

POLICE, DRUGS

15 March 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Police questions about the cost of police investigations and raids on drug premises.

Leave granted.

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: On 27 July 2006, police raided the home of a Ms Denise Campbell at Munno Para when they caught her in the process of harvesting a number of cannabis plants grown hydroponically inside the premises. She and two accomplices had in their position almost three kilograms of cannabis—2.86 kilograms to be exact—which is a major indictable quantity under the act. She admitted to police that she was a drug dealer and that she was planning to sell the cannabis for profit. On 2 March this year, Judge Smith dealt with her by way of a paltry, simple \$500 fine, and he described the almost three kilogram haul of cannabis as 'a minimal quantity'. My questions are:

1. In light of the estimated street value of three kilograms of cannabis being approximately \$10 000, does the minister agree that a \$500 penalty serves as no disincentive whatsoever to produce indictable quantities of cannabis?
2. Would the cost of police resources involved in the investigation and prosecution of this case substantially exceed the very lenient penalty of \$500 imposed and, if so, would the minister support a stiffening of penalties in cannabis cultivation cases?

The Hon. P. HOLLOWAY (Minister for Police): Certainly, in relation to the latter, I am sure that it would cost the police significantly more than that. After all, we spend more than \$500 million each year on our police, and I am sure it would cost more than \$500 in terms of their pursuing such matters. I am not aware of this case. Clearly, if penalties imposed by the courts are considered

inadequate, it is in the capacity of the Director of Public Prosecutions to appeal. I will refer that question on and I will have the situation investigated in order to determine if there are any grounds on which the penalty applied in that case could or should be challenged. As for the more general question, very serious penalties apply in relation to trafficable quantities of cannabis. They go up to extremely severe penalties both in monetary terms and imprisonment. It is important that our courts should take into account those matters when they impose penalties but, not knowing the background of this case, it would probably be improper of me to make an off-the-cuff judgment on it. I will ensure that the decision is examined.