




Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**

**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (6.50 pm): I am very proud to represent one of this parliament's most multicultural electorates. Of the 56,000 people who live in Bonney, around four in 10 were born outside of Australia and that is 41—

**Mr Crandon:** Only 56,000?

**Mr O'CONNOR:** I take the interjection from the member for Coomera. He likes to talk about how large his electorate is. That is people, not constituents, member for Coomera. The member for Coomera has 52,000 constituents, is it?

**Mr Crandon** interjected.

**An opposition member:** Relevance.

**Mr O'CONNOR:** Yes, relevance. Anyway, back to my speech. Some 41.9 per cent of the people I represent come from another country, but they all chose to call our part of the Gold Coast home and it is our responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure we make the home that they chose the most welcoming and the safest place possible. One way we can do that as community leaders is by condemning vilification in the strongest possible way, and that is what these laws aim to do. Serious vilification and hate crimes, whether they happen here or overseas, must be called out and firmly responded to. As other members have mentioned, after witnessing one of the most horrific acts of terror that the world has seen perpetrated by Hamas in Israel I know many people have been deeply impacted by the images we have been seeing in the news and on Twitter and other places from some of those acts perpetrated on civilians. We have unfortunately been reminded of the hate that is much closer to home as well. Over the last couple of days the anti-Semitism on display in other parts of our country has been disgraceful. I thought Australia was much better than that. It is not even just the comments about Jewish people. There is no further explanation or justification for what Hamas has done.

Last night, alongside many other members from all parts of this House, I was very proud to stand with Queensland's Jewish community at this difficult time. We heard a really powerful and heartbreaking contribution from Hungarian Australian Holocaust survivor Suzi Smeed. I also take the chance to commend the member for Chatsworth, who has hosted these functions, I think, for the last decade. He does an outstanding job to organise that.

On the same topic, last month I took the opportunity to visit the newly opened Queensland Holocaust Museum and Education Centre just up the road in Charlotte Street. It is an incredible place. It is a powerful monument against intolerance, against anti-Semitism, against hatred, racism and indifference. It is somewhere that promotes multiculturalism, acceptance and harmony. The virtual reality experience—the goggle set-up that you can put on—is particularly moving. That shows one aspect of the Holocaust from Latvia. There are some really important artefacts from Queensland

survivors. There are quite a few videos of them telling their stories. There is a replica train, but most importantly there is a final message in the stairwell as you leave. It says, 'Never again.' I encourage all members and all Queenslanders to visit that place.

Turning to the bill before us, the Criminal Code (Serious Vilification and Hate Crimes) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023, any step we take towards reducing vilification and hate in our state is a crucial step towards promoting a more inclusive and safe society. This legislation comes from the inquiry into serious vilification and hate crimes and it enacts four of the 17 recommendations of that inquiry: that the government investigate the viability of removing the requirement for the written consent of a Crown Law officer before commencing prosecution for vilification; that the government introduce a statutory aggravation regarding hate crimes and serious vilification in the Criminal Code; that the government relocate the offence of serious racial, religious, sexuality or gender identity vilification from the Anti-Discrimination Act to the Criminal Code; and that the government establish a criminal offence prohibiting the display of hate symbols, with some considered exceptions.

The bill also proposes to increase the maximum penalty for the offence of serious racial, religious, sexuality or gender identity vilification in the ADA. Vilification and hate crimes are serious offences and this increase of the maximum penalty reflects the community's denunciation of such conduct when it occurs. Throughout the committee process stakeholders raised concerns about a number of sections, including protected attributes, some of the prohibited symbols, the prescribed offences for circumstances of aggravation and the definition of what constitutes a public act. However, despite these concerns, the bill's intent was broadly supported.

Vilification must be called out. We support education around the impacts of hateful behaviour on various groups and the community more broadly. Although thankfully we have not seen many instances of the types of vilification behaviours that this covers, the cases we have seen have shown just how important it is to prevent these and to deter people from even thinking about committing these acts. The bill seeks to strike a balance between the protection of our communities and of minority communities in particular from vilification and hate crimes against the freedom of expression that we hold so highly in this country.

This balance is more heavily weighted towards the protection aspect. Given the long-lasting impacts of vilification and hate crimes on communities, I believe this is justified. Even today the effects of vilification and hate and their most evil iteration during the Second World War are still felt across communities, with some people continuing to perpetrate discrimination and vilification and to spread fear. Take, for example, the flying of a Nazi flag near a synagogue a couple of years ago. It is just disgraceful behaviour and my community does not condone this type of hatred based on someone's heritage or their personal attributes and we will never find it acceptable in a modern Queensland.

There have been a couple of examples in my part of the Gold Coast that show why this is so important. I have a proud Islamic community, one of the largest in our state. Around four years ago I stood in solidarity with them at the Gold Coast Masjid in Arundel after the horrific terrorist attack in Christchurch. Hundreds of people came to show their support for the basic right to be safe while you pray, to practise your religion without fear. Last year we saw some disgraceful individual drop a pig's head and heart at the entry of the mosque on a Friday, the holiest day in the week for our Islamic community, and it was just a day before the National Mosque Open Day. At the time the head of the Gold Coast Islamic Society, Hussin Goss, who himself is proudly from the first Muslim family on the Gold Coast and some of our oldest residents of Labrador, described this incident as a targeted hate crime.

I also want to take this opportunity to give a massive shout-out to some of the multicultural organisations that support my diverse community. Legislation like this will not fix this problem alone. We have to promote and celebrate the multiculturalism we have in our state. Our diversity is our strength. The largest organisation is the Multicultural Families Organisation. It is led by Cornelia 'The Queen' Babbage OAM. It is a not-for-profit which works to support culturally and linguistically diverse families across the Gold Coast. It has been doing this for a couple of decades. From settlement services and DV support to its Global Village Festival, it makes an outstanding contribution. Even its homework club is in our local schools. The other one is TMC, Thriving Multicultural Communities, led by the amazing Anna and Joyce. It is a fantastic mostly volunteer-led organisation supporting migrants in our area. It works tirelessly to promote the benefits of multiculturalism, differences of opinion and the contributions migrants have made to our city and it does a really good job delivering the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program for which it has been awarded. There is also the great work done by the Gold Coast Islamic Society and the meals it provides to international students. One of its executive members, Hussain Baba, works tirelessly through the Multicultural Social Network.

I am so proud of the community I represent and the incredible number of different faiths that harmoniously exist beside each other in our Arundel community precincts. To all these fantastic organisations and their volunteers, thank you for working towards a better society where discrimination, vilification and hate have no place.