

ASSAULTS ON POLICE OFFICERS — MANDATORY SENTENCING

**556. Mr J.M. FRANCIS to the Attorney General:**

It has been a year since the introduction of mandatory sentencing for assaults on police officers, which was a key election commitment of the Liberal–National government during the last election campaign. Given the repeated criticism of members opposite when this was debated in this house, could the Attorney General advise members of the outcomes achieved by the introduction of mandatory sentencing?

**Mr C.C. PORTER replied:**

I thank the member for his question. It has been fascinating to watch the statistics unfold after those laws were passed. As a matter of history, the reason we went into the election with that policy, and one of the primary justifications for that policy, was that over the five-year period leading up to the passing of that legislation, assaults on public officers had increased by 10 per cent. Indeed, inside the overall reported crime decrease, that was one of the very difficult areas of crime to tackle. That was a situation that was, in the view of this government, unacceptable.

The legislation came to be debated in or about May or June last year and, since then, we have tracked the assaults on public officers and police officers. What is absolutely fascinating, on looking at those statistics, is that there was a steady increase in assaults on police officers between 2007 and 2009, and at precisely the point that that legislation was debated in this place and gained media attention, for the first time in a very long time those assaults started to track downwards, which is remarkable testament to the fact that people do get a message when it is sent publicly and clearly.

**Mr E.S. Ripper:** Are you confident that that will be sustained, Attorney General?

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Let me give the Leader of the Opposition the figures, and I will answer that in a moment.

We looked at the 12 months prior to and after the date of proclamation. In the 12 months prior there were 1 346 assaults on police officers; in the 12 months after there were 969. That is 377 fewer assaults on police officers in a 12-month period. Anyone who follows statistics on any category of crime has to acknowledge that that is an absolutely extraordinary decrease over a very short period of time.

Several members interjected.

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** If there is any bad news about 377 fewer police officers being the victim of violence in our community, then let us hear it, because we cannot see what the downside to that is.

**Mr M.P. Whitely:** They may not be charging them.

**The SPEAKER:** Member for Bassendean!

**Mr C.C. PORTER:** Let us go through that. The other effects for all assaults on all public officers, which we have measured by financial year, are: in 2009–10 it was down 7.5 per cent compared with 2008–09; and it was down 20 per cent compared with 2007–08. Thirty-seven people have been considered under the guidelines for a charge under the legislation: 14 were charged; five have been sentenced; five are remanded awaiting trial; two matters were discontinued; there is an outstanding bench warrant for one; and one had the charge downgraded. That is interesting, because at the time of the debate I said that it would be difficult to calculate and assess with any precision the number of people this might pick up in a year. I imagined it to be somewhere between 15 and 30—if that—and it may well have been fewer than 15, but I seriously doubted that it would be anything like more than 30; we have, interestingly, had 14 charged in a year.

This legislation demonstrates that the government was not afraid to follow through on what is clearly an aggressive enforcement and deterrent strategy on crime, and it goes to the heart of that policy as to whether or not it works. I know that members opposite are sceptical about whether policies such as this work, and we had comments such as that from the member for Warnbro, who said, “I am not convinced that this type of legislation has a deterrent effect in the manner that has been suggested.” Another comment from the member for Warnbro was, “This legislation will do no good for the police officers of Western Australia; it will not result in any better defence for police officers in Western Australia.” A comment from the member for Mindarie was, “If the Liberal government says tomorrow that it passed legislation today that protects police officers, that is eyewash, complete eyewash.” Member for Mindarie, tell that to the 377 officers who did not have to suffer violence because of this legislation.