




Speech By
Mark Furner

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Record of Proceedings, 11 December 2024

MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr FURNER** (Ferry Grove—ALP) (11.46 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Making Queensland Safer Bill. I want to put on record my position and that of every Labor opposition member who has come into the chamber tonight who supports strong action and tough laws to protect Queenslanders. Everyone deserves to feel safe and must be safe in their communities across the various electorates in this state. As legislators, we have a role and a duty to make sure that when we come into this place we put in place laws that are evidence based, properly scrutinised and that have been demonstrated to work.

Most of the long-term members in here would know my history as the son of a police officer and my understanding of how society has changed. I was talking to the member for Lockyer earlier. We had a discussion around when the change occurred from khaki to a blue uniform. When I was very young I can remember my father coming home in khaki and then transitioning into the blue uniform. I can recall that he never wore his service pistol. In those days it was a .22 pistol as opposed to the Glocks they have these days. He never wore a protective vest or carried a taser or any of the gear that our police officers have to wear these days. The reality is that society has changed, and with society changing our good, hardworking men and women in the Police Service have changed how they deal with crime.

Crime has changed as well. The sad reality is that the most common type of crime these days is domestic and family violence. However, we are here tonight debating youth crime laws, and rightly so. If you look at the past, governments move crime laws to reflect changes in society. Tonight I am very encouraged by every member who has come in here and told stories of what is occurring in their electorate.

While the LNP went to the election with its Adult Crime, Adult Time position, the bill makes substantial changes to youth justice in Queensland. It is clear from the stakeholders that there are a number of unintended negative consequences which need further exploring. The LNP has rushed this bill through parliament, giving stakeholders less than a week to provide submissions. In fact, they held only two public hearings and a public briefing on the legislation. The bill and the extraordinarily limited process for consultation are, unfortunately, a textbook example of the kind of rushed, politicised lawmaking that will inevitably have significant and harmful consequences for all Queenslanders. The Labor caucus will not stand in the way of increased maximum sentences for youth offenders; however, Queenslanders did not vote for matters that will put Queenslanders in harm's way through those unintended consequences.

I make the following observations on the expert professional submitters who frustratingly provided evidence to the committee. I turn to the Queensland Law Society initially. The bill overrides Queensland's Human Rights Act 2019 and significantly diverges from the tenor of the fundamental legal principles—and we have always relied upon FLPs in this chamber to reflect upon whether natural justice is being done in terms of the laws we introduce—the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other instruments such as the United Nations Rules for the Protection of Juveniles Deprived of their Liberty.

It is out of step with national and international best practice approaches to child justice and the approach recommended by the National Children's Commissioner of Australia. Furthermore, the bill will have an inimical effect on community safety. The provisions will entrench children in the youth justice system. The legislation will have a disproportionate detrimental and devastating impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children who are already disadvantaged.

In their submission the Bar Association of Queensland clearly identified that the LNP government has introduced the bill without evidence and will fill the objective of its purpose. They said—

... any reform to the criminal law should be evidence-based. There is no evidence that the Bill will fulfil its titular object of 'making Queensland safer'. In the statement of compatibility the purposes of the Bill are said to be 'punishment and denunciation'. There is no evidence that either of these sentencing philosophies will have a correlative positive effect on public safety.

The Australian Human Rights Commission noted—

... evidence shows that a more punitive justice system does not work to prevent crime by children.

Furthermore, they said—

The evidence shows that the younger you lock up children, the more likely it is that they will go on to commit more serious and violent crimes.

In the Attorney-General's own statement of compatibility, the Attorney-General admitted that the amendments are in conflict with international standards regarding the best interests of the child with respect to children in the justice system and are therefore incompatible with human rights. Furthermore, consistent with other submissions to the committee, the Attorney-General pointed out that these laws could result in more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children being imprisoned for periods of time.

In my capacity as a former minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships and a member of the Senate, I was privileged to travel right around this state and the Northern Territory and attend those discrete Indigenous communities, so I think I am forearmed with regard to seeing some of the conditions that some of our First Nations people live in. Therefore, we cannot stand here tonight without looking at the compatibility issues that have been identified by the Attorney-General and the effects on our First Nations people.

Given the expert evidence presented to the committee on this bill and the copious Senate hearings that I attended over six years, I ask the Attorney-General to reflect on the statement of compatibility once again, reflect on the human rights obligations and reconsider the effects on our First Nations people that have been clearly demonstrated. The opposition acknowledges that community safety is of paramount concern and that youth crime in particular is on the minds of many Queenslanders and indeed many Australians.

This problem is not unique to Queensland nor the world. I can recall several years ago when I was acting on behalf of the then minister for police, Mark Ryan, the member for Morayfield, in Bowen and talking to officers there. One officer had returned from Europe and was explaining what was happening over there. It was the same as what is happening in Australia currently. He spoke to me about the effect on youth crime and the effect on drugs. This is a worldwide issue; it is not unique to Queensland. We need to look at addressing this and we need to look at addressing society as it stands by looking at appropriate laws to put in place.

There are unanswered questions that need responses on the modelling of what this bill shall mean for those custodial officers who are responsible for the care of these children and the impact on the health and safety of those officers when overcrowding impacts the workplaces they are employed at. What modelling has been done for the increased workload on the courts?

As the member for Ferny Grove, I pride myself on the strong collaboration with the hardworking women and men at the Ferny Grove police station. My office engages with the station on a regular basis to have an understanding of any policing matters in the electorate. In respect of crime stats, I know by the information that is readily available through the Ferny Grove 10 Neighbourhood Watch, which provides trends of offences, that this year there were 25 in June, 10 in July and six in August. This is a clear sign of a reduction in crime in Ferny Grove this year. I am not disputing the facts and figures in other parts of the state. I take on board what members have said in those areas, and that is no doubt why we are here this evening.

We need to look at some of the measures we put in place. I want to commend the police minister at the time, the member for Morayfield, Mark Ryan, for the measures he put in place and for the \$1.28 billion he committed to tackle those crimes such as vehicle immobilisers, extra Polair helicopters, more police in Townsville, measures to reduce the carriage of concealed weapons through the introduction of Jack's Law, the use of electronic monitoring and strengthening hooning laws. With all of those measures I saw a reduction in crime in Ferny Grove. That is why we need to take on board our

lived experiences and what we have experienced in our particular areas as members of parliament and come in here and have that debate. I appreciate that members have been respectful of each other this evening and are having a good, frank discussion around these laws.