



Speech By
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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Cyberbullying

 **Dr ROWAN** (Moggill—LNP) (2.40 pm): I rise to address the related issues of cyberbullying and internet trolls. There is no doubt that the modern era of differing modalities of technological communication has had some distinct advantages for all of us, however, there is also a darker, more sinister side to such communication modalities, including those of the internet and social media platforms. The notion of ordinary citizens being able to freely communicate with each other, elected representatives, media organisations and others in theory should enhance the idealistic notion of full participatory democracy. However, what has emerged is a truncated version of liberal democratic process due to a failure of basic manners, poor ethical conduct by some, personality and personal-attack politics, combined with a rudimentary knowledge by some of civics and citizenship.

On Facebook and Twitter, and within comment sections on media sites to name but a few, often what can be found are ill-informed, offensive, derogatory, threatening, racist or sexist comments which add very little to informed public debate. Often grammar mistakes and incorrect spelling are a feature of such comments. In a *Courier-Mail* article on Friday, 2 January 2015, Paul Williams identified a number of important issues. Whilst I do not intend to quote exactly what he said, he did identify that online abuse generally falls into a number of categories: firstly, attacking the writer or contributor, not the content but the personal characteristics, intelligence or appearance of the author of an article, post or blog while casting aspersions as to reasons or motivations as to the content being written by the writer or contributor in the first place; then there is the second category where there is an attack on fellow readers, attacking the motivation of readers or the perceived bias of readers with the aim of closing down debate; and a third category involves comments targeting the veracity of a journalist's neutral sources, including disputing peer reviewed research.

The intolerance of differing opinions is the antithesis of free speech in a western democracy. Unfortunately, such conduct is being seen also within our parliaments around Australia. Such intolerance was seen most recently in the Queensland parliament with speeches by some Labor members during the debate on the Tackling Alcohol-Fuelled Violence Amendment Bill 2015, such content clearly inspired by health unions.

We are seeing children as young as 10 establishing fake social media profiles in order to bully fellow students and/or friendship groups. As parliamentarians we have a responsibility to show leadership, set a standard and assist teachers, parents and our youth to not contribute to or become victims of cyberbullying, ill-informed debate and/or unethical conduct on the internet or via social media forums such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Through educating our young people, together with parents and teachers, hopefully we can address some of these important social issues.