



Speech By
Hon. Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2025

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

Second Reading

Resumed from p. 2717, on motion of Mrs Frecklington—

That the bill be now read a second time.

 **Hon. GJ BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (3.01 pm): I rise today to speak on this bill not just as the shadow minister for police but as someone deeply concerned by the LNP's repeated failures to stand up for the very people they claim to protect: victims and survivors of sexual assault and rape. Let me be clear from the outset: the Queensland Labor opposition supports this bill. We support its intent, its direction and its core reforms.

Let's not pretend for one second that this bill is timely or that the government should be praised for acting now, because the truth is that it is too late. It has been too slow, and it has come after months of inaction and political cowardice by the LNP. We support the bill, but we will not rubberstamp it without fighting for victims to get the protections they need sooner, not later—not in November, not after another six months but right now. It is an absolute disgrace that the LNP has had every opportunity to move quickly on these reforms but it has chosen time and again to delay, distract and deprioritise the safety and dignity of victims in Queensland.

Let me remind the House exactly how we got here. In 2023 the then Labor attorney-general and member for Waterford tasked the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council with a crucial piece of work: to review how sexual assault and rape offences are sentenced in our state. This was not some bureaucratic box-ticking exercise; this was 18 months of hard work, consultation and listening—listening to victim-survivors, legal experts, frontline support services and the broader community. What they delivered was comprehensive. The end result was a powerful report with 28 recommendations aimed at reforming a crucial system in Queensland, a system where justice is too often out of reach for victims.

Where did that report go? It sat gathering dust on the desk of the Attorney-General for nearly six months. We had six months of silence, six months of victims waiting and six months of inaction by this government. It was not until Labor took the initiative and wrote to the LNP in May 2025 proposing urgent amendments that we saw any movement on this bill. In fact, the Crisafulli government introduced the bill the very next day, and it just so happened to contain the same four recommendations that we identified.

We reached out to the Attorney-General again that day offering our bipartisan support to declare the bill urgent and pass it that very sitting week. What did the government do? They ignored us. They chose delay. They chose to play politics. They had a golden opportunity to act, but they let it slip through their fingers. As we have heard today, they have had multiple opportunities now to bring bills forward and declare them urgent.

Today it has been 119 days since the date of our offer. That is 119 days when victims and survivors have been told, in effect, to just keep waiting. What exactly was the government waiting for? They have used urgency motions before, as I said, to pass youth justice changes, to replace the Trusts Act and to push their own political agenda in this place. When it comes to protecting victims of sexual assault, suddenly there is no urgency. Suddenly there is no rush. Suddenly the wheels of government grind to a halt. That is not leadership; that is embarrassing for this government.

What makes it even worse is that when this bill was finally presented it included a delayed commencement date for the key protections we are looking for. The reforms in part 4, which are some of the most important changes in this legislation, are not even scheduled to commence until 1 November 2025. That will be 160 days after we first offered bipartisan support to pass them immediately. How many victims will pass through the court system between now and then? How many will be traumatised by facing their perpetrators without the protections this bill will offer?

In 2023-24 alone, there were 3,898 recorded rape and attempted rape offences in Queensland—that is nearly 75 every single week—and the government is telling victims they must wait even longer for that help. The Labor opposition has put forward a reasonable and necessary amendment to ensure part 4 of this bill takes effect immediately on assent. That is what should happen. It is the right thing to do. These are not controversial reforms. They are not contentious in any way. They are supported by both sides of the chamber. Why wait? What is the justification for putting politics before the people of Queensland?

Let's talk about what is actually in this bill and what we have had to drag the LNP kicking and screaming to implement. Recommendation 1: courts will now be required to treat the age of a child victim as an aggravating factor in sentencing. That will mean tougher sentences for those who commit these vile crimes against our most susceptible—children. This should have been done two months ago. Recommendation 2: sentencing judges must now explicitly consider the lived harm of victim-survivors. This is critical. They must take into account their trauma, their suffering and also their voices. That should never have been in question.

Recommendation 5: the so-called 'good bloke' defence, or the use of character references to downplay offending, will now be limited to what is relevant—the risk of reoffending and rehabilitation. This is long overdue. Finally, recommendation 23: victim impact statements, or the lack of them, must never again be used to suggest a victim has suffered no harm. That is a grotesque misuse of silence and this change will help prevent it.

These are critical protections. They should be in place today. Instead of pushing these through with urgency, what did the LNP do? They stapled them to a bill that also deals with maritime crime laws, blue card reforms and false representation offences. This is a legislative patchwork that reads more like a desperate effort to justify parliamentary time than a focused commitment to justice here in Queensland.

What on earth do changes to the Crimes at Sea Act have to do with protections for victims of sexual assault and rape? Why is a new offence about impersonating a government agency being crammed into this bill? It is important for sure, but, to put it in context, it is like fixing a broken engine by repainting the car. This government is more focused on appearances than on action and more focused on spin than on substance.

That brings me to the heart of this matter. The LNP wants Queenslanders to believe that they are on the side of victims. Let us look at the facts. They sat on the QSAC report for six months. They ignored Labor's offer of bipartisan urgency. They made us wait 119 days to debate the bill. They inserted a commencement clause that delays these most important reforms until November. They refused to bring this bill forward with urgency despite having done so for lesser matters in this House.

You cannot call yourself a government that supports victims while actively choosing to delay these critical measures. You cannot claim moral authority when you are morally absent. Every member of this House has a choice—a choice between action and excuses, a choice between standing with victims or standing with delay, a choice between justice now and justice postponed. The Labor opposition has made its choice. We will support this bill, but we will move the amendment required to make sure that its most critical protections take effect immediately. Every week, every day, every hour of delays puts real people at risk of further trauma, further injustice and further pain.

We are not here to serve ourselves. We are not here to tick boxes. We are here to deliver real reform, real safety and real justice for victims. Victims do not need sympathy; they just need action. Let us give it to them today. I commend this bill to the House, but I urge every member to make sure they support our amendment. Let us not let victims wait any longer.