

MISUSE OF DRUGS AMENDMENT BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from 9 May.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [8.57 pm]: I stand on behalf of the alliance to say that we will be supporting the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023. I got the minister on the canvas on the last bill, so I intend to finish him off and bring the government down with my contribution to this second reading debate!

At the outset, I will say that I am probably the least qualified person in the chamber to talk about drugs. Hand on heart, I can say that I have never had as much as a cigarette, let alone an illicit drug. That is a true story. I value my body and would never take an illicit drug. Having said that, I am very conscious of the scourge of illicit drugs in our community. I have said before that I came from a period in the 1970s when smoking cannabis was a hanging offence and smoking was fashionable. Now we have done a complete 180 whereby smoking is a hanging offence and cannabis is fashionable. Is it? I am sure Hon Dr Brian Walker will try to explain it to us when he makes his contribution.

Having said that, things have shifted. We are trying to prevent the scourge of illicit drug use, particularly meth et cetera, from getting on to our streets. Of course, during the COVID pandemic we saw a significant decline in one, the importation of illicit drugs into Western Australia, and two, the actual consumption of illicit drugs. First of all, I just want to go through the contents of the bill and then explain a couple of reasons why the alliance will be supporting the bill.

As I have said, the closed border during COVID certainly saw a significant reduction in drug smuggling and drug use in Western Australia. That came through the water testing results in particular and we saw a significant decline in drug use right across the board. From the wastewater alone, we saw a reduction of meth use by 51 per cent in the metropolitan area, 73 per cent in Albany and 65 per cent in Geraldton. Given the access points, the police were extremely keen to extend their powers to prevent the importation of drugs into the state and that is why it has requested these powers. The capacity to stop the importation of drugs will see a corresponding decline in drug use. The evidence is there. It is clear and unambiguous.

This is nothing particularly new. It is an extension of the vehicle search authorisation scheme. The Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill is in fact an extension of the border search area scheme that was introduced in 2017. That provides police with the power to set up temporary vehicle search locations. Unfortunately, there are a few limitations on the BSAs. There must be reasonable grounds to suspect that an area is being used for the transportation of drugs. They have an effect for only 14 days and can be extended for an additional 14 days if the threshold level is satisfied. They cannot be used in the metropolitan area, which is extraordinary. Only three authorisations can be enforced at any one time and they can be vehicle-focused only and preliminary tests can be done only on people who are in vehicles. Although the intention is there to prevent the importation of drugs, the limitations on the VSAs make it problematic in the extreme.

This bill seeks to establish 22 border search areas, BSAs. The components for the establishment of the 22 BSAs are the key locations of entry, listed in the new schedule to the act, proposed schedule 6A. They comprise all major road, rail, air and sea entry points into Western Australia. An aerial photograph is included with an illustration of the boundary lines. Any modification to the boundary will require the minister to consult with the other relevant ministers and seek the approval of the Attorney General, and each BSA must not exceed five kilometres. The BSAs will remain dormant unless they are activated by authorisation of a senior officer of inspector or above, or by a superintendent if activated by an inspector. The BSAs will provide the police with the power to conduct preliminary drug detection tests on people either via a passive alert dog or electronic devices that currently exist and also vehicle searches. If a test indicates the possession of a drug, the police will be able to utilise section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act to stop, detain and search the person, along with any baggage, package or vehicle. Searches can be conducted only in a public space and cannot be carried out on people engaged in activities such as political demonstrations, religious or cultural activities or medical emergencies, and further exemptions may be included if required. They are the mechanics of the bill.

There are several oversight provisions that are important for a bill like this that will extend the powers of the Western Australia Police Force. The oversight provisions include that the Commissioner of Police must provide a report to the Corruption and Crime Commission every six months, which must include data on the number of times that preliminary drug detection tests and vehicle searches were carried out in each BSA and on any seizures, arrests or prosecutions arising from the utilisation of the powers. The CCC must then provide an annual report to the minister, which must be tabled in Parliament. There are more than sufficient oversight provisions within the bill to ensure that there will be no corruption in the system. Nothing is perfect, of course, but I think this is about as perfect as it can possibly be. A statutory review must be conducted every three years after the reforms commence and the minister must table the review in Parliament. Also, a sunset clause will take effect five years after the scheme

commences, which effectively ceases the BSA scheme unless Parliament extends the scheme. That will be up to the next Parliament. In five years' time, my mob will be on the other side of the chamber. I will not be here, but they will be able to review the bill and, if necessary, extend it. I will leave that in the capable hands of my two colleagues sitting to my right. Having said all that, there are 22 border search areas, which are clearly identified in proposed schedule 6A. The restrictions for the search, I think, are profound enough and certainly secure enough to ensure there will be no abuse of the system. That is why the alliance is supporting the legislation.

As I have said, I am consistent in my attitude towards illicit drug use. I detest it. I see the impact that it has on our community on a day-to-day basis. I see the impact it has on our children, our adolescents and the community. Not a day goes by when we do not see a drug-fuelled individual out there causing havoc in the community. I am on the public record saying this. In my inaugural speech I talked about the scourge of illicit drug use. I find it extraordinary that in contemporary society, in the twenty-first century, one of the biggest inhibitors towards self-fulfilment comes from something that we can inject or take voluntarily into our body. I find that offensive in the extreme.

As I said, my attitude towards illicit drug use has been on the public record for many years. Before I even came into this place, I was fortunate to be appointed to the committee for the national school drug education strategy. It was an extraordinary personal experience for me. At that time, I was still teaching at Scotch College. I was part of the state advisory body on school drug education. I was on the youth advisory committee and from that position I was appointed to the national school drug education committee. At that stage it was quite clear there was no consistency with drug education in our schools—none whatsoever. In fact, it was very sporadic. Education and the curriculum in those days was very much focused on individual jurisdictions; we did not have the national curriculum. That did not come in until 2015. Certainly, school drug education was up to each jurisdiction. There was an enormous amount of inconsistency in the standards that were set and established.

I will read part of the final report from the *National school drug education strategy* that was handed down in May 1999. It says in the introduction —

1.1 Need for school drug education initiatives

Harmful drug use in our society continues to be a major source of concern to its members and there is a clear demand for the issue to be broadly addressed. All governments recognise that there is a real need to provide a safe environment for young people, including school students and to address parents' concerns about the impact of drugs on their families. It is vital that Australia's young people, and those who work and interact with them, have the information, strategies and skills to prevent or reduce the harm that can arise from their own drug use and the drug use of others. For school students, drug use may adversely affect not only their physical and emotional health but also their chances of maintaining a current and life-long connection with education, achieving their full potential academically and living fulfilled and well adjusted lives.

The potential adverse health effects of all drugs, including alcohol and tobacco and other substances such as inhalants, are well documented. Linked with worrying details of levels of use in school students (as revealed in the 1998 report *Australian Secondary Students' Use of Over-the-Counter and Illicit Substances in 1996*, prepared by the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria) it is therefore important to take action to enhance resilience and prevent drug experimentation and usage by our school students and to be able to respond to harm that may arise.

Under the heading "Whole of Government Approach", it states —

On 9 April 1999, Heads of Australian Governments agreed, as part of a broader agreement on the need for national action, to strengthen their attack on drug pushers and their responses to drug use within schools. A Communique was issued at the Special Council of Australian Governments' meeting which included the following extract in relation to drugs in schools.

It says, in part —

This Communiques sets out the agreed outcomes:

Heads of Government agreed to add a new dimension to the National Illicit Drug Strategy which it founded in November 1997, based on a partnership between governments and the broader community, including volunteer and community organisations.

Heads of Government agreed to work together to make a new investment in prevention, early intervention, education, and the diversion of drug users to counselling and treatment. They agreed to a major shift in the practice of law enforcement and treatment and a clear message about the unacceptability of illicit drug use. The measures proposed increase the availability of information about the dangers of drug use and the impact of police action.

As I said, that was over 20 years ago now and they were talking very strongly at the national level about ensuring we had a comprehensive, consistent drug education policy to ensure that the message to students in our education system, from a very early age, was that illicit drug use was unacceptable. As I said, I am very proud to have my name to that document. It has not changed. We still have a national approach to drug education in schools through the national curriculum. As a direct result of something I insisted upon, the preamble to the national curriculum contains the capacity for each jurisdiction to adopt and adapt. There was the overarching national curriculum and jurisdictions had the capacity to adopt and adapt. We were able to put our own stamp on it and make it unique to Western Australia, as all other jurisdictions do. That is one avenue for preventing illicit drug use and the scourge of illicit drug use within our community. Of course, that alone will not do it and it does not do it. In fact, unfortunately, it is getting worse.

As I said in my introductory comments, when the government closed the border as a result of COVID, there was a corresponding rapid decline in the importation of drugs and the use of illicit drugs. That is when the Western Australia Police Force, in its wisdom, said, “We’re on a winner here.” WAPOL went to the government. This was not some overarching government agenda item. WAPOL specifically asked the government for extended powers, which is why, as a result of this legislation, should it get the consent of the chamber, it will get 22 border search areas with a much broader, more expansive capacity to stop the infiltration of illicit drug use into our state. I will go through a few of the statistics to put into perspective the impact of closing the borders and COVID, not only in Western Australia but also across the nation. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission is the organisation that looks at illicit drug use consumption and at water testing results across the nation. I refer to ACIC’s *National wastewater drug monitoring program: Report 18*. Under “Snapshot”, it reads, in part —

The Program shows that of illicit drugs with available dose data, methylamphetamine remains the most consumed drug by a large margin, despite fluctuations across this market over time ... Consumption of other drugs has also fluctuated throughout the life of the Program, albeit within a narrower range. There has been a considerable decrease in cocaine consumption since December 2021, culminating in August 2022 in cocaine consumption being at record low levels in capital city and regional areas. MDMA —

That is ecstasy —

remains one of the lowest consumed drugs monitored by the Program. Since August 2021, heroin has been the second most consumed illicit drug after methylamphetamine. The consumption of fentanyl and oxycodone has remained relatively stable over the past 2 years.

Throughout the life of the Program, national consumption of nicotine and alcohol far exceeded consumption of all other substances monitored. Dose data were unavailable for cannabis, but based on load data ... consumption of cannabis was higher in mid-2022 than it was at the commencement of monitoring in August 2018. Moreover, for 3 of the past 4 years, cannabis consumption has peaked in August in regional areas before decreasing, with a peak also recorded in August 2022. This trend has the appearance of being cyclical, which is perhaps surprising for the cannabis market. The reason for this is unknown.

The combined estimated national consumption of the 4 major illicit drugs of concern (methylamphetamine, cocaine, MDMA and heroin) increased annually in the first 4 years of the Program, followed by a marked reduction in total consumption in Year 5 —

That is 2020–21 —

of the Program and a further, smaller, decrease in Year 6 (2021–22). The most recent decrease amounts to 10%, or 1.5 tonnes, less consumption than in Year 5, chiefly driven by a decrease in MDMA and cocaine consumption ... In contrast, the consumption of methylamphetamine and heroin increased slightly in Year 6, with heroin consumption being the highest recorded by the Program. Methylamphetamine accounted for approximately 64% of the combined estimated consumption of these 4 drugs in Year 6 of the Program, compared with approximately 56% in Year 5.

Of course, the rapid decline that came about in 2021 is entirely attributable to the COVID pandemic and the resulting closure of the borders. If we look at the numbers for the estimated consumption of methylamphetamine in kilograms per annum, we see that in 2019–20, the estimated consumption of methylamphetamine was 11 147 kilograms. That declined to 9 018 kilograms in year 6—that is, 2021–22—over the two-year period when COVID hit. The estimated consumption of cocaine went from 5 675 to 3 385 kilograms per annum. The estimated consumption of MDMA, or ecstasy, in kilograms per annum went from 2 630 in 2019–20 to 723 in 2021–22. The estimated consumption of heroin pretty much flatlined. It went down in the first year from 1 021 kilograms in 2019–20 to 984 kilograms in 2020–21, and then increased slightly to 1 077 kilograms in 2021–22. As I said, that shows in stark reality the significance of the closed borders. That had an evident effect on the consumption of illicit drugs throughout Australia.

Let us have a look at a couple of specifics. First of all, let us look at the figures for MDMA, or ecstasy. This is compelling stuff. Over that two-year period, the estimated consumption of MDMA in Western Australia in kilograms

per annum went from 271.3 in 2019–20 to 46.6 in 2021–22. That is clear evidence of the impact of the closed borders. Once again, it went from 271.3 to 46.6 kilograms per annum. There was a decline of 49 per cent over the five years; there was a much greater decline over that two-year period. Over the same period, the estimated consumption of heroin in Western Australia in kilograms per annum went from 91.4 in 2019–20 to 51.4 in 2021–22. The estimated consumption of methylamphetamine in kilograms per annum went from 1 186.2 in 2019–20 to 944.8 in 2021–22. Finally, the estimated consumption of cocaine in Western Australia in kilograms per annum went from 147 in 2019–20 to 80.7 in 2021–22. The statistics are there. If there is some other extraordinary reason why drug use has declined so significantly in Western Australia other than the closed borders, I would be very open to hearing it. Without a doubt, there is a corresponding decline in, one, the importation of illicit drugs, and, two, the consumption of illicit drugs as a direct result of the closed borders.

Let us have a look at the impact on crime in the state. Although overall crime in Western Australia declined, and that was a direct result of the fact that robberies significantly declined because everyone was staying at home, there was a significant increase in assaults, and particularly domestic violence assaults. Let us look at the selected offences against the person. These are the figures for the first quarter of this year. Over the five-year period, selected offences against the person increased by 16.7 per cent. Family-related offences of assault and threatening behaviour increased by 33 per cent. Selected offences against the person, excluding family offences, sorry, increased by 16.7 per cent to 18 622.2. Family-related offences of assault and threatening behaviour increased by 33 per cent to 18 885. Selected offences against the property, as I said, declined by 1.77 per cent to 104 762. Total selected offences against the person or property declined by 5.3 per cent to 142 270, but, and this is very, very significant, drug offences declined from the five-year average by 20.4 per cent to 20 789. Turning to the actual numbers, in 2019 there were 30 229 drug offences in Western Australia. That declined to 20 772, so there has been a significant decline in drug offences over this period of the significant decline in importation and consumption. The figures are quite compelling.

I will just break that down before I conclude my comments. In the metropolitan area there were 9 380 drug offences and they declined to 6 186 in 2022, which is a significant decline. In regional Western Australia they went from 20 849 in 2019 to 14 586, again a significant decline. That is drug-related crimes. With all of that said, the figures do not lie; they are quite compelling. I would like to ask a few questions about the figures. There is a bit of contradiction in some of the figures nationally and at the state level. I will wait until we get into Committee of the Whole House to ask those questions. The figures do not lie. They quite clearly and starkly indicate that with the significant decline in the importation of drugs into Western Australia, particularly over that two-year period, the corresponding decline in drug use, shown through wastewater testing, and crimes is compelling; it really is.

As I said when I started, the campaign against drug use must be community led. It cannot be left to Education, to Health, to the Western Australia Police Force or to the government; it has to be a community-led campaign and everyone must pull their weight. Yes, our education system is educating and continues to try to educate our children that illicit drug use is unacceptable, as we as a community try to educate our community that illicit drug use is unacceptable. We are also doing our best to ensure that as many people as possible know that tobacco use and smoking, even though it is still legal, is probably not a wise idea and responsible for the deaths of literally thousands of Australians and Western Australians every year. Aside from that, it is very evident that police have a stark vehicle that they can use to stop drugs coming into the state. Those lesser mortals will always think of wonderful ways and means to make ideally hundreds of thousands of dollars by importing drugs through the barren Western Australian coastline or the extremities of our border with South Australia and the Northern Territory. People have been doing that for years, and they can do it through a whole raft of means. Extending the access point for stop and search with the 22 border search areas will go a long way to ensure that WAPOL is given the opportunity to prevent drugs coming into the state.

Whether we like it or not, whether we are an advocate for any form of drug use or whatever is irrelevant. There has been a significant drop in illicit drug use, and for that reason the alliance supports the bill. As I said, I would like to ask a few questions on the locations of the BSAs, potential locations for others and how they can be extended et cetera, but we feel there are sufficient checks and balances on the establishment, process and maintenance of the BSAs to ensure that there will not be any overreach. I will leave my comments there. I will not consume too much time during the committee stage, but I will ask a few questions. The opposition alliance supports the bill.

HON DR BRIAN WALKER (East Metropolitan) [9.27 pm]: I would like to start by saying that I shall be vigorously opposing the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023. Members might wonder why. We just heard a very cogent speech from Hon Peter Collier, and I have to say that I agree with every word he said. Why, then, would I oppose this bill? This is a question about drugs as such. I have to reinforce that despite all the jocularities in the past about me being the leader of the Legalise Cannabis WA Party, we are actually looking at a shared goal to stop or greatly reduce drug misuse, because it is undoubtedly the case that the scourge of illicit drug use in Australia has cost lives and money and wellness in the community. It is to be thoroughly regretted.

The question really is: what is the best way to achieve this goal? I have repeatedly mentioned in this chamber the need to get laws enshrined in this state that are fit for purpose. The current Misuse of Drugs Act was created in 1981,

and much has changed since then. The primary purpose of the bills we bring to Parliament is supposed to be to serve the people. It is an essential purpose. We cannot bring in bills that serve some vested interests. We need to serve and protect the people we have sworn to serve, give order to society and ensure the freedom of the people in a free country that has democratic principles. We need to provide sensible guidelines, if you will, and enshrine, as far as possible, community safety. I can see the logic behind what we just heard from Hon Peter Collier—this old, status quo thinking—but the Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill 2023 will do nothing to enshrine the protection of our community, freedom, or, indeed, sensible guidelines and safety. The idea is there, but the impact of this law will not serve that purpose.

I now turn to look at what went on in the not-too-distant past. I have referred to the Criminal Property Confiscation Act a number of times. A bill I introduced in 2021, which would have amended the Misuse of Drugs Act, referenced that act. In that bill I asked that just one of the recommendations—recommendation 9—of the review of the Criminal Property Confiscation Act by Hon Wayne Martin be implemented to amend section 32A of the Misuse of Drugs Act. When I wrote this speech, it had been 1 474 days since that report had appeared; 1 474 days had gone by without any action being taken until that bill was proposed. Not one official word has yet come back from government on the urgent need to reform a critical part of the act. The question is: over those 1 474 days, how many have suffered unjustly because this government has failed to act on manifestly unjust laws? Yet this is the bill the government has brought before us 1 474 days later.

I will use some pretty strong language to describe this bill, not because I think it is inherently bad—although I do think it is unfit for purpose—but because I find it contemptible. Members might agree that that is very strong language, but I hope that I will justify it in the course of my speech. It is not a comment made in any way disparagingly of the people who have created this bill, but it has been created in the old way of thinking. I will speak about that at some length.

The government has not given an official response to that report. It has been the subject of much discussion, but there is a growing consensus that that act is in need of reform. In his report Hon Wayne Martin found that the act is fundamentally flawed, ineffective, disproportionate and unfair. He also said that it does not meet international standards. Has that been addressed in this amending legislation? Not in the least. Not in the least will the act be affected by anything this bill proposes.

Hon Wayne Martin's report has been supported by a number of organisations, including the Law Society of Western Australia—a not inconsiderable body; the Australian Lawyers Alliance, which also supports his recommendations; and the Aboriginal Legal Service of Western Australia, which supports the report with great enthusiasm. They have all called on the government to repeal that act and enact a new law that is fair, just and, most importantly, effective. We want to achieve the goal of reducing the scourge of drug misuse in our society. The government has not yet announced any plans for the act; it is clear that the report has had a significant impact on the debate about criminal property confiscation in Western Australia, and it is likely that the government will take yet more time to consider the report's findings, because nothing has emerged yet.

When we look at the scourge of illicit drugs, we have to look at the question: what is a poison? What is actually quite poisonous in our society? We heard in Hon Peter Collier's speech about the increase in domestic violence during the COVID lockdowns. What was the cause of that? I think we will find the cause of that increase in violence when we dig into the figures. People have been abused at home and violated, and children have been threatened, injured and even killed. The cause was actually alcohol. One of the major scourges in our society is alcohol, which will remain completely unaffected by this bill. It certainly was not cannabis.

I am going to speak at some length about cannabis, because I need to use it as an example of the old thinking here, stating that I fully accept that the intent of this bill is honourable, but the effect will not achieve what we hope it will achieve. Alcohol is a physical poison; it can cause death. Just by taking enough alcohol, especially by someone who is not used to alcohol, it will cause death. It does that regularly. Every single mouthful of alcohol—I refer to my regular gin and tonics here—brings a calculable, small risk of cancer. It affects multiple organs, not just the liver but also the kidneys, brain, skin and teeth. Brain function is of course majorly affected by alcohol. The bill will not deal with this. It is a disgraceful bill because it is not dealing with a major scourge in our society.

I look further at alcohol and domestic violence, as I mentioned earlier. In fact, all violence, and the exclusion from precincts, is for the most part due to alcohol. I will come to methamphetamine in due course, because that deserves a lengthy explanation. We get road accidents from alcohol in drivers. The .05 blood alcohol limit for driving, which is acceptable, results in double the number of accidents that we would expect from someone with a zero per cent blood alcohol content. That is double the number of accidents on the road. I think it was Hon Steve Martin who earlier today said that we are now leading Australia as the state with worst accident history for the number of people maimed and killed on our roads. Yes, speed may play a role, but alcohol would encourage people to speed and is very often a part of this disaster on our roads. It is a financial poison. Those who are addicted to alcohol and suffering will waste their hard-earned income to obtain more alcohol. It is a well-known mental health poison, and I see this

in my practice on a regular basis. It is a central nervous system depressant, yet, still, it is freely available. We spend time asking ourselves how to stop the importation of drugs, and a major drug is being entirely ignored because it is so common. Almost all of us here use it.

Cannabis, on the other hand, is very much different. It is not a physical poison. No deaths are reported from cannabis use alone. Is it a cancer risk? If mixed with tobacco, absolutely. Cannabis is a healthy healing herb that can be misused, but I have found no evidence to suggest that when orally ingested, it has a cancer risk. On the other hand, it has a healthy effect on multiple organs through the endocannabinoid system. The liver can be improved and cannabis can help undo chronic alcoholic liver damage. It has an effect on the brain and increases the number of brain cells by increasing neuronal connections in the brain; thereby, we could postulate that it could maybe help recovery from a stroke. It has not been tested yet, but if brain cells can be regrown and connections can be enhanced, would it be beneficial post-stroke? Has anyone checked that? We have not, because we describe it as an illicit drug not to be used. It enhances the effect of the brain with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism. It seems to be something that we could eminently use rather than despise. Socially, it is not a poison either. It reduces domestic violence, enhances safety in the home and reduces violence altogether. The most we could have from a cannabis abuser in Northbridge is an assault on a shop selling fish and chips to get more of the necessary. It does not increase accident rates, provided that it is used appropriately. It has a financial cost, of course, in that it is expensive, but it can be homegrown if the government had any sense—but it does not. As for mental health, it actually enhances mental health. I can use it to treat anxiety; post-traumatic stress disorder; depression, to a degree; autism; and ADHD. It is very useful for that. Yet we treat cannabis as something dangerous. We bundle it in the whole illicit drug category as one of things we ought to avoid.

The suspicion of cannabis causing schizophrenia has been debunked. Alcohol and tobacco are far more dangerous. Does anyone actually speak about the dangers of these commonly obtained drugs enhancing the risk of schizophrenia? For example, 95 per cent of patients in psychiatric wards are addicted to tobacco and caffeine. Does caffeine have a role in this? I do not know. I do know that when we stop supplying caffeine and tobacco to patients in a psychiatric ward, the need for medication goes down. We ought to reconsider how we observe those social poisons. Why the different treatment? Alcohol is freely available; no-one cares about it. Cannabis is heavily regulated, as in this bill and the amendment. I think I made the point—very clearly, I would suggest—that the government is aware of the need to make major changes, especially to cannabis legislation, but refuses to contemplate the changes. We even heard today from the other place that the sensible suggestion to introduce a bill that would permit the personal growth of cannabis and the use of cannabis was refused. We are not even going to consider that because we did not come to this parliamentary session with a mandate to legalise cannabis. I could probably say the same about the decision to change the electoral laws affecting the upper house. That is probably fair game, but we cannot do this for cannabis because we did not take this mandate to the people. They are double standards. This is just unacceptable.

For the safety of our society and the protection of our citizens, we need to reconsider how we deal with the commonly available drugs that are abused in our society to the great detriment of residents. I beg the government to have a good long hard look at how we might enhance our population wellness by dealing better with cannabis and being more careful, if you like, with alcohol.

I would very much like to move on to the very important topic of methamphetamine. The bill seems to focus mainly on the scourge of methamphetamine coming across the border. If that is the case, I have to state very clearly at the outset that I personally find methamphetamine to be a scourge, unacceptable and something that we ought to reject out of hand. It is not something I would play with. I look at one of my heroes, Ben Cousins, who was devastated by this. Looking at him on the footy oval and how he has managed his life, recovering from his addiction to methamphetamine, I have to bow to him for the immense courage, focus and discipline he has shown in being one of the few to escape that scourge of a drug. I commend him in the highest possible terms for having done what I consider almost impossible. Methamphetamine as a drug is foul; it is evil. Those who dabble in it and those who deal in it are foul and evil. But it is also a reality. We have this in our system right now. This is what makes a profit for the criminals. It is something we must absolutely get to grips with, and do so with some urgency. Does this legislation actually do that? As we found out from Hon Peter Collier's excellent speech, apparently the numbers went down. Did it reduce the need and the desire? Did it affect that at all? I put to members that the answer is no. It made it less available temporarily. Are we fooling and kidding ourselves that the criminals will not find some way of going around this law? Of course they will. This is an inevitability. That is what criminals do, and they do it so very well.

We are the ones who determine what is illicit. In other societies, certain substances are deemed illicit but we do not. There are a multitude of factors behind why we would call a drug illicit. There is the potential for harm that would merit a drug being deemed illicit. Another factor is the potential damage to society. There are also societal values—those who think that we should not have anything in the way of mind-altering substances, such as coffee. I am thinking of the Mormon religion, which bans such things. I would regard them as the essentials of life; others think of them as societally unacceptable. There are also economic interests. Things are declared illicit if economic

interests are impinged on. Another factor is international agreements. These are the factors that determine whether a government declares a drug to be illegal or not—illicit or not.

We need to understand why these specific substances are prohibited, and that means looking at these nuanced perspectives. In Saudi Arabia, for example, I am not sure whether someone would get their head cut off for it, but taking alcohol is certainly banned.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.