

Speech By

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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH WEST

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JUSTICE AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms BOURNE (Ipswich West—ALP) (7.30 pm): I rise to speak on the Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026. Copper theft is not a victimless crime. In Ipswich West, my constituents are living with the consequences. Whether they are driving home at night from work, picking the kids up from footy or heading out for an earlybird shift, motorists in my electorate are having to navigate roads and intersections that have been left in darkness for months because streetlights have been the targets of continuous copper theft. This is why we support increased penalties for metal theft, but this must be coupled with an extensive plan to disrupt the underground economy making this profitable and to quickly restore infrastructure that has been damaged.

In 2023 the former Labor government recognised the seriousness of metal theft and the impacts it was having on state owned infrastructure and our communities, and they completed a parliamentary inquiry into the issue. The Crisafulli government did not inherit an unknown problem but an issue that had already been identified and investigated—unlike the fairy stories the members for Nicklin and Glass House have been spinning. Yet they have taken two years to act while Queenslanders were left literally in the dark—navigating hazardous driving conditions, sometimes unsuccessfully, while solutions were left on the backburner.

Increasing penalties for metal theft is a step forward, but by the time those penalties apply the copper has already been stolen, the lights have gone out and the cost has been passed on to taxpayers. This bill does nothing to address the lighting infrastructure that remains out of action. We still need a clear plan from the Minister for Transport and Main Roads on how to quickly repair those lights and properly protect them from further attempts at theft. We must ask: where is the strategy to protect the infrastructure that is continuously targeted? Where is the plan to repair damaged lighting as soon as thefts occur?

People in Ipswich West are not judging the government's response by the maximum penalty written into legislation but by what they see when they are driving home at night. I particularly see this on a Thursday night when I am driving home to Ipswich after a week in parliament and it is pitch black and dangerous. People in Ipswich West want the thefts to stop, the damage repaired and the lights back on.

Another aspect of this bill where getting the balance right matters is media access to information held by the Queensland Police Service. Open justice is not about giving the media special privileges but about making sure the public can see and understand what is happening in our courts, except where there are legitimate legal reasons to restrict that information. Even the government acknowledges this in the explanatory notes, which recognise that media attendance at criminal proceedings supports open justice and transparency. This bill is supposed to improve transparency, but as we heard from Australia's Right to Know coalition of media organisations during the committee hearings, there are serious concerns about the restrictions on how journalists can use and share information they lawfully receive from the courts and the Queensland Police Service.

Journalists should be able to report on what is happening in our criminal justice system without having to worry that doing their job could expose them to criminal charges or civil liability. That is why it is so important that these provisions are clear and give the media certainty about what they can and cannot report. This would allow the provisions relating to the disclosure of information to accredited media organisations to be referred back to the Justice, Integrity and Community Safety Committee for proper scrutiny and examination—scrutiny and examination that the government did not properly afford to the current bill. The concerns raised were legitimate and deserved proper consultation before the bill was introduced. Yet, as we heard from the coalition of media organisations, the government gave only 24 hours notice before the bill was tabled. Despite how the Crisafulli LNP government treats it, consultation is not an inconvenience or an optional extra—a worrying trend we are seeing by this government. It is how unintended consequences are identified and addressed before legislation becomes law and it is how Queenslanders have their say.

This raises serious questions about why the Crisafulli government gave so little opportunity for Queenslanders to have their say on this very important piece of legislation. Is the government trying to blindside the community and pass laws that will limit what the media can report about our criminal justice system? If that is not the intention, then the government needs to make that clear and ensure these laws do not prevent journalists from doing their job and reporting on what happens in our courts. These concerns were raised throughout the committee process and they deserve to be taken seriously. When we are dealing with something as important as open justice and the public's right to know, we need to make sure we get the legislation right.

I want to finish by thanking my fellow committee members, particularly the shadow attorney-general and deputy chair, along with our committee secretariat, for their hard work throughout this inquiry.