Grace Tame's advocacy on this important issue.

The bill amends the Criminal Code to modernise and strengthen the offence of unlawful stalking by renaming 'unlawful stalking' as 'unlawful stalking, intimidation, harassment or abuse'. The type of conduct that may be captured by the offence is broadened and reflects how technology has introduced new tactics and ways of offending. The additional behaviour that is captured by the offence includes monitoring, tracking or surveilling a person's movements, activities or interpersonal associations without a person's consent, including through technology; publishing offensive materials on a website, social media platform or online in a way that will be found or brought to the attention of a person; providing offensive material directly or indirectly to a person, including on a website, social media platform or online; and threatening humiliating or abusive acts against a person, whether or not involving violence or the threat of violence. It is the unfortunate reality that devices that so often bring us together can be used to perpetrate further abuse.

As the Minister for Youth Affairs it would be remiss of me not to mention how this bill will impact young people. We know that young women, in particular, experience higher rates of this violence compared to women in older age groups. We also know that young people are more likely to associate domestic violence with physical acts, despite the fact that emotional and coercive abuse are just as harmful. These reforms are about changing perceptions and enshrining in law that all forms of domestic and family violence are unacceptable. I was privileged to listen to Chanel Contos and Elena from the Gold Coast when they visited Queensland parliament late last year. Chanel is a fanatic advocate for consent education for many people and she has brought to light the stories and experiences of many young women. I thank her for her advocacy.

Queensland first introduced the Respectful Relationships program in 2017 and since then we have improved and expanded the program with an investment of \$15.5 million. It was a key recommendation of the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce report. The program teaches young people how to build respectful relationships and understand consent and the reporting of sexual assault. I thank all of the young people from across the state who put forward their views on how that particular program should be delivered to ensure that we get the outcomes that we need going forward.

To conclude, these amendments are an important step in ensuring our legislation protects victims and reflects the reality of domestic and family violence. Importantly, these amendments also lay the groundwork for the introduction of coercive control as a standalone offence. I commend the bill to the House.