

POLICE — PURSUIT LEGISLATION

846. Mr P. ABETZ to the Acting Minister for Police:

In light of recent media reports on police pursuits, can the Acting Minister for Police please inform the house on the impact of the pursuit legislation that was introduced in December 2012?

Mr J.H.D. DAY replied:

I thank the member for Southern River for the question, and I know that this issue is causing a lot of concern to the community. People driving recklessly and at high speed on our roads are clearly a major threat, partly to themselves, but more importantly to other members of the community and to police officers who have to try to deal with those difficult situations.

Unfortunately, so far in this month of October, there have been 15 full police pursuits in the metropolitan area. I think members will recall that in December 2012, amendments to the Road Traffic Act were passed, having been introduced by this government, to address the concerns that people have about this issue. Included in that legislation was the provision of greater protection to police officers who are engaged in emergency driving—that is, if they are undertaking those duties in accordance with police guidelines and are driving reasonably in the circumstances, they will have a greater level of protection than was the case previously.

In relation to the offenders, the amendments to the Road Traffic Act created offences for reckless driving while seeking to escape a pursuit by the police; dangerous driving causing bodily harm while seeking to escape a pursuit by the police; and dangerous driving causing death or serious injury while seeking to escape a pursuit by the police. These offences now carry with them some tough mandatory minimum sentences that reflect the government's commitment to deterring and ensuring there is adequate punishment for offenders who are putting at substantial risk the lives of police officers and other members of the public, as I have said, not to mention themselves.

So it is the case now, for people who are apprehended and charged and convicted of these sorts of offences, that reckless driving while seeking to escape a pursuit carries a minimum two-year licence disqualification and a minimum of six months' imprisonment; dangerous driving causing bodily harm while seeking to escape a pursuit carries a mandatory minimum sentence of six months' imprisonment; and dangerous driving causing death or serious injury while seeking to escape a pursuit will result in a mandatory minimum prison sentence of 12 months. As of 31 May this year, 3 538 offenders have been charged with pursuit offences since the legislation was initiated in December 2012. As I have mentioned, so far this month there have been 15 police pursuits in the metropolitan area. That is clearly 15 too many. But we are keen to ensure that, as I have said, people who are charged and convicted of these offences understand the consequences of their very dangerous behaviour, and we are keen to ensure that our police officers are properly supported and that the lives of innocent people on our roads are protected to the maximum possible extent that we can.