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Police reject Barns view on violence

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A HOBART lawyer has been accused of justifying violence against Tasmanian police officers.

The state Liberals yesterday joined Acting Police Commissioner Darren Hine and the Police Association of Tasmania in their condemnation of Greg Barns's assertions that police should shoulder some of the blame for assaults against them.

Opposition Police and Emergency Services spokesman Rene Hidding said Mr Barns's stance could justify more violence against police, while the broader Tasmanian population was calling for officers to be offered greater protection.

This week the Bartlett caretaker government pledged that, if it were re-elected, it would ask the Sentencing Advisory Council to consider introducing guideline sentencing for offences of violence, particularly against emergency workers.

Mr Barns said the Australian Lawyers Alliance, of which he is state director, believed that most police officers did a very good job but that, on occasion, they could contribute to an assault occurring.

Mr Barns said police were already well protected by the courts and that judges and magistrates would impose more severe penalties as a matter of course when an



CONTRIBUTE:
 Greg Barns



DISAGREES:
 Darren Hine

assault involved a police officer.

"But what the association is saying by asking for mandatory sentences to be imposed is that people should be sent to jail irrespective of circumstances which led to the assault," said Mr Barns, who is also a *Mercury* columnist.

"If Mr Hidding looks at every police force in the world and spends time in criminal courts, he would notice that my comments are unexceptional."

Police Association president Sergeant Randolph Wierenga said Mr Barns's aspersions that police were assaulted because they mishandled situations and provoked the public would undermine police morale and potentially endanger the community.

Mr Hine acknowledged policing could be a risky business.

"Our members know and accept it as part of the job. But they also know they are not there as punching bags and neither are other emergency services personnel who frequently have to deal with violent people often affected by alcohol or drugs or both," Mr Hine said.

"Emergency services personnel and their families deserve to know they will be coming home safely at the end of a shift. They have the right to expect nothing less."

Sgt Wierenga said people who blamed the victims of attacks exonerated their assailants.

"It is exactly this vindication of offenders who punch, kick and spit on police and emergency workers that the Police Association is attempting to address," he said.

"By blaming the victim, we undermine the integrity of police and the justice system.

"It also perpetuates a reluctance of victims to come forward and report crime, something that the ABS recently revealed was a real problem in Tasmania."

Mr Hidding said it was concerning that Mr Barns, who is known as a justice advocate, would make such comments.

"However, there can be only one appropriate message for all Tasmanians: never assault a police officer," Mr Hidding said.