

METHAMPHETAMINE — USE

143. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Police:

I refer to the minister's consistent denial about the scale of Western Australia's resurgent methamphetamine problem and his comment that new stop-and-search powers have disrupted the ability for meth to be distributed in the state.

Given that only five grams of cannabis has been found after 70 searches at border search areas, will he admit that his hard meth border has failed?

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, please!

Mr P. PAPALIA replied:

As I have repeatedly tried to explain to the member and other members opposite, in 2021, the then Commissioner of Police, who is now the Governor, and the current commissioner, who was then Deputy Commissioner of Police, came to a meeting with the Attorney General, then Premier McGowan and me and requested a range of powers to be able to attempt to replicate the effect of the border controls during COVID. A number of powers have been delivered since that meeting. One of them was the consorting legislation that the Attorney General passed; another was an amendment to the Firearms Act that, amongst other things, created firearms prohibition orders; and another was the amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act that created 22 search areas. That is not the finite list. There were requests for other powers, and police are working on proposals for additional laws to enhance the measures to disrupt organised crime—the people who bring illicit drugs into the state and distribute it around Western Australia.

Those powers that I referred to were delivered to police. Police then implemented those powers, so they are utilising the powers that they have been afforded for conducting operations. The member is referring to the fact that in the last five or so months since the law that the member is referring to, the Misuse of Drugs Act amendment, came into effect, there have been a number of operations. A member of the upper house requested outcomes of those operations. This is the answer I got from police. For starters, it is operational. The police do what the police do; government affords them power and resources, which we have done.

Firstly, it is early days with respect to what are quite expansive laws. They have created 22 permanent search areas that can be enacted at short notice by an inspector or above, which is quite extraordinary. They enable search without warrant of people in those search areas. That is, as the member suggests, a significant power. They are being considered in their use. They also need to, based on intelligence but as part of that process, roll it out in a measured way so that different districts become familiar with the powers and there is no overreach of use of powers or inappropriate application of the powers. That explains part of it. Finally, the other thing that I would observe is—again, it is operational—that the police use these powers for a number of reasons. They use them to achieve a number of effects. One of them is deterrence. Another is shaping the environment. It might be that, for instance, there is an operation in which the police identify someone through conduct of one of these searches, but they do not want to actually arrest them right then.

I can say to members that there have been some significant seizures of methamphetamine in the last period that the member is referring to. So far this financial year, a total of 314.59 kilograms of methylamphetamine and almost \$22 million has been seized from serious and organised crime groups operating in Western Australia. The same people who use those search areas seized those drugs and that cash as part of their operations. It may well have been that the operations were being conducted as part of a seizure and an arrest later. It is interesting that the member is raising this matter on I think the same week that the people involved in the biggest cocaine bust in history have pled guilty in Western Australian courts. Our state crime division is doing an incredible job. We have given them the powers they need; let them do the operations. I would suggest that leaving police operations to them is a better approach than trying to grandstand around an answer to a question in the upper house.