Speech By

Rob Molhoek

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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COMMUNITY PROTECTION AND PUBLIC CHILD SEX OFFENDER REGISTER (DANIEL'S LAW) BILL

Second Reading

Mr MOLHOEK (Southport—LNP) (7.44 pm): Child sexual abuse is something that touches all of us. I doubt that there is a family or a member in this House who has not been impacted by child sexual abuse somewhere in their family, amongst their relatives, their neighbours or their local community. The statistics are that one in three girls under the age of 16 are more than likely going to be sexually abused. One in six boys is the figure that we often hear quoted in respect of child sexual abuse in our nation. It is a great travesty.

Over the last day or two in this House it has been heartening to hear the many personal stories and reflections about how we have all been touched so deeply by the Morcombe family. Indeed, many members here have very personal connections with the Morcombes that go back over the last 10 years or more. I first met the Morcombes when I was introduced to them by Hetty Johnston around the time that Daniel disappeared. There was no Morcombe foundation then; there was just a grieving family looking for support. At that time, Bravehearts stepped up to provide them with some of that support. Hetty Johnston was a very fierce advocate for them. Since the formation of the Morcombe foundation we have seen this issue of child sexual abuse heightened. Awareness has been increased not only in Queensland but also around the nation. That is something we should be very pleased about because it is an issue that touches everyone.

I want to mention how collaborative the Morcombes have been in more recent years, in particular in advancing this as an issue for education amongst kids across the nation and in the work that has been done by them, alongside Alison Geale from Bravehearts, in creating a collaborative organisation known as e-kidna, working very closely with Act for Kids, for the sole purpose of bringing this issue to the forefront and raising awareness.

I joined the board of Bravehearts 21 years ago after a grandmother came to visit me and shared the story of how 11 girls had been sexually abused by a sporting coach at a gymnastics club. That was an eye-opener for me. It was the first time I really came to understand the impact of this issue. It is a cause that I have continued to work very closely on over many years.

A little bit of history is sometimes good. We have come such a long way in Queensland. Back in the 1960s we did not even have child safety legislation in Queensland. In fact—and I almost do not want to say this—in the late fifties and sixties children who were orphaned and born outside of marriage were still referred to as bastards within legislation. That is why we saw the rise of institutional care and, sadly, a lot of institutional abuse. It was not until the early eighties that we really started to see significant changes around child safety legislation. It was Hetty Johnston, Carol Ronken and others from organisations such as Bravehearts who really championed the need for child safety legislation in every state of Australia. I want to honour each of those people for their work in laying the foundation for where we find ourselves today in adopting some very significant, important laws.

I want to reflect on some of the comments made in the submission by Bravehearts. So much abuse, including sexual abuse, is perpetrated by people known to the family, by family members or by others who will not end up on the register. While the register is an important step forward and absolutely has the support of Bravehearts and other organisations across the state, it is important that we remain vigilant and continue to educate our kids and their kids about the importance of being on guard and protecting our kids. I have certainly had that discussion with my son and daughter-in-law about my granddaughters because there are perpetrators, paedophiles, lurking in places where we least expect to find them. The Bravehearts submission states—

Sex offender disclosure schemes, while intended to enhance public safety by informing communities about known offenders, can inadvertently create a false sense of security among the public. These schemes focus on individuals who have already been convicted and registered, yet the majority of sexual offenses are committed by those not previously identified by the criminal justice system. As a result, disclosure laws may lead people to overestimate their ability to detect and avoid risk ...

It is important to note that.

I note from the Bravehearts submission that they fully support the Community Protection and Public Child Sex Offender Register scheme, Daniel's Law as we are calling it. The scheme that we have adopted is based on the Western Australian model, which is considered best practice. The Western Australian tiered model was developed off the back of some reforms in the United Kingdom around Sarah's Law. Bravehearts and other organisations fully endorse this approach. In the past, other models had been discussed and suggested but they were perhaps not best practice and would not necessarily have fulfilled their original objectives. The closing comments of the Bravehearts' submission states—

... we note that notification schemes should only be considered as part of a holistic approach to the protection of children and young people. Offender reporting laws and notification schemes only protect against known, convicted sex offenders. Research indicates that only a small percentage of sexual offence cases make their way into the criminal justice system, and those that do are subjected to various barriers and filtering processes, which ultimately results in few cases resulting in charges, prosecutions, or convictions.

There is still so much more work to be done in respect of child protection. I know that both sides of government have conducted trials where children have been interviewed in very private environments with trained psychologists, federal police, state police and qualified child safety experts. So often in cases of serious child sexual abuse, a child will disclose something and family members will come out to support them, but in the period until those matters come to trial, later down the track, the child is groomed or talked out of their testimony. That is why it is important that we look at modernising some of the processes that we have in place. If I had my way, we would have a child advocacy centre in every major population centre across the state where people could access counselling support and where the child could be discreetly interviewed in the presence of trained professionals, rather than at the local police station, in an environment where people could analyse their testimony and then provide the necessary supports to the family.

This is an important step forward. It is an approach that is endorsed by many. Like everyone else in this House, I pay tribute to the Morcombe family. This law, Daniel's Law, stands as a tribute to them. It honours the extraordinary advocacy of the Daniel Morcombe Foundation, which has long championed greater public access to information about child sex offenders.

(Time expired)

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Furner): Member, before you take your seat I ask you to withdraw some unparliamentary language. I know it was not intentional; you were referencing historical terminology that has been used. I will ask you to withdraw that language, thank you.

Mr MOLHOEK: I am happy to withdraw. I am not sure what it was.