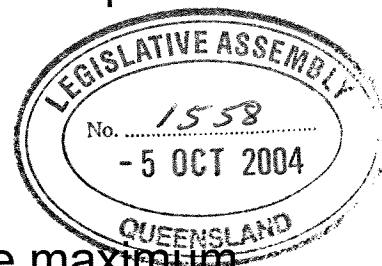


5/10/04

Fighting 'net child porn

Queensland has some of Australia's harshest penalties for paedophilia and child pornography.

They are about to get tougher.



Cabinet decided yesterday to ramp up the maximum penalties for procuring children for pornography, and producing and possessing child pornography, and to include the offences in the Criminal Code.

To enforce our tough laws, Queensland also has some of the best paedophilia-fighting forces in the world - the Queensland Police Service and the Crime and Misconduct Commission.

The police service's specialist anti-paedophilia unit, Task Force Argos, does a colossal job and played an integral role in the apprehension last week of almost 200 people involved in sickening internet pornography.

Officers from Task Force Argos charged more than a quarter of the alleged offenders.

I now advise the House that the government will immediately spend an extra \$1 million to boost Task Force Argos's success in fighting internet child pornography.

The extra funds - a 2004-05 capital injection from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet - will target people who trade in internet child pornography, by improving the equipment and skills of Task Force Argos.

The funding will ensure police continue to have the forensic information technology, knowledge and skills to stay a few steps ahead of child sex offenders.

From the \$1 million the Task Force Argos Forensic Computer Examination Unit will gain:

- Upgraded IT equipment;
- Additional research into encryption of data; and
- Extra forensic computer experts.

Anyone who possesses child pornography is a sex offender and is contributing to child abuse.

These criminals cannot hide behind the fact that they may hold positions of authority or respect in our society.

They must be caught – and this funding will assist in catching them.

Cabinet's decision yesterday means that when they are apprehended the courts will be able to impose tougher penalties.

Currently, offences involving the production, sale and possession of child pornography come under three Acts – the Classification of Computer Games and Images Act 1995, the Classification of Films Act 1991 and the Classification of Publications Act 1991.

Cabinet has decided to include them in the Criminal Code to make clear that these are serious crimes.

We will double the maximum penalties for procuring children for pornography and for producing pornography to 10 years' jail, and more than double the maximum sentence for possessing child pornography from two to five years.

The government will also encourage other Australian governments to formulate consistent national laws and penalties against internet pornography.

Internet criminals transcend borders, and we need to have uniform laws across the nation so that they do not shop around for a more lenient jurisdiction.

Mr Speaker the government gave Task Force Argos and the CMC a potent new weapon last year when we introduced laws which make it an offence to use the internet to procure a child for sex or expose a child to pornographic images.

Since 2000 the CMC has used its dedicated Internet methodology to arrest 50 people on 241 charges.

The CMC has developed computer software which enables it to identify predatory paedophiles on a geographic basis.

This technology has been provided to the Queensland Police Service and the South Australian Police Service and the methodologies have been brought to the

attention of the Australian Hi-Tech Crime Unit attached to the Australian Federal Police.

CMC officers in approved controlled operations pose as children on the 'net in order to identify paedophiles seeking to sexually proposition children.

The CMC's anti-child sex offence unit continues the proactive attack on serial and networked child sex offenders and on Internet child sex offenders.

This is an attack which the Queensland Crime Commission began.

Under the CMC, the unit has received more resources for areas including surveillance, forensic computing and intelligence expertise for targeting child sex offending.

As I've said, our penalties are among the nation's toughest.

A radical overhaul of the laws last year led not only to the new internet powers, but also to new benchmarks for the courts to punish predators who prey on young children as sexual targets.

When judges sentence child rapists and paedophiles, they no longer follow the general principle that prison is a 'last resort'.

We made the maximum penalties for indecent treatment the harshest in the nation – 20 years for indecently

treating a child under 12 years and 14 years for indecently treating a child under 16.

We introduced a new Internet offence in the Criminal Code – the first of its kind in Australia.

It carries a maximum penalty of 10 years imprisonment, for:

- using electronic means with the intent to procure a child under 12 to commit a sexual act (maximum sentence is five years if the child is under 16); or
- using electronic means with the intent to expose a child under 12 to pornography (maximum sentence is five years if the child is under 16).

Many offenders charged in Queensland last week through the operation against 'net child pornography' will be subject to these penalties – sending a message to would-be paedophiles and consumers of child pornography that their crimes warrant harsh punishment.