



Speech by

**Jann Stuckey**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

Hansard Wednesday, 27 August 2008

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## **CRIMINAL CODE AND OTHER ACTS (GRAFFITI CLEAN-UP) AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mrs STUCKEY** (Currumbin—Lib) (8.37 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Criminal Code and Other Acts (Graffiti Clean-up) Amendment Bill, which was introduced by the honourable member for Caloundra when he was then the shadow Attorney-General and shadow minister for justice. This bill seeks to make all people convicted of graffiti offences held responsible for their actions by making community service clean-up orders compulsory for them in addition to any other penalties issued by the courts.

I am privileged to represent the beautiful electorate of Currumbin, located on the southern Gold Coast. As I have informed the House on many occasions, the Currumbin electorate encompasses the best the natural world has to offer: mountains, valleys and rainforests forming a spectacular backdrop to our world-famous beaches and surf. The residents of Currumbin have a strong sense of community value. They are passionate about protecting their area from inappropriate development and antisocial lawless behaviour. Whilst my electorate does not suffer as badly from graffiti as some others in urban areas, the ire of locals is certainly raised when graffiti rears its ugly head in their midst. Graffiti is a scourge that not only creates unfavourable impressions of the area but also negatively impacts on local residents as it lowers property values, makes people feel unsafe and encourages other types of crime if it is not adequately addressed.

Each year in Queensland millions of dollars is spent on repairing the damage graffiti does to public and private property. In the past two financial years, Queensland has seen an increase in the number of graffiti offences committed, resulting in a strong need to ensure that offenders are held responsible and accountable for the damage they have done.

In response to question on notice No. 1467, the Attorney-General revealed that in 2005-06, 600 offenders were found guilty of a graffiti offence, rising to 743 in 2006-07. Recently, the minister for police cited that 5,546 incidents of graffiti were reported from July to December 2007, with a clear-up rate of 44 per cent. This equates to over 30 offences being committed each day with less than half of them being cleaned up.

I note with interest that yet again the state government has attempted to follow in the footsteps of the opposition, introducing legislation in parliament on 15 May this year to broaden the scope for the removal of graffiti in the community. Whilst in this instance I support giving local councils greater jurisdiction to remove unsightly graffiti from public places, the government needs to do more to support councils with this clean-up effort. The Summary Offences (Graffiti Removal Powers) Amendment Bill that was debated yesterday in this House was a somewhat limp-wristed piece of legislation that did not go far enough. If this is the Premier's and police minister's idea of ensuring that the fight against graffiti crime is effective, it shows how the Labor government is reluctant to get tough on this offensive scrawl that adorns countless surfaces, creating eyesores for many people.

If this government was really serious about cleaning up our community and taking a tough stance on graffiti, it would support this bill which provides a workable solution to removing graffiti whilst educating the perpetrators. The introduction of compulsory community clean-up orders will allow offenders to gain first-

hand experience not only of the damage they cause but also the amount of work that goes into cleaning it up. However, the scope of community service clean-up orders is not just limited to graffiti clean-up. It also extends to other forms of community service such as the cleaning up of rubbish in parks and on the roadside.

I commend the work of the Palm Beach Community Consultative Committee which completed a graffiti audit in my electorate a few months ago. The committee consisted mainly of volunteer local residents who, together with Dale Jackson, appraised the Gold Coast Highway and the M1, noting down the exact locations of graffiti tags. This audit identified 60 tags in our community's main thoroughfares, which were reported to the Gold Coast City Council's graffiti hotline so that they could be removed.

Community consultative committees are a healthy initiative and I am pleased to have helped instigate the reformation of the Palm Beach charter several years ago. They are a partnership that builds a sturdy link between police and communities, which allows the sharing of information in a cooperative way that benefits the local area. As an advocate of thorough community consultation regarding issues that directly affect southern Gold Coast citizens, I am heartened to see the positive outcomes that communities can achieve when they work together. The bill before the House tonight is a good example of that.

I encourage all local residents to become involved in this initiative and to become actively involved in keeping our area beautiful. If people notice a graffiti tag, I urge them to report it to the Gold Coast City Council's free graffiti hotline so it can be cleaned up quickly. Likewise, if anyone sees someone committing this crime, or any other for that matter, I encourage them to contact the police straightaway. The community needs to continue to take ownership and responsibility for protecting our local area to ensure that it remains pleasant, enjoyable and, more importantly, safe for all.

General support for the introduction of compulsory community service clean-up orders is apparent in the response to a local issues survey I sent out to the whole Currumbin electorate. Over 3,000 people, representing 10 per cent of the entire electorate, responded and an overwhelming number of individuals indicated that their top priorities were law and order issues. On countless occasions graffiti and hooning were listed as creating not only visual pollution but also noise disruption and an erosion of the lifestyle so many people in my electorate fight hard to preserve.

I take this opportunity to extend our community's gratitude for the stirring efforts of Senior Sergeant Mark Johnston of Coolangatta and Senior Sergeant Chris Ahearn of Palm Beach who are using the intelligence gathered through the exercise of my surveys to crack down on offenders in identified trouble spots. Also deserving of acknowledgement for their significant endeavours are Tony Unicomb and Kurt Foessel from the Elanora police beat. Those dedicated officers have mounted a successful crackdown on school truancy and youth vandalism.

Experienced community workers tell me that this legislation will make vandals more responsible for their actions. However, they also believe that a long period of tolerance by communities—perhaps better explained as a feeling of helplessness—has further complicated the problem. Undoubtedly these petty crime offenders would require adequate supervision due to the training and occupational health and safety concerns involved in working as a clean-up detail, for instance, working near roads and using ladders. However, it was agreed that if young offenders were to become involved in the removal of graffiti it would be very worthwhile to explore ways to do just that.

The introduction of compulsory community service orders will significantly deter pointless acts of petty crime such as graffiti and will greatly benefit the community by assisting in the cleaning up and repairing of the damage caused by vandals at a smaller cost than hiring contractors to do the job. Most importantly though, as we have heard from other members of the opposition who are seriously committed to fighting the crime against graffiti, it will make vandals take responsibility for their actions and teach them to take pride in their community and local area, and discourage future vandalism. Perpetrators of graffiti deserve tougher deterrents to stop them from defacing and ruining property that belongs to others, whether privately or publicly owned.

The message I am receiving loud and clear from my electorate is that people have had enough of vandals creating havoc and spoiling our public facades and personal property, and they want tougher sentences put in place. Residents are sick and tired of the lacklustre performance of this tired Bligh Labor government which, with its massive majority, time and time again votes down sound and responsible legislation put forward by the opposition—legislation that would make our neighbourhoods safer. I commend the bill to the House.