



Hobart Mercury
29/01/2010
Page: 11
By: Danielle McKay
Section: General News
Region: Hobart Circulation: 45974
Type: Australian Capital City Daily
Size: 270.00 sq.cms
Frequency: MTWTFSS-

Tougher assault laws bid Push to protect emergency staff

DANIELLE MCKAY

EMERGENCY service workers could be better protected under proposed new laws to criminalise assault on Tasmania's front-line workers.

Offenders will be dealt with under the full force of the law, facing a judge and jury in the Supreme Court and a potential 21-year prison sentence under proposed changes.

Premier David Bartlett made the announcement at the Police Association of Tasmania's annual conference yesterday.

Mr Bartlett said Attorney-General Lara Giddings was investigating creating the indictable offence for any assault against emergency service workers.

The proposed law would apply to serious assaults against police, firefighters, ambulance officers, doctors and nurses.

"These are the people who work around the clock to protect Tasmanians, and I believe Tasmania should do all it can to protect them," Mr Bartlett said.

"The community does not tolerate the reprehensible and cowardly actions of those few individuals who would choose to assault someone simply going about their job of keeping our state safe."

While there are already provisions under Tas-

mania's Police Offences Act and laws for serious violence, Mr Bartlett said the new laws would strengthen the punishment and act as a better deterrent.

"I believe strongly that the consideration of a new indictable offence is the best way forward to protect our front-line emergency workers," he said.

Mr Bartlett also used the opportunity to announce:

- \$400,000 for five automatic numberplate recognition cameras.
- \$175,000 to double the number of mobile data terminals to 100.
- \$450,000 to provide new Tasmania Police uniforms.

For the first time in the conference's history, the three political leaders were also invited to outline election promises.

Among Mr Bartlett's list were promises to relieve police from court attendance and prisoner escort duties, which has drawn about eight and 10 officers from front-line action in the state's North and North-West.

Meanwhile Liberal leader Will Hodgman unveiled an \$8 million package to strengthen the force.

Despite similarities to Mr Bartlett's proposal, including employing 30 ex-

tra police and remedying the court duty dilemma, Mr Hodgman announced hard-line action against dangerous driving.

Under the proposed changes, Mr Hodgman will follow a New Zealand model. It allows for impounding and auctioning off the cars of repeat dangerous driving offenders with profits going to road safety campaigns. Cars may even be destroyed.

"To people who repeatedly offend, who show appalling disregard for road safety in using a vehicle and becoming a lethal weapon, we say there should be an ability for courts to take strong, decisive action," he said.

In a grand statement of one-upmanship, Greens leader Nick McKim promised to boost the state's force by 100 officers over three years.

Mr McKim said the Greens would also move to bring Tasmania in line with the nation and give police the ability to intervene in acts of racial vilification.

"We need to provide police with a tool kit so they can intervene during vilification based on race, which can then act to stop that vilification turning into violence," he said.

POLICIES

LIBERAL

- Remove police from court duty in Launceston
- Match Labor's commitment to employ an extra 30 police
- Establish a Serious Crimes Unit
- Legislate for the independence of the Police Commissioner
- Implement unexplained wealth legislation
- Legislate to give courts the discretion to order the crushing of confiscated vehicles of dangerous drivers
- Support the rollout of modern communications technology

GREENS

- Support the police salary nexus under the EBA scheduled this year
- Employ an extra 100 police over the next three years
- Support the commitment to improve technology to fight crime
- Maintain commitment to relieve officers of court and security duties in the North and North-West
- Support the unexplained wealth Bill in the Senate
- Create legislation which allows Tasmania Police to intervene in acts of racial vilification