



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Thursday, 11 September 2008

POLICE SERVICE ADMINISTRATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (11.42 am): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Police Service Administration and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2008, which was introduced into this House by the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport on 26 August this year. As honourable members have already heard from my colleague and opposition shadow minister for this portfolio, the honourable member for Gregory, the LNP will be fully supporting this bill.

According to the explanatory notes, the bill aims to provide for an act that allows the Queensland Police Service to participate in national information sharing initiatives and to also facilitate the exchange of information between the Queensland Police Service and other police services of the Commonwealth and other states and specified agencies, approved by government, for use when performing a policing function or a law enforcement function. The bill achieves the objectives by amending the Police Service Administration Act 1990 and overriding the provisions of the Criminal Law (Rehabilitation of Offenders) Act 1986 and the Juvenile Justice Act 1992.

The removal of legislative barriers to the communication and sharing of detailed nationwide police information will permit the exchange of data that was previously unavailable between states. The disclosure of information relating to spent convictions and information relevant to investigations relating to juveniles will now be accessible via an information processing service provider. The current database, QPRIME, which replaces over 230 existing systems, is described by the minister as a fast, high-quality information technology system that will enhance officers' capacity to solve crimes. Being able to exchange information with the federal government's highly acclaimed CrimTrac will provide numerous benefits to assist our police to respond rapidly to police requests from other jurisdictions. For that I am very grateful, and I have no doubt that so are they. I am pleased that the government has, through this legislation, been able to extend the information sharing regime of the Queensland Police Service to match that of other Australian police agencies. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the minister for bringing forward this legislation.

Through the removal of legislative barriers, the bill allows the Queensland police to work more closely with their neighbours on my electorate boundary in New South Wales and other Commonwealth and Australian departments. As honourable members are well aware, my electorate of Currumbin, which abuts New South Wales, has in recent years seen increasing incidents of cross-border crime and has featured on national news and current affairs programs. This new legislation will definitely give police on both sides of the border a potent weapon by which to tackle crime.

For too long criminals have crisscrossed the border, leaving damaged property and severely injured people in their wake, with hamstrung police unable to share vital intelligence to secure arrests and convictions. Undoubtedly, the assaults are getting worse in their severity and are involving younger juveniles. Last month two girls aged around 15 years old attempted to rob a 21-year-old at a bus stop at Burleigh at 8.30 pm. The victim struggled and lost control of her handbag. But that was not enough for

these perpetrators. One of the perpetrators pulled a meat mallet from her bag and was about to clobber the defenceless young woman, but was intercepted by a passer-by who intervened.

We have to get the message through that this kind of injury, especially to the head, could kill and at least cause irreversible consequences for the sufferers, such as brain damage and loss of body movement. Intensive education and awareness campaigns, together with sentences that fit the crime, are required urgently. A culture of fear of reprisals is creeping through our suburbs, with more and more parents coming to see me distraught about senseless assaults on their children. I am happy to say that the people of Currumbin will be supporting this legislation, as over 3,000 residents who completed a recent local issues survey indicated that they wanted tougher sentences. 'What is the point of the police catching the thugs,' they ask, 'who go out deliberately to spoil someone else's leisure time when all they receive from the courts is a slap on the wrist?'

Since late last year I have been calling for more powers for our police to prevent the attacks on innocent people, such as the vicious assault by a group of youths from New South Wales on a police officer and his girlfriend that occurred at Coolangatta in mid-November. What was most disturbing about that incident was the age of those youth. They were juveniles—and I note that this legislation deals with that issue. The reports in the newspaper suggested that some of those involved in this crime were as young as 10 or 12. One has to ask what on earth those children were doing out on the streets at 1 am or 2 am New South Wales time. They are too young to get into nightclubs, so they hang around looking for trouble. Younger hangers-on are coached into taking part in these dangerous activities.

Countless calls from certain concerned residents in February this year about cross-border issues compelled me to call for a thug-proof fence at the New South Wales border to repel troublemakers who are regularly terrorising innocent people. Whilst that was a tongue-in-cheek comment, as we have invisible borders in our country, it highlighted the need to address violent youths coming over from New South Wales, committing crime and fleeing back to their hideaways. Like many residents, I was sick and tired of these thugs coming over the border and deliberately breaking the law by attacking innocent people with intent to inflict harm.

Alarming, the severity of the attacks is increasing. In relation to the Coolangatta incident, for one youth to climb up a fence so that he could jump on to the officer's head with more impact shows just how out of control our streets have become and how little regard some of these youngsters have for human life or another's property. These criminals—juveniles or adults—must be caught and punished and their parents questioned as to why their children were roaming Coolangatta's streets in the middle of the night. A failure to act will allow these 10- and 12-year-olds to develop into serious criminals by learning from older youth.

As a matter of urgency, together with this legislation, we must work towards the implementation of proactive measures and we need to be creative in how we tackle the ever-increasing number of youth issues. I note that over the past couple of years there have been a number of attempts by the government to host task forces and forums, but none have resulted in tough measures that engender police confidence.

Additionally, on the topic of cross-border intelligence I requested an operational police task force from a cross-border perspective to be established to address the increasing incidence of youth violence. I am aware that regular discussions take place between senior levels of police from both Queensland and New South Wales, but what is needed is a better on-the-ground response to deal with youth who are border hopping to escape their crimes.

I sincerely hope that this legislation will assist in catching more of these offenders. To date, there has not been a functional sharing of information between the police service because the computer systems in both states, which this legislation addresses, varies, limiting the sharing of police intelligence about certain individuals.

Due to a string of crimes, culminating in a particularly terrorising episode where a gang invaded a home and kidnapped one of the occupants before beating them and leaving them in the bush, the Tweed-Byron local area commander, Michael Kenny, has called a public meeting for 23 September to get our local community involved. I will be very pleased to inform this meeting of this legislation that has been brought in by the Queensland government. The Tweed MP, Mr Geoff Provest, and I are committed to working together to assist our police to make our streets safe and wholeheartedly support Mr Kenny's initiative to hold a law and order public meeting.

I would like to share with the House the successful initiative that New South Wales is trialling in the Tweed. I hope that the minister will be interested in this. It is called Hoon Watch where residents fill in forms outlining the date, time and location of the disturbance. I am keen to speak with my local police officers about promoting a similar initiative in Currumbin so that residents can contribute to the process rather than feeling angry and helpless. Mind you, it was stated that the situation may not have reached this

stage if our Labor premiers on both sides had implemented the cross-border initiatives that were promised in 2007.

A number of suggestions could be explored and I do ask the minister to consider these. These are just a handful which I am pleased to share: implementing of mandatory curfews for these under-age youth who crisscross the border; police reserves to supplement full-time operational police during peak periods and special events; a review of the Juvenile Justice Act to make youth offenders more accountable for their actions; enhanced police powers to deal with these juvenile offenders—and this legislation I understand does deal with that; a local safe house facility where children roaming the streets can be taken by police; and ensuring operational police vacancies are filled as a priority. There was also a very strong request for Palm Beach and Coolangatta police stations to have 24-hour counter service.

The national exchange of policing information is long overdue and amounts to common sense. Police on both sides of the New South Wales-Queensland border have suffered enormous frustrations for many years and, from what I hear and have shared with the House, they will be very pleased with the increased intelligence gathering network.

Rapid population growth in south-east Queensland and northern New South Wales, coupled with years of neglect from both the Labor governments through denial of adequate police resources, has enabled these young thugs to cause mayhem and get away with it which irks our good officers no end. I would like to take a moment to congratulate our hardworking, dedicated police officers who work on our cross-border issues. I particularly wish to thank Senior Sergeant Mark Johnston at Coolangatta, Senior Sergeant Chris Ahearn at Palm Beach, Inspector Des Lacy and Superintendent Jim Keogh for instigating and supporting the Southern Alliance Task Force and providing police on the beat every Friday and Saturday night in Coolangatta. It has made a difference and must be continued if we are to stem the tide of violence threatening our streets at night.

The minister said in her second reading speech that this government is committed to ensuring that the Queensland Police Service has all appropriate and available resources to aid in the protection of our community. As I have said on numerous occasions throughout this speech, it is a positive move but it does not satisfy the need for more police resources or tougher sentences for criminals as is desired by a significant number of residents in the Currumbin electorate.

We are concerned, with Indy and schoolies coming along in a very short time, that we will be short-changed with our numbers. Most of all, the residents of the Currumbin electorate want their police to have more powers to deal with these youths and to be given the resources to keep our community and themselves safe. The residents have proven that they can work willingly hand in hand with police by reforming the Palm Beach Community Consultative Committee, by regularly sharing information—which of course can now be increased with this legislation—and by working together on graffiti and truancy campaigns. I commend the bill to the House.