




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE PROTECTION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (12.09 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Domestic and Family Violence Protection and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It is obviously a worthy endeavour to address something that makes us feel very uncomfortable and sits heavily on the conscience of all politicians. Talking about domestic violence evokes a lot of emotions. I would argue that it most certainly evokes a gender bias. It creeps in there, perhaps even with myself. We are quick to say that it is the men who are at fault. I want to rest heavily on that in my contribution today.

I think it is really important to acknowledge the terrible acts of domestic violence against women. They do need assistance, and I am well aware of that. All too often in our scurry and scramble to address things, there is overreach that has inadvertent impacts that can make a bad situation worse. It can certainly compound flaws in our legislation—not just legislation but the way the government interacts with the lives of people in their own homes.

We would argue in the KAP that a strong component of domestic violence and many of the social problems we have is the dismantling of Australian families—and many government policies have contributed to this—and the defocus on strengthening those families. I would concede that there is a strong economic dimension to that. I think that real house prices have had an impact, sending mums to work. It has seen the rise in child care and aged care, and there is a correlation there with housing affordability. There is an economic dimension to that. Also, I think legislative intervention has compounded this.

I think it is fair to say that in trying to resolve these issues and to save women from horrible domestic violence there have been some inadvertent impacts on men. We see that PPDs could compound this. PPDs are much easier to slap on people under this legislation. That might do some good in some places—there is no question about that—but the interesting and challenging question is: how much damage will that inadvertently do?

One scenario I pictured—and this is entirely hypothetical—is that, in small communities in my electorate such as Kynuna or McKinlay, if the local copper has a grievance with someone in town—and that happens; it happens in any profession, and it has certainly happened in the past—there might be an element of malice in it. Briefings we have had from the QPS say, 'That is okay. That will be overridden by the inspector.' In this case, the inspector might be in Townsville.

My colleague the member for Hinchinbrook alluded to this. It is pretty hard to imagine scenarios where it is fifty-fifty. I put myself in the seat of that inspector. Without really knowing what is going on out there—it might have taken six months to find someone to move to Kynuna—you are going to be pretty motivated to go along with the advice they are giving and the action they have taken. If I reflect on a hypothetical like that, there is a good chance that some bias would creep in which opens it up to malicious intent. I think we would be ignorant to say that that does not happen.

Vexatious claims run hand in hand with what I am talking about when it comes to inadvertent impacts. Some constituents' issues sit in your head as an MP. We probably all have a catalogue of those. Firmly embedded in my memory are some horrific encounters I have had. There have been multiple—and I mean multiple—encounters with people who have come to see me. If I take them at their word, their stories are absolutely horrific. Some of them have spent a lot of money—more money than they could afford; their life savings—to prove that in the end the claims were vexatious and there was malicious intent by their female partner or wife. It absolutely destroyed their life. One I know was imprisoned. It was all fixed up in the end, but there is no consequence for the person who makes the vexatious claim. The person who has had the vexatious claim made against them just has to pick up the pieces.

That is not to say that existing laws have not done some really important work to save women. The majority of claims are not vexatious but, crikey, the damage that is done by vexatious claims is hard to hear. I do not see anyone trying to fix that area of the law. There are some men out there who are screaming for help. They feel they have been so unjustly handled by the legal system and there seems to be no reprieve for them.

I think there is still a very vulnerable part of our society that no-one likes to talk about. As soon as we talk about that, we are accused of not caring about women or domestic violence against women. That is a really serious consideration that needs to be considered every time we touch any of this. Again, I go along with the member for Hinchinbrook's claim. I certainly do not have good answers to this, but I think a lot of work needs to be done perhaps in an inquiry to get ahead of this game, rather than having punitive things that I think are perhaps going to compound issues of frustration and anger that exist already.

Changes to weapons licensing laws have far-reaching effects. For a lot of people in the electorate of Traeger, hunting is a popular recreational activity. For some people, that is all they have—recreational hunting and fishing. When you take one of those away, it is a pretty big deal for them. A lot of people think that as soon as you invoke the words 'firearm' and 'domestic violence' it is a gimme—just rip it away. We are talking about orders that can be just slapped on by the police. Like I said, in remote areas I feel there is going to be a bias against males being the people the orders will be put on. They will have to defend themselves. That would have a very deep impact on a lot of males in the Traeger electorate.

Blue cards are another issue. We already have problems with blue cards. This will be another big red flag. We will be spending the next 20 years trying to justify it. It is going to really hurt in Aboriginal communities, where we are already finding it hard to find people who qualify for jobs. I am really concerned about that.

Police will arbitrarily be deciding on a 12-month order with no court oversight unless there is an appeal after 28 days. That is certainly too much for us to bear on that issue. We will not be supporting that, not to mention the impact of the changes to weapons licensing laws. A lot of rural producers and pest controllers in the electorate could fall foul of that.

In the Aboriginal communities that I represent there are horrible levels of domestic violence. If there is a street brawl between two blokes who might be loosely related, that is classified as domestic violence as soon as it is established that they are a cousin or a brother. That is one area that you need to get your head around. It can change your perspective on how you look at this.

Something I want to offer around domestic violence, because it is the truth—and I can put my hand on my heart—is that in the last five or six years I have had two Aboriginal elder women come to my Mount Isa office to strongly advocate for their sons, saying, 'They keep getting put in prison and we believe it is the partner that keeps stirring them up. What do we do to help our sons?' I think it gets very complicated in those situations where there are high levels of domestic violence and things are misinterpreted. As I said, we believe there is a strong bias in the system against the males, and this is going to end up doing more damage than it set out to fix.