



Speech By


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

Second Reading

 **Ms MARR** (Thuringowa—LNP) (3.30 pm): I rise to speak in strong support of the Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. This legislation strengthens Queensland's justice system and delivers long overdue reforms to how we address sexual offences. The Crisafulli government made a commitment to Queensland and all those whom I represent to deliver a fair and efficient justice system that places victims' rights at its core and strengthens community safety, addressing the shortcomings of a decade of Labor's ineffective laws. This bill is a testament to that commitment. Victims and survivors of sexual violence whose voices have not been heard will be heard today.

I begin by acknowledging the immense courage of victims and survivors who have shared their stories. Sexual violence leaves deep and lasting scars, not only on the individuals directly affected but also on their families, friends and communities. In preparation for committee hearings on the bill and writing my speech I read everything I could and listened to those who wanted to come forward. I read harrowing accounts of victims' suffering not only during the horrid offences committed against them but also their feelings of despair through the legal process. It has left me heartbroken yet fiercely determined to advocate for strong legislation that delivers justice and restores hope to those who have endured such pain.

This bill is another example of how the Crisafulli government is putting victims first, recognising that sexual offences committed against our vulnerable children are more serious. The effect of these crimes is profound, creating waves of trauma, fear and disruption that touch countless lives. This bill reflects our recognition of those impacts and our resolve to ensure our laws better serve those who have suffered, prevent further harm and reflect community expectations.

This legislation draws from recommendations by QSAC and has guided our approach to reforming the justice system. The recommendations emphasise the need for a victim-centric framework that prioritises the safety, dignity and healing of survivors while holding offenders accountable. By implementing these reforms Queensland is taking bold steps to address the systemic issues that have for too long allowed sexual violence to persist and its impacts to go unaddressed.

The bill delivers important, overdue reforms to good-character evidence in sentencing for sexual offences. For too long our courts have at times been swayed by problematic types of evidence such as character references or an offender's standing in the community when determining sentences. Labor's good-character amendments, which are proposed to be made to section 11, would see courts prevented from decreasing a sentence because of a person's good character. Additionally, Labor's proposed amendment to section 9 would only have acknowledged harm done to surviving victims, excluding any

recognition of harm inflicted on victims of unlawful killing, including suffering caused immediately before death. This would have prevented courts from imposing sentences that account for severe acts such as rape or sexual assault committed against a victim prior to their death—a significant oversight.

In contrast, our government is committed to ensuring these critical updates to the sentencing framework are accurate and effective while addressing the shortcomings of the previous proposals. This bill delivers clarity and fairness by restricting such evidence. From now on courts may only consider good-character evidence if it is directly relevant to the offender's prospects of rehabilitation or their risk of reoffending.

I want to emphasise that under these reforms a sexual offender cannot simply rely on claims of being a 'good bloke' to lessen their sentence. Character references or evidence of community contributions will only be considered if they speak directly to the offender's likelihood of rehabilitation or the risk of committing further offences. These are the appropriate factors for a sentencing judge to weigh, ensuring that justice is grounded in accountability and public safety. Even when such evidence is deemed relevant, this bill empowers courts with the discretion to decide whether it should mitigate a sentence. Judges will consider the nature and seriousness of the offence, ensuring that the gravity of sexual crimes is never overshadowed by irrelevant or superficial claims of good character. This change sends the powerful message that sexual violence will not be excused or minimised.

Queensland is proud to be the first jurisdiction in Australia to introduce these restrictions on good-character evidence. This landmark reform will fundamentally reshape our sentencing framework to better reflect the harm caused by sexual offences and the expectations of our community. It aligns with the QSAC recommendations by ensuring that the sentencing process is fair, transparent, focused on protecting victims and preventing future harm.

The bill expands the purpose of sentencing to include recognition of harm done by the offender to a victim. While the Labor government ignored victims, we are putting them first by making sure that a court can impose a sentence for the purpose of recognising the impact of the offending on them and the harm it causes. This bill is about reforming legal processes and rebuilding trust. For too long victims and survivors have felt unheard or dismissed by a system that seemed to prioritise an offender's reputation over the harm they caused. By centring the experiences of victims and implementing the recommendations we are working to restore faith in our justice system. We are saying to survivors, 'We have listened, and we are acting to ensure your pain is not overlooked.'

This bill recognises the broader community impacts of sexual violence. The pain extends beyond individual victims to their loved ones, their communities and society as a whole. By strengthening our laws we aim to break this cycle of harm, deter future offending and foster a culture where sexual violence is unequivocally condemned.

For a decade Labor had the opportunity to strengthen our sentencing laws and place victims at the heart of justice, yet they failed to act decisively. Today they claim their amendments are not a political stunt. This is an outrageous betrayal of victims who deserve justice. Let us remind those opposite of their inaction for 10 years. Our government is fiercely committed to getting this right. We are dedicated to putting victims first, ensuring a robust sentencing framework that upholds justice and honours those affected by the vile and atrocious crimes of sex offenders.

In closing, I reiterate my gratitude to the victims and survivors who advocated tirelessly for change. Your courage has paved the way for this bill. I say to the Queensland community: know that this LNP Crisafulli government is committed to a justice system that upholds fairness, accountability and compassion. The Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill is a significant step forward toward that goal. It ensures that our courts prioritise rehabilitation, public safety and the voices of victims above outdated notions of character. I commend the bill to the House as a bold and necessary reform for a safer, fairer Queensland.