



Speech By **Hermann Vorster**

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

Record of Proceedings, 16 September 2025

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

Second Reading

 **Mr VORSTER** (Burleigh—LNP) (3.48 pm): I of course prepared some notes for this speech, and I think it is important that we do so because we are dealing with a topic that is very sombre and serious and demands from all of us a bit of reflective thinking. However, I cannot help but reflect on the comments of the member for Macalister which I found quite extraordinary. The member for Macalister would have us believe that the former government acted in the interests of victims when in fact the only interest the former government had in victims was producing more of them.

Mrs McMahon: Better than using them as puppets. Have you got any strings or victims to pull on now, to call on, or are you just going to stand up there and give us your outrage again?

Mr VORSTER: I am not taking that interjection. I think to do so would be an outrage, because the former government let down thousands of victims of crime when they oversaw what must be the greatest scandal in the way justice is delivered in this state—that is, their failure to properly manage a forensics lab. The member for Macalister would talk about justice being served in a court. I think about those victims who did not get their day in court because there was no evidence to bring before the courts. What about those victims? What about those victims of rape who had to wait over 412 days to have their samples tested—398 days longer than the Queensland Police Service demands? What about those victims? When we have members opposite strutting into this House, trying to talk on behalf of victims, finally I call bogus because, as the member for Macalister—

Mrs McMahon: Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. I stand in this House as a child survivor and I take personal offence at the member's suggestion that my claims are bogus.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Whiting): It is very clear who the member was referring to. Is the member willing to withdraw?

Mr VORSTER: Absolutely. I am very happy to withdraw. When members opposite come into this place and try to point to a record of acting on behalf of victims, I cry foul. The truth of the matter is that we have far too many victims of crime in this state. It is something that our government is working hard to address. It is a big task because the numbers are so staggering. They have their genesis in the very laws that the member for Macalister lauded, for example, the watering down of the Youth Justice Act which created more perpetrators and more victims in the state of Queensland. I do not believe, as the member for Macalister does, that that track record is worth celebrating because it does a disservice to victims.

Turning my attention now to the bill, which is yet another step this government is taking to stand up for victims, I want to point out that this work will define where we stand. It begs the question: do we stand with offenders, letting reputation, connections or silence in the courtroom reduce their responsibility, or do we stand with victims, recognising their harm, their dignity and their right to see justice done? The answer under this government is we stand with victims.

As we have heard, the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council did review the state of sentencing for rape and sexual assault, and they found what victims already knew, that the law too often minimised their experiences. This bill fixes that. First, it makes offences against 16- and 17-year-olds an aggravating factor. Victims at that age are still children. They deserve the full protection of the law and their age must count against the offender at sentencing.

Second, it expands the very purpose of sentencing to include recognition of harm done to the victim. That is a profound shift. It says clearly to victims, 'The justice system sees you, acknowledges you and does not treat your pain as a footnote.'

Third, it reforms that so-called good-character evidence. For far too long in this state, offenders have stood in court with letters of reference or claims of standing in the community as though reputation should outweigh the suffering of their victims. That stops here. From now on, such claims only matter if they speak to rehabilitation or the risk of reoffending, and if good character enabled the offending, it can never ever be a shield. We will not let offenders hide behind their social standing while victims are left voiceless.

Fourth, it makes clear that the absence of a victim impact statement does not mean that there was no harm. Silence cannot and must not be held against a victim. Every survivor has the right to choose whether to speak, and that choice will not diminish the seriousness of their suffering. Each of these reforms has one message at its core: we stand with victims.

They say politics is about contrast. I believe our government offers Queensland not only contrast but also hope. It pays to explain what that contrast is because elections matter. Here lies the contrast. Labor rushed out half-baked reforms. Their version would have weakened the recognition of harm. Their version would have tied the hands of courts in assessing offenders' character. Their version excluded some victims altogether. It was legislation written for the cameras, not for victims.

This government chose a different path. We took the time to consult, we listened to survivors and advocates, we respected the committee process, and we wrote a bill that will stand up in a courtroom, not just in a media release. That is the disciplined, principled way the Liberal National Party governs.

When people ask what the LNP stands for, I will point to this bill. We believe victims should never be an afterthought. We believe the harm they suffer must be recognised. We believe their voices must carry weight in the courtroom. We believe in strong, trustworthy institutions that protect the vulnerable, not the powerful. That is the choice before this House: to keep victims at the centre or to let them slip back into the margins. This government has chosen. We stand with victims. I commend the bill to the House.