

CANNABIS CROPS

18 June 2008

The Hon. A.L. EVANS: A constituent recently contacted me to complain about a neighbour growing a cannabis crop hydroponically in his house. Apparently, the neighbour had been convicted on previous occasions for growing large numbers of cannabis plants, but he has continued to cultivate the plants because at most he gets a suspended sentence if convicted. Of course, I advised the constituent to report the cultivation to SAPOL but, from a policy point of view, he remarked that the neighbour had an airconditioner running continuously and would have large lamps and other fans inside for the hydroponics, all using large amounts of energy.

The constituent suggested that if AGL, or other electricity suppliers, would notify SAPOL of the suspicious use of electricity then a number of cannabis crops could be detected by that method. Apparently, the house being used for the cultivation is also a rental property. The constituent suggested that if landlords and real estate agents during inspections were also legally required to notify police of suspicious drug activities then the further detection of cannabis crops would occur. These proposals came from a constituent and I thought they seemed very common sense proposals and I undertook to take them to parliament. My questions of the minister are:

- 1.Does SAPOL have a relationship with electricity retailers such that unusual electricity usage is automatically reported?
- 2.Does the minister believe that there is merit in legally obliging landlords and real estate agents to notify SAPOL if they observe any unusual drug activity in their rental properties?

The Hon. P. HOLLOWAY (Minister for Police, Minister for Mineral Resources Development, Minister for Urban Development and Planning): I thank the Hon. Andrew Evans for his question. I am not sure what relationship SAPOL has with ETSA but, of course, there have been a

number of cases where the electricity meters have effectively been bypassed. I am sure the electricity authorities notify SAPOL if they become aware of any unusual pattern. I will refer the question to SAPOL because I believe there is some merit in further considering that linkage.

Similarly, with the second suggestion made by the honourable member, I think that is probably more a matter for my colleague the Minister for Consumer Affairs, in relation to the landlord and tenant relationship. Certainly, the police do rely on members of the public reporting matters. In my answer to an earlier question from the Hon. Mr Finnigan in relation to Crime Stoppers I gave the example of a couple of cases where significant cannabis hauls from hydroponic growing had been detected by police as a result of calls to Crime Stoppers and, of course, those calls can be done anonymously.

So, the police do rely very heavily on information that comes from the public. Whether that can be formalised through utility users or others, I will refer that question to the police for their consideration. Certainly, in relation to the fight against cannabis I hope that before we adjourn for the winter recess we can pass the Controlled Substances (Controlled Drugs, Precursors and Cannabis) Amendment Bill because, of course, that does contain measures, particularly in relation to the filters that are used in relation to hydroponic cannabis production.

It will also introduce some controls on the fairly unique high powered lights that use the electricity, and thus give our police a significant weapon in dealing with the problem of hydroponic use. I thank the honourable member and his constituent for his suggestions and I will make sure they are given some consideration by the appropriate authorities.