



Speech by

RACHEL NOLAN

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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COMMUNITY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES LIQUOR LICENCES BILL

Ms NOLAN: (Ipswich—ALP) (6.38 p.m.): I, too, rise to speak in support of the two bills that have been brought to the House by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Judy Spence. In doing so, I wish to express some reservation about speaking about these issues as if I am an expert. I have some knowledge of these areas and they are something we talk a lot about in my family. However, none of us here has lived these experiences. It is a great shame that there are no Aboriginal members of the Queensland parliament and that in its history there has only ever been one. I very much commend the minister, Judy Spence, for the legislation she has brought to the House today. Judy is not one to seek self-promotion, but this is genuine progressive legislation. It is very good legislation.

This legislation has come about through a long process of community debate and government policy. Previous governments have, as we know, created communities with few services and little support. We have initially prohibited Aboriginal people from drinking alcohol and created situations where people have been forced to drink on the fringes of town and to drink quickly in order to escape the police enforcing those prohibitions, and later we forced alcohol on those remote Aboriginal communities as a means of allowing them to make their own money.

The legislation that we have introduced today has been a direct response to a report presented in 1999 by Boni Robertson and the women's task force and, later, Tony Fitzgerald's report on alcoholism in Aboriginal communities. The essence of this legislation is to address alcoholism in Aboriginal communities and to give those communities a chance for genuine development. The crux of it is that it removes council control of licences and places them with community liquor licensing boards. It also empowers community justice groups, which already exist on most communities, to make recommendations to the licensing board about matters such as dry areas and drinking conditions, such as what hours the canteen should be open and what types of drinks they should serve.

This legislation is better than what Tony Fitzgerald recommended because it does not take the licences away from community control. Tony Fitzgerald recommended that the licence should be taken out of the hands of the community councils and placed into the hands of government—that is, completely outside the community. The legislation that the minister has put forward keeps control in the community, but it keeps it with the good people in the community—the people who are willing to make the tough decisions. It empowers good people in communities, largely the women in communities, to take a leadership role. I spent some time visiting communities in India some years ago. We found that, in the communities which needed to rapidly change from Third World conditions, when control was given to the women—usually the strong women in the community—they took that responsibility very seriously and took on board responsibility for children and their own men. Community development happens very effectively when the strong women of a community are empowered, and that is what this bill is largely about.

In talking to the bill, I want to focus mainly on the community development aspects. However, I want to make a couple of points about alcoholism. The reason why I want to focus on the community development aspects of the bill is that it bothers me enormously that we talk about Aboriginal communities only as places where people drink and not as places where people live, and many people live quite happily. There are, however, a couple of points about drinking that I want to make. The first is that we, as a predominantly white community, should treat Aboriginal alcoholics like real alcoholics. We should not assume that their drinking is purely circumstantial—that is, they sit around and drink but could just as easily be doing something else. We need to treat Aboriginal alcoholics like real alcoholics who drink because they are getting away from the difficult circumstances of their lives.

Many people start drinking because they are shy or because they find white people and white communities intimidating. Sometimes they feel too ashamed to speak up. For some Aboriginal people alcohol gives them Dutch courage to put themselves forward in our society. There are many reasons why people start drinking, but for alcoholics it is about escaping the trauma, the dispossession and the terrible difficulty of their lives.

Debate, on motion of Ms Nolan, adjourned.
