



The Honourable Greg Donnelly MLC, Government Whip

**COTTON ON JUST DOES NOT GET IT !**

**ADJOURNMENT SPEECH**

**2<sup>ND</sup> DECEMBER 2009**

Madam President,

Honourable Members would be aware that I, along with others in this House and the other place, have spoken about the issue of the sexualisation of children by the media and popular culture. Many people are expressing great concern about this matter as the evidence mounts about its negative impact on the development of children and young people.

It is almost three years since the American Psychological Association released its seminal report titled "Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls".

The report said unambiguously:

"Ample evidence indicates that sexualisation has negative effects in a variety of domains including cognitive functioning, physical and mental health, sexuality and beliefs."

It doesn't get much clearer than that!

Australia can be proud that we have some of the world's most outstanding advocates and activists on this most important public policy matter. Time does not permit me to go through all that has been done over the last few years however what has been achieved should not be under estimated. For those looking to get a handle on what has been done and what is left to do, can I strongly recommend you get a copy of Melinda Tankard Reist's book titled "Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls". The book contains contributions from Noni Hazlehurst, Emma Rush, Maggie Hamilton, Lauren Rosewarne, Louise Newman, Clive Hamilton, Selena Ewing, Abigail Bray, Melissa Farley, Renate Klein, Betty McLellan, Steve Biddulph, Tania Andrusiak, Julie Gale and Melinda Tankard Reist herself. The book was for me a status report in that it outlined where we were up to with the issue. However, it demonstrated that there is a long way to go. If anybody wants a copy of the book I would be happy to provide them with one.

Despite this concern some companies are prepared to put their profits before the interests of children. In August this year Julie Gale from Kids Free 2B Kids "outed" retailer Cotton On for their raunchy baby t-shirts emblazoned with slogans like "I'm a tits man" and "I'm living proof my mum is easy". Under mounting pressure and anger from the public the company admitted that the slogans in question had "crossed the line". They apologised and promised to withdraw the offensive merchandise.

Three months later, nothing has changed. As Julie Gale said when asked by the Melbourne Herald Sun on 19<sup>th</sup> November about Cotton On still selling the t-shirts, “It’s ratbag behaviour and an excellent example of ignorance and irresponsible corporate behaviour”. I and no doubt, many others in this House would completely agree. On 23<sup>rd</sup> November I visited the Cotton On Kids store at Westfield, Hornsby. There, still on full display for all to see, were the offensive t-shirts. I thought that it would be instructive to purchase some of the t-shirts and show Members how low some companies are prepared to go to turn a dollar. Slogans include “Lock Up Your Sons”, “Lock Up Your Daughters”, “mmm...boobies” and “I’m a tits man”. I have them here this evening for anyone to see for themselves.

What then will get Cotton On to honour its original promise made in August?

Perhaps this might do the trick. From today I call on all Australians preparing to do their Christmas shopping to strike Cotton On stores off their Christmas list. The Cotton On Group retail stores include Cotton On, Cotton On Kids, Cotton On Body, Rubi and Typo. Australians should not spend one cent in a Cotton On store in the lead up to Christmas. Perhaps this may get the company’s attention and encourage them to do what they promised. I would also encourage shopping centre proprietors like Westfield, Lend Lease and Stockland to sit Cotton On down and tell them this merchandise is out of bounds – full stop. Families and lots of children visit shopping centres. They should not have to put up with this crass merchandise being shoved in front of their faces. I call on Westfield, Lend Lease, Stockland and other shopping centre proprietors to do the right thing and call any ratbag retailer to account.

Madam President,

When Cotton On comes to its senses, can I suggest that they contact my office and I will provide them with Julie Gale's mobile phone number.

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