



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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POLICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—LNP) (4.24 pm): I rise to contribute to the debate on the Police Legislation Amendment Bill 2010, which was introduced by the Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services, the honourable member for Nudgee, just last sitting on 5 October. This bill will amend the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000, the Police Service Administration Act 1990 and the Prostitution Act 1999 to achieve three specific aims. These are to expand ticketing for public nuisance offences state-wide, to allow for Queensland Police to use CrimTrac for assessments of suitability records to be used for employment screening and to implement changes to disciplinary processes within the Prostitution Licensing Authority. I shall contain my comments to the first two points mentioned.

Amendments to this bill are the result of a report by the Crime and Misconduct Commission titled *Policing public order: a review of the public nuisance offence*, which prompted a 12-month trial of issuing infringement notices for public nuisance offences in 2009. Griffith University was engaged to evaluate the trial, which took place in the Townsville and South Brisbane police districts. They found that the issuing of on-the-spot fines was a more cost-effective means of dealing with public nuisance and also freed up courts and police. According to the minister's second reading speech, the rollout of the ticketing system state-wide will reduce the need for offenders to be taken into police custody for minor offences and enable police to spend less time on paperwork for public nuisance offences and more time performing operational duties. The minister has also indicated that ongoing evaluation will occur through an operational performance review on public offender reporting 12 months after the state-wide implementation.

Unlike many definitions relating to provisions enshrined in legislation, it is surprisingly difficult to find exactly what amounts to 'public nuisance' as the offence is deliberately broad in definition, decided by an objective test considering time, place and circumstance of the behaviour. The Queensland Police Service mentioned some actions as examples of possible public nuisance offences in its submission to the CMC review. These include insulting behaviour such as verbal taunts, disorderly behaviour, destruction of property such as smashing beer bottles and general harassment of the public. Further, the CMC's own review highlighted the following four broad categories: offensive language, offensive/indecent behaviour including public urination, threatening or violent behaviour and disorderly behaviour. In addition, kicking over bins and acting in an obstructive or threatening manner can be interpreted by police as public nuisance activities.

The LNP will not be opposing this bill. However, we do have some reservations, which have been addressed by my colleagues and in particular the shadow minister and honourable member for Gregory. No electorates in Queensland are immune from public nuisance offences and suburbs in Currumbin suffer from time to time with unacceptable behaviours from a small minority. Unfortunately, this is more frequent in licensed areas in entertainment precincts. Operation Cleanout, conducted in Coolangatta over 24 and 25 September this year, saw 27 arrests for charges from urinating in public to possessing a dangerous weapon—none, I might say, for violent crime. Police from Coolangatta, Palm Beach, Robina and the State Crime Command in Brisbane were involved.

Our police generally seem to welcome this legislation as it will give them more time to spend on the beat. However, some concerns have been raised that, while the ticketing system will work towards freeing

up our courts, an increase in nonpayment of fines could result in an overload of cases being referred to the State Penalty Enforcement Registry—SPER. A history of unpaid liquor SETONS and driving SETONS are an example of fines that tend not to be paid, particularly if they are imposed on young offenders.

In announcing this legislation in June this year, the minister encouraged police to take a zero tolerance approach—and not before time from this government with a soft on crime attitude that has allowed public disorder to become a hallmark of society over the past decade. Police resources are stretched thin on the ground, especially when officers from our local stations are taken away for major events such as schoolies in Surfers Paradise. Given those circumstances, police in the Currumbin electorate have learned to be resourceful by working closely with the community, ensuring a strong relationship of cooperation and collaboration. The unique cross-border situation in my electorate also creates a greater and more difficult workload for our police. Special constable status is required to make arrests across the border in New South Wales. Following my call for the fast-tracking of special constable status earlier this year, the situation has greatly improved and now virtually all officers at the Coolangatta station have the necessary training and qualifications to perform their duties unhindered.

The layers of bureaucratic inefficiency forced on to the Queensland Police Service by successive Labor governments have long frustrated serving officers in our great state. That is why our volunteers in policing, VIPs, play such an important role in assisting police in their duties. VIPs work with police to address customer service, community safety and crime prevention needs in the community. In the Gold Coast district we have 44 VIPs. I had the pleasure of talking to the VIPs manning the Crime Stoppers van in Coolangatta during Crime Prevention Month in October. VIPs do a fantastic job offering important information on crime prevention tips to the community and making sure that our kids are aware of the need to be sensible and safe. I would like to thank Senior Sergeant Holly James of the Gold Coast district crime prevention office for her efforts in coordinating the VIPs program.

Two years ago I conducted an electorate-wide survey asking residents to list their key issues and things they would like to see improved in our local area. Over 3,000 people responded and the issues that were of greatest concern, by far, were hooning and graffiti. This result prompted me to start the Hoon Watch initiative, which provided residents with a simple form to record details of villains who were disturbing their peace. To date the response has been strong, despite the former minister for police criticising this popular initiative when I launched it. Disturbances in our neighbourhoods should not be tolerated and, whilst there is already legislation to deal with many of the issues, the provision for police to issue tickets will hopefully act as a deterrent.

I could not speak to this bill without taking the opportunity to talk about the great work of individual police in the Currumbin electorate. I was really sorry to learn that Superintendent Jim Keogh and Inspector Des Lacy will be leaving us to take up positions further north. Superintendent Keogh is moving to Wynnum and Inspector Lacy has accepted a new job in Brisbane. Both gentlemen have many years of police experience on the southern Gold Coast and were instrumental in several projects that benefited our community, such as the Southern Alliance, the Palm Beach Community Consultative Committee and several truancy operations. On behalf of the people of Currumbin, I wish them well in their new endeavours.

I also mention the acting inspector for the southern Gold Coast, Chris Ahearn. It is hoped that Chris will be placed permanently in this position to carry on the solid groundwork that his predecessors, Des Lacy and Jim Keogh, put in place. I acknowledge Constable Emily Tragis, who was the winner of the most outstanding female practitioner at the recent Australasian Council of Women and Policing awards. Emily was recognised for her work with our youth and for drug, alcohol and other problems in our community. She has done an amazing job in a very short space of time, and it is really great to see someone so worthy acknowledged for that. I welcome to our electorate Katrina Casaclang, who commenced work in Currumbin as our youth engagement officer. I also acknowledge Tony Unicomb and Kurt Foessel from the Elanora police beat. It is the ongoing efforts of all officers that have such a positive influence in our community. I am pleased to see before us today legislation that is designed to improve the working conditions of our police.