



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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## COMMUNITY SERVICES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES LIQUOR LICENCES BILL

### Second Reading (Cognate Debate)

Resumed from 5 September (see p. 3472).

**Ms NOLAN** (Ipswich—ALP) (8.35 p.m.), continuing: In taking up where I left off a couple weeks ago in Townsville, I wish to reiterate a couple of my earlier points perhaps as much for my benefit as for anyone else's. The first real point I made is that this legislation is good because it empowers the people in the community who have the capacity to do so to make the hard decisions about liquor licences. It empowers the good, strong women. The second point I made is that we need to treat Aboriginal alcoholics seriously. We should not treat them like their drinking is some kind of phase or is related purely to their circumstances at the time. We need to understand that Aboriginal people who drink heavily, like alcoholics everywhere, drink to escape loneliness, sadness, the traumas that life brings, a sense of not fitting and, perhaps uniquely in the case of Aboriginal people, they drink to escape their sense of their own dispossession. We need to understand that in the Aboriginal community a far smaller proportion of people drink than in the broader mostly white community but among those who do there are some serious drinkers.

This legislation is good legislation because it will make it harder for the drinkers to get grog and hence it makes it harder for those drinkers to make others' lives hell. It makes it harder for them to get drunk, go home, bash up their wives and give their kids a hard time. That can only be a good thing. This is a step that, surprising though it might seem, has not been taken before and it is a very good step. The bottom line, though, is that no-one can stop someone else from drinking—not the government, not the wife, not the family and not the community. We can create a situation where a drinker has all the reason and all the opportunity in the world to get off the grog, but in the end the drinker has to do it themselves. The reality of this legislation is that, if we were to make it impossible for people to drink in communities but not give them a good reason to get off the grog, those drinkers would simply end up in the towns. They would end up in Townsville and Cairns, where no doubt there is plenty of grog but there is no place for drinkers to fit into the community and where, God knows, the white community does not want them.

In order for people to want to get off the grog a couple of things need to happen. Firstly, there is this legislation, which sends a very strong message to people in Aboriginal communities that drinking to excess is no longer socially acceptable and indeed is not on. This is also good legislation because it slows down the tap. So this legislation, as I see it, is a very important step in turning off the tap and giving people a reason and a mind-set to want to get off the grog.

Another important part to encourage people to make their own decision to get off the grog is providing serious rehabilitation and drug education. It is not the case to the same extent in Queensland's Aboriginal communities, but in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, which is where I gained most of my experience, people drink because many of them do not know about internal diseases and the damage that drinking can do to one's body. Traditional Aboriginal people believe, perhaps quite rightly, that people die because they have been sung, not because they have drunk their

liver into a state of oblivion. Therefore, it is very important to educate people about the serious harm that alcohol can do to one's body. There needs to be serious drug education and real opportunities for rehabilitation in Aboriginal communities.

The other thing that needs to happen if we want to encourage people to make their own decision to get off the grog is to give Aboriginal people and Aboriginal communities a real place in our world in modern Australia and economic independence. People will never make the incredibly hard decision to change their whole way of life and to give up their social structure of sitting around with their mates socialising and drinking if they do not have something else to go to. More is needed if the only alternative to sitting around with your mates drinking is sitting around on your own facing the very hard realities of life in a remote Aboriginal community where the traditional lifestyle has broken down and where there is still no employment. There has to be serious economic development to get people off the grog. There has to be a breakdown of racism in Australia, a genuine appreciation of Aboriginal people's role in our community and real opportunities for economic independence.

It is a little ironic that canteens were introduced to many Queensland Aboriginal communities as an opportunity in themselves for economic independence. This legislation acknowledges the folly of those ways. Creating economic independence in remote Aboriginal communities is fundamentally hard to do. Unlike every other community in Australia, remote Aboriginal communities were not set up for a primarily economic purpose. Giving them an economic purpose further down the track is, in some senses, an artificial and difficult thing to do. However, I would suggest that we need to give these people control of their art industry. Art and tourism are perhaps the best developed of all the Aboriginal industries and the ones that we quite naturally associate with Aboriginal people.

For example, when walking down the mall in Townsville—as we all did a couple of weeks ago—we all saw the cheap junk masquerading as Aboriginal art that actually comes in from Indonesia. We saw the stuff that white shopkeepers sell and make big profits from selling as Aboriginal art that has never seen an Aboriginal person in its life and we suddenly realise how hard it is for Aboriginal people to get economic independence out of something that is fundamentally their own. This is a very difficult thing to do, because we do not have the same understanding of property rights when it comes to art as we do with other objects and other things.

The biggest opportunity for at least a degree of economic independence in Aboriginal communities and economic independence for Aboriginal people is for there to be cooperation among governments to give Aboriginal people control of their very lucrative art industry. The paintings of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, who died recently, sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars, but he sold them for a few thousand dollars. He sold them to white art dealers in Alice Springs and Melbourne, many of whom quite actively exploited him. When he was taken to Melbourne to produce his own art to be sold through Christies and on the international stage, many of the art dealers who took him there supplied him with grog and hotels with anything he wanted—anything to keep him happy and producing his art. While he was an internationally recognised artist, he never gained any economic independence from the art that he produced.

This is happening all around Australia all the time. We spend our time thinking about what Aboriginal people can contribute to our western economy and what commodity they have. The obvious one is clearly their art, but they do not control that art. They produce their art and other people make money from it. I propose this as by no means an answer to all the economic ills of Aboriginal communities, but it strikes me as a very good starting point. It seems to me that if we want people to make the hard decision to get off the grog we need this legislation. We have to, to some extent, turn off the tap. We have to encourage people to understand the harm that the grog is doing to them. We have to provide rehabilitation and education that empowers them to make their own decision, but we also have to give people something to live for. We have to give them a role in the world as it exists today. There are lots of ways that we can talk about doing that, but one of the most obvious and perhaps one of the more unexplored is to give people real economic independence when it comes to their industry, and that is art and tourism.

This is good legislation because it develops a philosophy of genuine community development. It empowers people in the community who can take a leadership role to do so. It gives drinkers an opportunity to sober up for a while, to think about their lives and to get off the grog. It is a good start to the broader process of community development in Aboriginal communities, and I commend the bill to the House.

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