

CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES
(CONTROLLED DRUGS, PRECURSORS AND CANNABIS)
AMENDMENT BILL
3 July 2008

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: It will be no surprise to members that I rise briefly to indicate Family First's strong support for this bill. Drugs are a scourge in the community, and this bill appropriately increases penalties for the cultivation of hydroponic cannabis and places amphetamines in the most serious category of illicit drugs.

It also more appropriately deals with the manufacture and possession of drug precursor chemicals. Right now, the penalties for hydroponic cultivation of cannabis are nonsense. I have criticised, on numerous occasions, the current penalty for growing cannabis for personal use which, regardless of the quantity essentially, is \$500, even when hydroponics are involved and even if they are recidivist offenders.

When the street value from five large hydroponic plants can be in the tens of thousands of dollars, a maximum fine of \$500 is absolute nonsense, and led me to introduce a private member's bill to substantially increase the penalties. The amendment to section 33K in this bill does not go as far as my bill went. My bill, which passed in this place, increased the penalty to \$10,000 or two years' imprisonment. This bill proposes only a fine of \$1,000 or imprisonment for six months, but the mention of imprisonment as a possible penalty opens up a wide array of sentencing options for a magistrate, and Family First certainly supports that move.

The fact is that cannabis is a far more dangerous drug than has previously been thought. A study released just a month ago in the American Medical Association's journal *Archives of General Psychiatry* found that long-term use may cause two important brain structures to actually shrink, and brain scans of cannabis smokers showed smaller hippocampus and amygdala than non-users.

Users scored lower than non-users in a verbal learning task, and about half of the long-term users in the study experienced some form of paranoia and social withdrawal. As many as 34 per cent of Australians have used cannabis at some point, including 81 per cent of male prisoners and 18 per cent of secondary school students; and so, as a legislator, I am very keen to take up the appropriate measures against this drug.

I strongly support the other measures to differentiate the stronger hydroponically grown cannabis, implementation of dosage units and the new penalties regarding precursors. These measures have been advocated by the Australasian Police Ministers' Council and have been requested by the Police Commissioner, so it comes as no surprise to members, I am sure, that Family First supports this measure. This is a good bill, and Family First supports it wholeheartedly.