

POLICE — OUT-OF-CONTROL GATHERINGS

325. Mr C.D. HATTON to the Minister for Police:

Can the minister advise the house of the extent of the use by WA Police of the out-of-control gatherings legislation and its impact on the Western Australian community?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

I thank the member for his question and for his interest in law and order issues, particularly the progress of our out-of-control party legislation. As members will be aware, late last year the Liberal–National government introduced legislation into this place to create the offence of hosting an out-of-control gathering, whereby the hosts of nuisance parties would be held accountable for not taking reasonable steps to prevent a party from becoming out of control. We gave the police new powers to enter premises and shut down out-of-control parties and we also gave the police new powers to help them disperse people from out-of-control gatherings. At the time, police reported to me that they were attending three to four out-of-control gatherings a week. Indeed, between March and August last year there were 25 high-profile out-of-control gatherings with up to 300 people in attendance, and some with more than that number. These incidents always required the use of police dogs, the helicopter, multiple police officers and mounted police to try to manage the crowds and bring order back to those communities. Since the introduction of the legislation on 15 December 2012, 16 gatherings in Western Australia have been deemed by the police to be out-of-control gatherings. At those gatherings, five people have been charged with failing to comply with an order in relation to an out-of-control gathering in circumstances of aggravation, and 12 people have been charged with disorderly conduct. There has been one assault occasioning bodily harm, one assault of a public officer —

The SPEAKER: Sorry, minister, just hold it a moment, please. Member for West Swan and member for Willagee!

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Two people have also been charged with organising a gathering that has become out of control. WA Police has also advised that 52 juveniles have been gathered up by the party buses, which are specially fitted prison transport vehicles that have been modified for purpose to round up people at these out-of-control gatherings and remove them from the site. Fifty-two juveniles have been rounded up this way and, under section 41 of the Children and Community Services Act 2004, have been brought into custody for their own protection.

It is important that we note at this time that when this legislation was debated in this place, there was an incredible level of scaremongering from those opposite in respect of what might happen and the sort of people who might be captured by out-of-control parties legislation. In fact, one member asserted that a car parked illegally and obstructing traffic by someone attending a sedate backyard barbecue could result in the organisers of the barbecue being held responsible for an out-of-control gathering for the purposes of this legislation. I am very, very pleased to announce to the house that the police have used this legislation exactly as we intended it to be used: they have used it sparingly; and they have used it appropriately to disperse out-of-control gatherings. Funding of \$1.2 million is being used to double the number of general-purpose dogs available to police, so it has been put to good use.

In summary, the people of Western Australia can be assured that we have resourced our police force appropriately to deal with the issue of out-of-control gatherings. We have given them the appropriate legislative resource tools they need to ensure that they can restore public order to our streets. The out-of-control gatherings legislation has been a tremendous success for this Liberal–National government.