

SYNTHETIC CANNABIS — LEGISLATION

444. Mr M. McGOWAN to the Minister for Police:

I refer to the fresh claims that synthetic cannabis is easily obtainable in our suburbs and that not enough is being done by this government to stop these drugs, which is an issue I brought to the minister's attention two years ago. Why has legislation to deal with this issue not been a priority over the past two years?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

Contrary to the claims of the Leader of the Opposition, police have not been sitting on their hands in this space and neither has the government. Synthetic cannabinoids are a huge problem in our community. This government has a very strong record for being on the front foot in combatting this issue in the community. We were the first state to ban these substances under the Poisons Act to enable police to prosecute people for illegally selling these products to vulnerable people in the community who are trying to source them. So far we have banned 22 of these chemicals. As a result, other states are now also banning these chemicals. The difficulty that we have with banning synthetic cannabinoids is that we are banning the chemical formula and the formulas change from time to time, and the people who peddle these awful products in our community are very adept at keeping pace with the efforts of government to continue to ban these substances. A further 33 substances have been identified and the Minister for Health has been working very diligently and effectively to get them onto the banned substances list, and I believe that that may have been signed off very recently. In addition, the Minister for Mental Health is developing legislation to work on a way to effectively ban these substances as a family of substances so that we can be more effective in this space. This is also an issue of concern to others—

Mr M. McGowan interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order, members! I call the Leader of the Opposition for the first time, the Minister for Health for the second time and the Premier for the first time. I want to hear the answer in silence and can the minister please wrap it up?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: In addition, police have been running targeted operations, one of which was successfully completed at the end of last year and resulted in the identification of further substances that have been banned under the Poisons Act. As a result of that operation, police seized over 57 kilograms of synthetic cannabinoids and psychoactive substances.

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Midland, I call you to order for the first time, and member for Warnbro for the first time. I want this answer wound up, minister.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: They seized \$200 000 worth of cash as part of that operation and confiscated around \$800 000 worth of assets.

Point of Order

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Speaker, I believe you asked the minister to wind this up. She is now no longer answering the Leader of the Opposition's question.

The SPEAKER: Thank you member. Can the minister wind it up please?

Questions without Notice Resumed

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I am doing my best amongst the interjections. The legislation is in train and we are working on it. It is difficult legislation to construct. In addition, we are bringing this issue to the agenda of the national policing forum, which I hope to be attending in the very near future in Melbourne.