

Police Amendment (Crime Reduction and Reporting) Bill

Second Reading

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.02 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

When Commissioner Ken Moroney was appointed in 2002 the Minister for Police, Michael Costa, said he would be targeting the reduction of perceptions of crime as well as the actual rate of crime. This has led to a media-driven policing model in New South Wales that encourages high-visibility policing—that is, policing that is friendly to television cameras with the aim of reducing the community's perception of crime. This is classical Michael Costa strategy and politics—lights, cameras, action—anything for the television cameras to give the appearance of change and the appearance of progress, but that is all it gives.

The police media unit was refocused under Michael Costa's administration to ensure that it supported this strategy. I quote from the media unit's paperwork which states that the unit offers police officers assistance in "maximising positive and minimising negative coverage". That is entirely understandable, but when it is combined with Michael Costa's totally cynical media-driven policing model in New South Wales, all that the people of New South Wales get is high-visibility policing which is friendly to television cameras.

The current contract of the Commissioner of Police was signed in June 2002 and is due to expire on 29 May 2004. The contract requires the commissioner to pursue high-visibility policing. I will discuss the contract and high-visibility policing in some detail, but the other point I wish to discuss is reporting of crime. In New South Wales 61 per cent of robberies, 70 per cent of assaults, 84 per cent of sexual assaults, 69 per cent of attempted break-ins and 32 per cent of break-ins are not reported to police, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. The Carr Government simply does not actively encourage the reporting of crime. Over recent years the Government's proliferation of police telephone numbers has probably also frustrated the process.

For those reasons I draw to the attention of the House that the commissioner's contract is fundamentally flawed, but the flaw was deliberately built into the contract by the Carr Government. Because the contract is due to expire within the next few months, there is an opportunity to change it or put in place a new contract to include the amendments I will outline. If the Government did so, I would applaud its action. High-visibility policing and the reporting of crime are a fraud on the people of New South Wales that is designed to satisfy television cameras. Half of all crime and public disorder in New South Wales is simply not reported. That is one of the fundamental problems with current law and order administration in New South Wales.

The contract of employment for the Commissioner of Police is available for examination. The contract is between Michael Costa, MLC, Minister for Police and Mr K. E. Moroney, Commissioner of Police, and is just a few pages in length. The term of the contract is from 30 May 2002 to 29 May 2004. One of its clauses is headed "Performance Agreements and Performance Review". It appears that the Government found it difficult to push the media friendly strategy hard in the contract, so it was shifted to the contract's schedules. Schedule B, the "Agreed Performance Criteria", states at subparagraph (3):

The Commissioner agrees that any Performance Reviews will be based on the performance criteria in the performance agreement attached to this Schedule.

The performance agreement is also just a few pages in length. It restates the period of the contract and has three columns headed "Objectives", "Priorities", and "Performance measures". Under "Priorities", the second bullet point states, "Drive high-visibility policing." Under "Performance measures", the third point is "Improvement in police visibility ...", which is a key performance measure. Those two objectives drive the operation of the office of the

Commissioner of Police and regrettably they drive the mind-set of most of the senior police officers in New South Wales. That is not because Commissioner Moroney or senior police officers have bad intentions; it is because those terms are written into the commissioner's contract, and the commissioner is simply doing his job.

The point that the Coalition makes is simply that the commissioner's contract is fundamentally flawed. It is a political contract that makes the Commissioner of Police and the office of the Commissioner of Police as well as senior police politically subservient to the Carr Government. The Opposition in New South Wales and the people of New South Wales do not want a Commissioner of Police who is demonstrably politically subservient to the latest whim of the Minister for Police. High-visibility policing has been discussed in a number of the articles. It is instructive to examine some of the points that have been made. Last year in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Robert Wainwright wrote a review of the policy in an article titled "Fear and the ripple effect", part of which states:

Moroney points to the new policy of high-visibility policing, and particularly Vikings, as the most significant measure so far to combat perception.

It is interesting that the commissioner referred to combating perception rather than combating crime. The commissioner is obsessed with combating the perception of crime, but that is because it comprises 50 per cent of his contract. The commissioner is paid something of the order of \$350,000. Presumably only about half of that is paid to him to reduce crime; the other half is paid to him to ensure that there is a good spin machine working for the Government and the commissioner's office to ensure that the Carr Labor Government's propaganda is made public.

For some time we have experienced difficulties with the police media unit. Essentially, although it does a number of good things, it also spends a large proportion of its time working simply as a propaganda unit for the Carr Government. Referring to other quotes in the article, I make the point that NSW Police is trying to reduce the fear of crime through a media strategy. The nature of Operation Vikings, which is media friendly, is to create the impression of a lot of police doing their job. It is a media stunt. The alternative strategy is to reduce the fear of crime by reducing crime itself, which requires effective police strategies, not a media strategy.

Some of us are amused, but it is not amusing to senior or experienced police, if I can put it that way, when the Government pushes media strategies about new, innovative policing ideas or operations. The Carr Government is pushing in the media something that it has not been doing for the past eight or nine years it has been in office. However, that is what policing is all about. It is about basic and effective policing, but the Government is reintroducing it as an innovative, new twenty-first century idea. It is not; it is old hat. The Carr Government simply forgot about it. I refer, next, to articles on the issue of perception. In an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 29 May 2002 Paola Totaro asked the question:

But how do you objectively measure one man's impact on public fear of crime?

She went to Sydney university criminologist, Professor Mark Findlay, who said:

He can do that to some extent but he can't do it entirely. It's a profoundly unfair measure, ill-conceived and a misdirected imposition on the police.

That is a good summary, but one would think that Professor Findlay is dismissing perception as an irritant. He is not. NSW Police spends 50 per cent of its time producing media strategies to pretend that we do not have a crime problem in New South Wales. We all know that there is a crime problem in New South Wales. I am introducing this bill to change the fundamentals of the commissioner's contract and to ensure that we increase the reporting level of crime in New South Wales.

As ever with the introduction of bills, we are indebted to Parliamentary Counsel. I acknowledge the work and assistance of parliamentary counsel in putting together the bill and

discussing the topic with me. In particular, I thank Robin Hodge of the Parliamentary Counsel's Office for preparing this material. The objects of the Police Amendment (Crime Reduction and Reporting) Bill are, first, to amend the Police Act 1990 to include as part of the functions of NSW Police the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales and, second, to include those matters in the performance criteria contained in the contract of employment or any associated performance agreement between the Commissioner of Police and the Minister for Police.

I turn now to the schedule 1 amendments. Schedule 1 [1] and [2] include as part of the police services to be provided by NSW Police the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales. The effect of that is to make these matters part of NSW Police functions. Schedule 1 [3] requires the performance criteria contained in the employment contract of the Commissioner of Police, or any associated performance agreement, to include the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales. I will read items [2] and [3] in schedule 1 to the bill because the detail shows that these amendments are long overdue. When I looked through the Act and the contracts I was surprised that these details were not included. Schedule 1 states:

[2] Section 6 (3), definition of "police services"

Insert after paragraph (c);

(c1) actively encouraging the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales, and

[3] Section 27 Employment and remuneration of Commissioner

Insert after section 27 (2):

(3) The performance criteria contained in the contract of employment between the Commissioner and the Minister, or any associated performance agreement, must require the Commissioner to do the following:

(a) reduce crime,

(b) actively encourage the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder in New South Wales.

(4) Any contract of employment between the Commissioner and the Minister, and any associated performance agreement, in force on the commencement of this subsection is taken to include the requirements referred to in subsection (3) and may be amended accordingly.

(5) Nothing in subsection (3) or (4) limits any other provision of this section or any other matter that may be included in performance criteria in the contract of employment or any associated performance agreement.

As I said at the outset, the commissioner's contract is fundamentally flawed and must be changed. The Opposition wants the contract changed to focus on the reduction of crime and to actively encourage the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder. This bill proposes amendments to the police commissioner's contract and the Police Act to emphasise the reduction of crime and the active encouragement of the reporting of all crime and incidents of public disorder. Currently, the commissioner's contract demands that he pursue a media strategy to push down the perception of crime. That is just plain wrong. It is not in the interests of the people of New South Wales. At present the reporting rates for crime and public disorder in New South Wales are low, and the Carr Government is preoccupied with media strategies instead of policing strategies.

I said earlier that a high percentage of crime in New South Wales is not reported to police.

According to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for 2001-02, 61 per cent of robberies, 70 per cent of assaults, 84 per cent of sexual assaults, 69 per cent of attempted break-ins and 32 per cent of break-ins are not reported. We must encourage everyone in New South Wales to report every crime and every incident of public disorder to ensure that police resources are appropriately allocated. When constituents talk to members of Parliament about particular instances of crime I am sure those members do as I do: the first question I ask is, "Did you report it?" In the 10 years that I have been a member of Parliament, 50 per cent of people have said, "No, I did not".

Those statistics have not really changed. For various reasons, 50 per cent of people do not report an incident that is of concern to them. Often that is because they believe police are underresourced and they simply want to know what they can do about it. Often they believe there is a crime spree in their suburb and there are simply too many crimes for police to pursue. But, for whatever reason, they do not report the incident, and that is a problem for us all. Of course, the statistics that we usually deal with—the statistics that attract a large amount of publicity in the media—are reported crime statistics, not real crime statistics.

The Opposition's amendments will force the Government to focus on crime reduction and lifting the reporting of all crime instead of its current obsession with media strategies. The changes will also encourage the Government to simplify the multiple telephone numbers that are currently used to report crime. The Government's police assistance line, which has become a glorified filing cabinet, contributes to the disconnection between local communities and police. That is a real problem. In all electorates in metropolitan areas—this does not occur to the same extent in regional and country areas but it is certainly a problem in metropolitan areas—there is almost a total disconnection between local communities and police. Somehow we must remake that connection, get police and communities working together, re-establish confidence and increase that reporting level.

Changing the commissioner's contract to encourage the highest possible reporting of crime might assist us in our objective of reconnecting communities and police. We must encourage local reporting of crime and re-establish strong connections between communities and police. The community has a fear of crime simply because there is a high level of crime in New South Wales. Regrettably much of that crime is unreported. A few months ago the Carr Labor Government proposed to conduct a survey on the perception of crime. I said at that time, and I say again today, "Premier, we do not need another survey to tell us what we already know." We have the results from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. New South Wales has a high level of crime, a high level of community concern about crime, and a low level of reporting crime. The Government's suggestion for a survey is just another of its media strategies on policing—and that is the problem. The Carr Labor Government puts a great deal of effort into media manipulation, not into supporting front-line police. I have spent many days talking to residents across New South Wales, most notably in the Premier's electorate of Maroubra. Many people live in fear of crime and also in fear of reporting crime. That is a major problem.

At the moment the police radio is not digitally encrypted, which is ridiculous. Anyone can go to their local Radio Shack, Tandy, or wherever, and buy a \$70 scanner to listen to the police radio. Obviously people of interest to the police would do that. That is why many of the gangs that are running around Sydney at the moment are able to keep one step ahead of the police. One implication of not encrypting the police radio is that people who report crime are at risk of being identified by the perpetrators of crime. I am aware of instances of that, and it is a real problem. For some reason, over the past seven or eight years the Government has been slow in providing funding for the installation of digital encryption. It should be an urgent priority, not only to protect crime but also to protect front-line police and people who report crime.

I return now to the survey proposed by the Commissioner of Police and the Carr Government. Obviously that idea arose because the Government's contract with the Commissioner of Police sets those two objectives: to reduce crime and to reduce the perception of crime. The way to reduce the perception of crime is to reduce crime by using effective police strategies, not media strategies. Under this bill the contract should be changed to emphasise those two objectives: firstly, to reduce the level of crime and, secondly, to encourage the reporting of crime. A few months ago, when the Government was floating the idea of a survey of crime,

Amanda and Walt—the Premier's press secretaries—were planning police strategies for the next couple of years. They decided to conduct a survey and to ensure that the survey produced results that showed that the community's fear of crime was higher than the reality on the streets.

Amanda and Walt decided next to put in place a television advertising campaign to encourage people to feel safe. That television advertising campaign was probably to start in 2005 or 2006 and to run right up to the 2007 election campaign. Obviously it would be run in the 18 months leading up to the next State election to try to convince people that there is no crime problem in New South Wales. I say to the Premier and the commissioner: We have a significant crime problem in New South Wales. When we compare data from other States and Territories and international statistics we find that New South Wales has a high level of crime. Some categories of crime might have reduced, but since this Carr Labor Government came to office crime has gone through the roof.

Last year there was a disturbing trend among senior police to use the two assistant commissioners as nothing more than press secretaries for the Premier's office. The Opposition raised that matter mid-year and pushed it fairly hard. I am pleased to say that it appears that the two assistant police commissioners have gone back to doing their job, which is to manage the operations of police in New South Wales, not to turn up on half an hour's notice at the whim of Ross Neilson, Amanda or Walt Secord, to do whatever is required for a press conference with the Premier, or whoever is the latest Minister for Police. The two assistant police commissioners should be doing their job and taking care of police, not acting as apprentice press secretaries. We also need to move beyond this ridiculous Uncle Ken strategy introduced by the Carr Government prior to the 2003 State election. That was all part of the media strategy and I am sure it was effective in introducing Ken Moroney to the New South Wales community; but let us get over that and move on. We do not want Uncle Ken. For the people of New South Wales, Uncle Ken has now become a distant relative.

Commissioner Moroney is not pursuing the interests of the community at the moment. He has not been doing that since he took over the job. The reason for that is that his contract is fundamentally flawed. Let us move into a new era in which Uncle Ken is transformed into a Commissioner of Police working for the people. I warn the Government that if it goes ahead with the proposed crime survey and it spends taxpayers' dollars on it, the Opposition will rip it apart, as will the New South Wales community. The Government should not go ahead with that survey. If the survey has commenced the Government should stop it, admit that dollars have been spent on it, and move on with more effective strategies. High-visibility policing has always been a major issue for the Carr Government, but it should admit that it is a stunt. The former Minister for Police did that. An article in the *Sun-Herald* on 26 May 2002 states:

NSW Police Minister Michael Costa has admitted Friday night's police blitz was as much a public relations exercise as it was about arresting criminals.

We know and the Minister knows that it was a stunt. Let us stop doing that sort of thing and put dollars back into effective policing. Nothing could be more counterproductive than spending a lot of money on getting a lot of police into one small location for a short time, as long as the television cameras are there. As soon as the cameras are gone, the police are gone. We do not want that, the community does not want that and local members do not want that. We want effective policing in every suburb all the time. Earlier I mentioned that since Bob Carr had been elected Premier, crime has gone through the roof. I produced an analysis of the figures that were published last year, which states:

Since Bob Carr was elected Premier in 1995, 45 of the 62 categories of "*Recorded Criminal Incidents*" have increased substantially—in most cases dramatically.

Attempted murder is up 50 per cent; manslaughter, driving, is up 180 per cent; assault is up 69 per cent; sexual assault is up 50.5 per cent; indecent assault, act of indecency, is up 19.2 per cent; abduction and kidnapping is up 50 per cent; robbery without a weapon is up 37.5 per cent; robbery with a weapon not a firearm is up 75.4 per cent; and the list goes on. Crime rates are up but the Government and the spin doctors are telling us that they are making

progress in reducing crime. They may be making progress in some areas but since the Carr Labor Government came to office crime has gone up and it has not come back down. I published information on a number of gun crimes in New South Wales that can be identified publicly. My list would have to be multiplied by three or four to match police data.

In last April last year I highlighted gun crimes across New South Wales, especially in Sydney, about six months before the Government was dragged kicking and screaming to establish Task Force Gain in October and to put Bob Inkster in charge. For six months the Government and the commissioner's office continually told the people of New South Wales and me that there was no problem. The Government and the commissioner's office were asleep at the wheel while this gang crime has been building up over the past 10 years. There was no shortage of warnings. Every few weeks we saw another newspaper article about another secret report that was available to senior police that told a different story to the propaganda put out by the Carr Government.

But finally in October we were able to put a task force into south-west Sydney to do something about the gang crime. Unfortunately, that task force is only dealing with about 10 per cent of the gun crime that is plaguing New South Wales at the moment. Local area commands, other task forces and other crime commands are the ones who have to deal with the other 90 per cent, and all those people are the ones who are suffering a budget squeeze. Every local member in the House at the moment knows from their local police that they are all under the hammer on their budget; they are all suffering the squeeze for overtime, for shift penalties, for phone expenses and so forth.

Debate resumed from 19 February.2004

Mr PETER DEBNAM (Vaucluse) [10.01 a.m.]: Last week I introduced this bill and spoke for some time about its objectives. I will read a couple of them and move through a few other topics fairly quickly. The objective of the bill is essentially to change the police commissioner's contract and establish two objectives for the commissioner: one, to reduce crime and the other one, to encourage the highest possible reporting of crime. That is very different from his current contract, which has two objectives: reduce crime but also reduce the perception of crime. The difficulty that the Opposition has with the commissioner's contract is that reducing the perception of crime requires media strategies. An extraordinary emphasis is placed on media strategies from the Government and from the commissioner's office, and we think that it is counterproductive. Given that the police commissioner's contract is up for renewal in May this year, it is an ideal time for the Government to change the terms of the contract on its own account or to accept the proposal I put forward in this bill to change the contract and establish the two objectives: reduce crime and increase the reporting of crime.

It is worthwhile commenting on a hysterical press release by the police Minister last week after I addressed the House on the bill. I will comment briefly on a few points. The press release is dated 19 February and consists of three pages. I did not think anyone on the planet apart from me was going to read it, but I read it. The Minister starts by attacking me for my "consistent and vicious attacks on Commissioner Ken Moroney". That is simply not true. It might be in the Minister's mind but it just shows how out of touch he is with the policing portfolio and what is happening in New South Wales. What I am doing with this bill and in many public statements is saying that the commissioner's contract is fundamentally flawed. Ken Moroney is a career police officer who has had an excellent career in NSW Police. The Opposition has no difficulties with Ken Moroney at all; our problem is with his contract. It is wrong and it should be changed.

The Minister went on to say in his press release that I had claimed that Commissioner Moroney was not committed to reducing crime. That is not true either. I did not say that. I have acknowledged that the commissioner's current contract has two objectives: one is to reduce crime and one is to reduce the perception of crime. The perception of crime objective is just plain wrong. The Minister went on to quote from my speech where I said, "Uncle Ken, for the people of New South Wales, has now become a distant relative. He really is not pursuing their interests at the moment. He hasn't been since he took over the job." But what the Minister did not include in the press release was the next sentence, which said that the

reason for that was because the commissioner's contract is fundamentally flawed.

The Minister's press release then runs through a bit of abuse, which I will not read into *Hansard*, and then refers to reporting percentages. The Minister might like to clarify his press release because the percentages in his bullet points state that the reporting of assault has increased from 30 percent in 2001 to 39 percent in 2003 according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. But according to the ABS there is no published figure for that, so it would be interesting to know where the Minister got the figure from, whether it is correct or simply a typo. The Minister stated that the reporting of crime was increasing, and that is all very good. That is our objective. It is very clear what we are trying to do: to make sure that the police commissioner, the Government and every police officer in New South Wales encourages the highest possible reporting of crime. The press release also states that a cursory glance at the NSW Police web site showed at least two links to report crime.

The Minister then talked about the Police Assistance Line. He did not talk about the second link. I can only assume that the second link is the email link that is shown on the police web site. I suggest that if the Minister tried to use that link to report crime he would not get very far. I tried to do it and after an exchange of about three or four emails with police they convinced me that there was no way I could use that link to report crime. As I said, the rest of the press release is hysterical. Getting back to the real issue, we need to acknowledge that it is counterproductive when the Government and the commissioner's office spent almost all their time talking down the crime problems. Having taken over the shadow portfolio after the election last year I focused on an issue that it was very apparent was out of control, and that was gun crime. An article the *Daily Telegraph* ran on 28 May 2003 was headed "Every second day, somebody is shot in Sydney". I am quoted in the article as saying, "Despite all the warnings from crime authorities in recent years, the Carr Government has just been asleep at the wheel about gun crime, especially in south-west Sydney."

I suffered every abuse in the book in the 24 hours following that, from the Government and to some extent from the commissioner's office, which was saying that there was not a problem. I was putting on the public record the fact that there was a major problem with gun crime in southwest Sydney, despite the Government's denial. The next day the police Minister put out a press release, dated 29 May, in which he again ridiculed what I was saying. He basically twisted it to suggest that I was trying to undermine the national handgun buyback. The point I made was that it had nothing to do with gun crime in southwest Sydney. The police Minister said in the middle of his press release, "And he's produced a wacky five-point plan on crime". I pushed that five-point plan from April through to October. Honourable members would be aware that I kept putting out a list of gun crime in that entire period. It listed every shooting, armed robbery, stolen firearm, carjacking and drive-by shooting. Finally, on 23 September, the Minister produced his own plan, a nine-point plan.

So it took him from May through to September to realise that he had to do something. I continued pressure on the Government after the September press release and finally, on 22 October last year, the Government created Task Force Gain. But it had taken the six-month of pressure from the Opposition and pressure from the community to get the Government to move beyond denial and abuse of the Opposition. That is a window on the problem that we have in New South Wales at the moment with crime. The Government is more focused on silencing critics and denying problems than it is on actually doing something about the problems. I indicated that one of the main objectives of the bill I have introduced is to increase the reporting of crime. The latest ABS figures on personal crime show that in 2001, 38.6 per cent of robbery was reported to police, 29.8 per cent of assault was reported to police and 16.1 per cent of sexual assault was reported to police.

In 2002 those figures have increased. As I said before, the Minister is quoting 2003 figures, and I do not know where he got them. He might like to explain that. But whatever the figures are, our objective, from the point of view of the Opposition, the Government and the Parliament, is to get those reporting figures as high as possible. The figure for reporting car theft hovers within a few per cent of 95 per cent each year. Most people report the theft of their car because it is their second biggest asset and they want it back. They also need to report the theft for insurance purposes. That is why the reporting figure is up to 95 per cent.

We would like to use that sort of figure as a target to increase the other reporting figures for robbery, assault, sexual assault, break and enter, attempted break and enter, and so forth.

The other reasonably high figure is for break enter and steal, which tends to hover around 70 per cent. The reason for the relatively high reporting rate is because typically the victim is going to claim on insurance and would need a police report to do so. But for attempted break and for crimes against a person, such as assaults, the figure goes down as low as 30 per cent. It is in everybody's interest that we get that reporting percentage up as much as possible. To do that the Government either accepts this bill or does what it usually does with my bills: waits a few weeks and introduces its own version of the bill, which is what it did with the confiscation of cars from car hoons. I have no difficulty with that. I am prepared to have the Government vote this down, if it really wants to play politics, and then come back into the House next month and introduce its own version of the bill. If that bill fulfils the objective I have set out in this bill, then I would be pleased to applaud the Government.

Alternatively, the Government can simply change the commissioner's contract. In the ongoing negotiations currently with Commissioner Ken Moroney, the Government can say: We are going to change the contract; we are going to get rid of this perception of crime thing—which is all about a pre-election stunt and media management—and we are going to move toward more reporting of crime. Beyond changing the contract it also has to be possible for people to report crime. At the moment built-in barriers exist across the system for reporting of crime. Many people who want to report a crime know that they will go to a police station and they will either be told to ring the police assistance line or they will be told, "Yes, all right, we will take care of it", but they will not get an incident number. They may get somebody to actually record the report and give them an incident number but, generally speaking, there is no community confidence that reporting the crime is going to end up in the police computer system and that something is going to be done about it.

The reason for that is because the Government has changed the system for reporting crime. It has established the police assistance line, which the Coalition has said on a number of occasions is simply a glorified filing cabinet. We are not convinced that these crimes actually get through to the local police. I believe it is also one of the reasons why a disconnection has developed between local police and local communities, and that is of great concern. I think it is probably time for the Government to have a look at the police assistance line and do what we have been suggesting for some time: shut it down, put the resources back into reconnecting local communities and local police and to make sure the report goes through the shortest possible channel to get to local police officers.

Mid last year an Auditor General's report on the police assistance line indicated that in the order of 37,000 calls were abandoned. The police Minister's response was to say, "Well, that is not a bad percentage for a call centre when you look at the totality of it". But the Minister has to understand that these were calls for assistance from people in the community who were victims of crime or fearing crime. The fact that 37,000 of them abandoned the call before it was answered has got to be a major concern to everybody.

In changing the contract negotiations and in changing the reporting channels we can make real progress. I think it is important that the Government now address this issue. It is obviously going to have to respond to this bill in the next few weeks and, as I said, I would be delighted if it embraced the bill. I would also be delighted if the Government introduced its own version of the bill or if it simply changed the contract negotiations and incorporated the changes in the police commissioner's contract. It is worth pointing out again that on so many issues we have had to lead this Government kicking and screaming on law and order issues. Despite the fact that the Premier is very good as a master storyteller, getting out with his spin and pretending he is tough on law and order, nothing could be further from the truth.

We had to lead the Government in an innovative measure of confiscating the vehicles of car hoons back in 1996. We had to lead the Government on the issue of getting more police in New South Wales, and we did that over a couple of elections. We have had to lead the Premier on reform of bail laws, and the Government is making slow progress on that. We have had to lead the Government on oversight—the Director of Public Prosecutions is an

issue that the shadow Attorney General has pursued again in the past 24 hours. We have had to drag the Government, kicking and screaming, to fight gun crime in south west Sydney, and after six months finally getting Task Force Gain established. We have had to lead the Government on the issue of crime statistics, and I note that it is 15 years since the Coalition first sought to have more frequent than annual reporting of crime statistics. It has taken 15 years of pushing from the Coalition to move to the quarterly crime statistics system that was announced last month. We will continue to push for at least monthly crime statistics that are broken down by local area command and by local government area.

We have had to push the Government on domestic violence. Depending on the local area command at the moment, police first response units spend something in the order of 50 to 70 per cent of their time dealing with domestic violence issues. Clearly there has to be a reform in the way domestic violence is dealt with to allow police to deal with other issues as well. We have lead the Government on radio encryption. We have pointed out that Paul Whelan, one of the former police Ministers, promised back in 1997 that he would ensure digital encryption of all police radios. It is now 2004 and it has not happened. There are only a couple of channels of police radios that have digital encryption, and they are used for very high priority and high security tasks. Meanwhile, the rest of the police have to deal with an open circuit. As a result, gangs can simply buy a \$70 scanner and listen to police radio. No wonder the smash and grab gangs and the armed robbery gangs are able to stay one step ahead of the police. No wonder that people who report crime are occasionally threatened by the criminals themselves because they have heard the name and address of the victim of the crime over a police radio. Digital encryption on all police radio channels has to be put in place as a matter of urgency.

The issue that we are raising today is the reporting of crime. We have again lead the Government by saying: let us change the system to ensure that we are all working to get the highest possible reporting of crime. It is important, and local members should look at their own community and support the bill. I would like to see all members talk about this bill, and I would certainly like to see them support the bill or argue in caucus for the Government to introduce its own bill. I commend the bill to the House.