




Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**

**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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**CHILD SAFE ORGANISATIONS BILL; WORKING WITH CHILDREN (RISK MANAGEMENT AND SCREENING) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (12.42 pm): I will spend most of my time on the Child Safe Organisations Bill, which our committee deliberated over. The bill aligns with recommendations from the 2017 final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and it was commended by many submitters to the inquiry. The objective of the Child Safe Organisations Bill is to improve the safety and wellbeing of children in our organisations and to ensure children who are at risk of experiencing abuse, or who have experienced abuse, in institutions are supported early in an appropriate way.

The royal commission reported a sobering reality that tens of thousands of children experienced sexual abuse in almost every type of institution where children lived or attended for educational, recreational, sporting, religious or cultural activities. The findings of the royal commission highlighted the failings of these organisations charged with their protection and recommended the implementation of 10 child safe standards and the establishment of nationally consistent reportable conduct schemes.

Queensland is home to more than five million people, and children make up around 20 per cent of the state's population. It is critical to realise that organisations are an essential part of childhood. Over the next decade, millions of Queensland children will attend early childhood education, engage with schools, have health checks with doctors, be supported by disability services and play in sport and recreation clubs. Children will attend religious institutions and participate in community engagement activities. These organisations must be responsible for delivering services in safe places and in safe ways where children can thrive and be free from harm.

The bill seeks to establish an integrated child safe organisations system in Queensland that includes mandatory child safe standards and a nationally consistent reportable conduct scheme. In addition, it will align with the recommendations from the 2017 final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and specifically its recommendations for the government to implement the following: compliance with child safe standards; cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; a nationally consistent reportable conduct scheme; and independent oversight by the Queensland Family and Child Commission. Implementing mandatory compliance with the 10 child safe standards, based on the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations and the universal principle for cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, reflects a best practice approach to child protection and safety.

The committee heard support for the objectives of the bill and recognition of the importance of establishing robust frameworks to protect children. The 10 child safe standards provide a comprehensive and proactive approach to preventing child abuse and ensuring child safety within organisations. These standards—which include child safety policies, codes of conduct and regular training for staff—are essential for creating safe environments for children. The universal principle for

cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is particularly significant for Queensland. Ensuring cultural safety and respect is integral to providing effective and appropriate care and safeguarding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

While there was support for the bill, many recognise the challenges that organisations may face in implementing and maintaining compliance with the new standards. Adequate resources, training and support will be necessary to ensure all organisations, particularly smaller and community-based entities, can effectively meet these requirements. We urge the Queensland government to consider the provision of funding and support mechanisms to assist organisations in this transition.

The committee heard support from submitters for necessary reforms proposed in the current Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. They acknowledged the need for timely and efficient implementation of reform to the blue card scheme alongside the implementation of the child safe organisations system. There was support for the proposed repeal of sections of the Working with Children (Risk Management and Screening) Act. Submitters believe replacing the requirements for an organisation to have a risk management strategy with the child safe standards and universal principle is a positive step towards reducing some of this overlap. It was raised that the introduction of state specific models still imposes compliance challenges, especially for organisations which operate across multiple states and territories and support families who live across different states and territories.

The direct financial costs of implementing a reportable conduct scheme for non-government organisations are substantial. Organisations will face costs related to policy changes, staff training, secure reporting systems and the human resources needed to conduct investigations and support staff. These directly attributable additional financial costs must be acknowledged and addressed within government service contracts and funding agreements. Without adequate funding, many organisations will find it unsustainable to continue providing the support services that Queenslanders deserve.

It was recommended that the Queensland government work with the Commonwealth government and other states and territories to progress the implementation of a national child safe organisation and reportable conduct scheme framework to streamline regulatory obligations and reduce duplication—and triplication in some cases—across jurisdictions. A unified approach would enhance efficiency and consistency in child safety practices, alleviating the administrative burden on organisations operating in multiple states, and ensure a consistent obligation for the safety of children regardless of where in Australia an organisation is operating.

Every time we hear in the news that a child has been sexually exploited, we ask what more could have been done to prevent this abuse. The opportunity presented within this bill to implement the child safe standards and the reportable conduct scheme—recommended many years ago by the royal commission—provides for a more coordinated and effective system to prevent, detect and respond to child sexual exploitation. The benefits of a community that protects and safeguards its children from harm and abuse are far-reaching.

I want to take this opportunity, in closing, to acknowledge the team at the Family Responsibilities Commission. Over many years it has been rewarding to get to know the team, especially the local commissioners. The Community Support and Services Committee has oversight of the FRC, and the work has included recent amendments to the youth justice trigger, school attendance notifications, trends in community, and recruitment difficulties for the FRC and in welfare reform community areas.

The commissioner recently raised concerns in relation to eligibility of applicants to the position of local commissioner. There is a proportion of aging commissioners, and potential candidates for commissioner positions may have historic convictions or representations with the FRC. This House has tried previously to introduce new requirements for the issuing of blue cards. Although previous private members' bills have not been successful, I do want to take a moment to read the following comment from the Legal Affairs and Safety Committee last year. It says—

We consider that the blue card framework should be reviewed so historical offences of a non-serious nature and not involving children are not taken into account. The criminal justice system is premised on rehabilitation, yet blue cards have the potential to impose 'life sentences' on individuals who have already been punished for their prior crimes.

During the FRC's public briefing in 2024, Commissioner Tammy Williams addressed the issue of blue cards and the difficulty of community members to get jobs driving buses or working on school grounds, for example. Ms Williams said—

The ability to be eligible for a blue card has continuously been an issue that most people recognise has been a difficult bar for First Nations people to meet... A possible suggestion that is worth exploring is whether there could be a provisional or restricted blue card available with restrictions applied—limited to a jurisdiction or location, limited to while a person is in a certain role and reviewed on a regular basis.

In conclusion, I put on record that the FRC has tried to work with these issues that are ever increasing in First Nations communities, particularly where they operate doing amazing work to get these communities back on track, and the blue card continues to be a hindrance to opportunity within those communities.