




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

Record of Proceedings, 12 December 2024

MAKING QUEENSLAND SAFER BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.43 pm): I rise to make a contribution on the Making Queensland Safer Bill. I acknowledge that we need a circuit breaker in the parliament to get some change. The KAP members of parliament have been identifying this issue at least since 2017 in the case of the member for Hinchinbrook, who came out of the blocks hard. However, even before that the KAP had identified how criminal problems were growing disproportionately worse in North Queensland and that the problems were not being addressed.

At the end of the day, I think there is a cultural difference. In metropolitan areas, a lot more people seem to be interested in human rights and civil libertarians advocate for the kiss-and-cuddle approach to get people back on the right track. From a compassionate point of view, we think the same thing. We would love to see that, but we have to be practical as well given the volume of hardcore recidivist offenders, initially in North Queensland but all around the state now, although we still have the highest numbers. There was never going to be a practical way of adopting a kiss-and-cuddle approach with those kids.

I can speak with authority about the kids in Mount Isa. I have seen firsthand how all of the groups and organisations were tasked with giving support to parents and families, helping kids get to school and making it all about education. They said that that was how we would turn this around and that it is not just about sending kids to prison. That all sounds good. On paper it sounds fantastic. However, at the end of the day the practical reality is that a person will be tasked with driving around town to pick up kids but will spend their eight-hour shift trying to chase the kids in order to get them to school. The hardcore recidivist kids avoid them and are the hardest to find. They have the most broken families. Those service groups are overwhelmed. It is never done effectively so that approach does not work.

We can all look at the evidence and say that the approaches we have had for the past 10 years have not worked. I was trying to add it up in my head. I remember for the 2014 election, so even before the 2017 election, we started campaigning heavily on crime in North Queensland. That is when we first started talking about relocation sentencing and how we need to change the form of sentencing.

Many members have talked about what is happening in their electorates. It is a matter of fact that the worst statistics circulate between Cairns, Townsville and Mount Isa, on every metric we have on crime. I ask members to imagine some of the following things. Businesses have to replace glass windows regularly. Most businesses are locked up with Crimsafe on the windows and roller doors so we do not have nice facades and sign writing in the main street. Wanton vandalism is rife, costing businesses and home owners thousands of dollars. Mayor Peta MacRae has had her own business ramraided by a car, twice. Can you believe that that has happened to the mayor of the city, twice? There are daylight carjackings. Elderly ladies have been thrown from their cars in the middle of the day. Multiple cars have been rammed by stolen cars driven by kids. On the busiest weekend of the year, during the rodeo, multiple cars were stolen. Unapprehended kids run wild till morning when they either run out of fuel or puff. Caravan parks have been smashed and the owners have had to hire private

security firms. I know that in Brisbane people who can afford it hire private security firms to patrol their streets. We are not talking about Cape Town in South Africa, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs; we are talking about Mount Isa.

In Mount Isa, the steady stream of QPS, child safety and youth justice people who come through my door are all well-meaning people. They will say, 'I don't think you understand, Rob, that things are getting better because we are doing this and I go to all these meetings.' I try to be polite when responding by saying, 'Look, you can say all that but my biggest metric is the people who come through my electorate office door and the stories they tell me.' I am being told such stories more frequently and they are getting worse. Things are getting so bad now that people do not even come to the office anymore because they say, 'What's the point?' Rocks are regularly dropped off at my office by people who say, 'This is what was thrown through my window today.' They are horrible stories and we should not have to live like this.

The scales have been well and truly tipped against the kiss-and-cuddle approach and towards an approach where we have to look after the victims. I acknowledge that the government has said that we need to do that. While this legislation does not go nearly far enough to address it, it is a good start. The position that the KAP has taken is that this is a good start. We welcome it in that respect.

It is not just Mount Isa, either. According to the crime data, 99 per cent of Queensland suburbs and towns are safer than Mount Isa. QPS official stats show that there are more than 1,000 crimes per month in Mount Isa, and that cannot be accurate because a lot of people are not bothering to even report them anymore. Every month, one in 20 people is a victim of crime. It is just horrible that we have reached a stage now where there is apathy around the subject, where people are saying, 'We've come to expect this.' It has become normalised in these cities and towns in North Queensland—Mount Isa, Cairns and Townsville—and the rest of Queensland is starting to get a taste of it all now.

The first big policy change that happened in this place came after events like the Lovell case. The first big triggers for Queensland's state parliament to act on crime were Brisbane events, nothing in North Queensland. None of the deaths and none of what we suffered up there were triggers for this parliament. It was only when things happened in Brisbane that government started to take notice.

I have other horror stories. An elderly lady in Laura Johnson Home had her home broken into and was bashed and sexually assaulted. Kim-Maree Burton, a single older lady, woke up to an intruder lying on top of her in bed—that happened after multiple break-ins. People are just being terrorised. They target the elderly in Mount Isa often because they have cash or they cannot defend themselves. They are a soft target for the kids out there. Last year cars were stolen and driven onto ovals around the beginning of school time. They were trying to mow down kids and parents on the oval. That involved five cars around Mount Isa.

A friend of mine, Councillor Kim Coghlan, roared at one of them in traffic near the hospital in Mount Isa, so they pulled out and started ramming her. They were going around town for about 10 hours before they were caught. These are kids who do not know boundaries and are mostly from dysfunctional families. Undoubtedly, a lot of them have suffered a lot of trauma in their life, but the fact is that they are causing damage and projecting that on everyone else in society. We should not be made to pay the price for that.

We acknowledge that those kids do not know a consequence, and they still do not know a consequence. It appears to us that there is still nothing in here that gives them an effective consequence. The QPS in Mount Isa say that the kids are regularly telling them, 'We want to go to Cleveland. It is Christmas time.' There will be a run of kids in trouble in Mount Isa around Christmas time because they will get a regular feed and a bit of safety at night there. They want to go to Cleveland, so that is not a consequence. That is not a deterrent and that is all we have at the moment.

That has driven people to ask us, 'Why don't you set up camps out there? You could buy an old mining camp.' The town of Urandangi has been effectively evacuated. There is housing, water and roads there. It is very remote. We have to break the sizes up—not have 100 to 150 kids, like there are in Cleveland. We have to try educating. Putting people in those larger groups makes it very hard to provide vocational education and training and to get them to concentrate. Breaking them up into a group of 10 or 20 out in Urandangi, and with the right supervisors, is when you can start to turn these kids around.

I have seen it, and not in a punitive way. When kids are isolated in those communities and they have the right parents, they can turn their life around. The bad kids of Mount Isa at Urandangi were fine; they were good under the right influences. Yes, they still have to be returned to Mount Isa or wherever, but at least there is a circuit breaker. That is a cheap way to do it. Out there, fences and big buildings

in a prescribed youth detention centre are not needed—just dongas with bedrooms, a kitchen and a laundry. There are plenty of mining camps like that which are as cheap as chips. Lady Loretta will come online soon and will be available. There are sites at Gunpowder. It is a really cheap option but we need to break up the groups in terms of size. That has not been done. That is not there but we need that element.

We have put that suggestion to the parliament before and it has been rejected. I know that a similar idea in principle is being put by the now government, but we have to be very careful how we do it. If it is not done right, it will be a waste of time. The key parts are: it needs to be a legislative instrument; it needs to be a sentencing option for the magistrate; and it needs to be very remote—not 20 or 30 kilometres out of town, because the kids will still be thinking about stealing the supervisor's car to get back into town. If they are 200 kilometres out of town, that option is gone. There is a good reason we all go camping.

We have introduced things like detention as a last resort into this parliament and they have been voted against. I want to talk about timing. These things should have been acted on much sooner than right now. This problem has been avoided for a long time.