



Speech By
Bree James

MEMBER FOR BARRON RIVER

Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2025

PENALTIES AND SENTENCES (SEXUAL OFFENCES) AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

 **Ms JAMES** (Barron River—LNP) (4.35 pm): I rise today to speak on the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. I am proud to see the LNP Crisafulli government taking decisive action after 10 years of inaction by the previous government. I want to commend the Attorney-General, Deb Frecklington, and the many other ministers for working hard to deliver this bill to the House. This bill also reflects the tireless work of the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council and the community, ensuring our laws better protect victims and hold offenders accountable. I thank them for their hard work, too.

This bill brings in new sentencing rules that much better match community expectations and puts into action recommendations from the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council's report on sentencing for sexual assault and rape in Queensland. Out of 28 recommendations, four key changes to the Penalties and Sentences Act are included in this bill. This bill recognises the harm done as a sentencing purpose; this bill ensures an offender's good character cannot be used to reduce a sentence unless it is relevant to rehabilitation or risk of reoffending; and this bill protects victims who are unable to provide a statement. This bill also makes sexual offences against 16- or 17-year-olds, who are at a very vulnerable age, an aggravating factor.

Ultimately, the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council found issues with the sentencing outcomes of sexual assault and rape offences, but particularly offences of rape committed against children, as well as the physical, emotional, psychological and social impact sexual offences have on their victims. Simply put, this bill puts these victims first, harsher sentencing for those horrible crimes, crimes that not only are heinous in nature but also have lifelong impacts on the victims. Of the victims and survivors who reported the impacts of child sexual abuse to the royal commission, 95 per cent of those reported mental health related issues, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sexual violence is not an isolated issue, it is a national crisis. In 2022 in Australia, 88 sexual assaults were recorded by police every day. One in five women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15; one in 16 men have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15; and one in six women and one in nine men were physically and/or sexually abused before the age of 15. Far North Queensland is considered one of seven hotspots in the state and has some of the worst numbers for sexual violence. Cairns recorded 867 sexual offences and 280 rape related crimes in 2024. These stats horrify me and my heart goes out to all of these victims. These are women, men, daughters, sons—and many of them are minors. There were 867 recorded offences, however, there are thousands more that go unrecorded. Ninety-two per cent of women who experience sexual assault do not report it to the police. History has shown over and over that 'he's a good guy' could get someone off these charges or

stop someone from pressing charges. Many victims will not put themselves through the trauma of court after the trauma of being raped and many victims cannot bring themselves to relive the moment to share the specifics around their rape.

This inability to testify was also used against them. Under these new laws, even if a victim is unable to provide a statement it does not lessen the seriousness of this crime. Absence of detail will no longer equate to a weak sentence. Unlike the former Labor government, we are making sure that we get these important changes to the sentencing framework right. 'He is a good guy' or 'he just made a mistake' will no longer be an excuse for sexual violence. Good character with good references will no longer mean lighter sentencing.

Weak blue card laws under Labor's watch meant the list of offences that required the chief executive to suspend a person's authority when charged was unclear, leaving gaps in protection for children. This meant that individuals who posed potential risks could continue to work with children while matters were unresolved: teachers, day care providers, coaches—adults our children are taught to trust. Under these amendments offenders cannot hide behind a blue card. The current amendments retain the necessary list of offences and ensure that the blue card system operates effectively to protect our children. Supporting this law means we are safeguarding our children.

We are putting victims first and sex offenders where they belong, which is behind bars. We are protecting our most vulnerable. This bill strengthens sentencing for sexual offences, ensuring the seriousness of those crimes is reflected in the penalties handed down. It recognises the lifelong harm caused to victims and ensures that even if a victim cannot provide a detailed statement that will not reduce the seriousness of the offence. This bill toughens sentences for sexual offences against 16- and 17-year-olds and stops offenders hiding behind 'good character'.

Victims come first. Men, women and children who have been through an unimaginable breach of consent have had their lives shattered. Those victims have had their dignity stolen and those crimes must never be excused, minimised or silenced. Many victims are afraid to speak up to retell their story and many victims are told that it was their fault or that they were partly to blame. The new laws will allow victims to come forward with or without a victim statement and to be listened to and protected by ensuring the 'he's a good bloke' card will not hold up.

To offenders who previously relied on good character to reduce sentencing: your actions are unforgiveable. These are crimes that can never be excused. They are crimes that have lasting impacts on the victims. To the countless people living with the consequence of sexual assault: this bill is for you. We see you, we hear you and we will do whatever it takes to break this cycle, because sexual violence is a violation, it is unacceptable and there are no 'ands', 'ifs' or 'they're a good person' about it. I fully support the bill.