

CHILD EXPLOITATION MATERIAL

Statement

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [6.46 pm]: I want to introduce the house to the realities of tackling child exploitation material, which has been in the media recently and discussed in both houses today. *The West Australian* ran a front-page story titled “Crackdown on evil”. That story relates to a new federal anti-paedophile law that forces judges to impose minimum mandatory sentences for child sex offenders. I also note the release of a registered dangerous sexual offender back into the Perth community, under some 40-odd conditions, which, from experience, I can pretty much guarantee he is going to breach sooner or later—it is not a question of if, but when. So I ask: why release him in the first place?

The federal government also released figures showing half of all child sex offenders face no jail time, and that is what I really wanted to advise members about on the experience here in Western Australia. In Western Australia we have a group called the computer crime squad, and its job is to gather physical evidence of child exploitation material. The group has approximately 10 officers, whose job is to find all those deleted or hidden files on computers that are seized. Those guys have to deal with material that is disturbing at best and quite horrific at worst. They need regular counselling to do that job. The group needs very sophisticated software licensing to be able to do its job. Every computer has to be licensed so they can break the codes, break into the files and so on. Those licences cost thousands and thousands of dollars.

It has come to my attention that the computer crime squad’s budget has remained pretty much the same for the last 10 years. The problem here is that the levels of crime and the levels of offences in child exploitation have gone up exponentially. This is a small unit that simply cannot cope with the volume of work that comes through its doors. It is my understanding from my experience that at any one time there are between 200 to 300 outstanding cases—a backlog going back to at least 2015. It is reasonable to assume that if that issue is not fixed, some people will never, ever go to court for the offences they have committed. It just never gets dealt with. To me, it is a worry that people are committing offences and it is though there is no law, because they are never dealt with. That is because there is no budget increase and not enough money for these guys to do their job. I want to acknowledge the work that they do, under very difficult circumstances. It would have been good to see a serious increase in the police budget to enable police to get on with their important job, on which I hope the government places great importance, as does our community.