

ILLICIT FIREARMS — OPERATION UNIFICATION

Statement by Minister for Police

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Police) [9.01 am]: I rise to inform the house that tomorrow police around Australia will be launching Operation Unification, a national campaign focused on getting illicit firearms out of the hands of criminals. This two-week national operation is being run by police in each state under the direction of the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency. The background to this operation is that last June, police ministers agreed at the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management that there be a national community awareness campaign about unlicensed firearms. This nationwide policing effort is the result of that, and acknowledges that criminals do not respect borders. That is why police are working together across Australia to get illicit firearms off our streets and out of homes.

The house will no doubt be aware that the possession and use of illicit firearms are significant elements of criminal activity in WA and in Australia more broadly. Trafficking of firearms, including the movement of firearm parts across borders, is an ongoing concern for police jurisdictions, as are the links to organised crime. According to the Australian Crime Commission's national illicit firearms assessment, it is estimated that there are more than 250 000 long arms and 10 000 hand guns in the illicit firearms market in Australia. Operation Unification is aimed at recovering these illicit firearms, including those in the possession of criminals and in particular those used by organised crime groups or suspected by police of being used for the purpose of criminal activity. It is also aimed at encouraging members of the public to contact Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 with any information they may have about illicit firearms. The intelligence gathered from people calling Crime Stoppers can be used by police to assist in tackling this problem and the criminal activity associated with it. It is also a good time to remind people that firearms that are not safely stored are at risk of being stolen and falling into the hands of criminals.

Statistics collected throughout the operation will be used to inform future investigations by police agencies into illicit firearms, to enhance coordination across jurisdictions and collaboration with other intelligence agencies, and to strengthen operational arrangements. The main message this operation aims to promote is that information from members of the public about illicit firearms is vital. The Crime Stoppers number is there for a reason and I encourage Western Australians to use it. Protecting the community from the harms associated with illicit firearms contributes to a safer and more responsible community, so I commend WA Police and police across Australia for undertaking this important operation.