

Second Reading

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.16 p.m.], on behalf of the Hon. John Hatzistergos: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to incorporate the second reading speech in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Council Law Enforcement Officer) Bill.

The object of the bill is to amend the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act 1999 with respect to sentencing for crimes committed against parking officers, council rangers, and other employees of Local Councils exercising enforcement functions.

Council employees such as parking officers and animal control officers provide important services to the public. But unfortunately, many have their personal welfare put at risk when they go out to perform their duties.

The Southern Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils has advised the Government that between July 2007 and June 2008, some 31 serious assaults, 41 common assaults, and over a thousand incidents of verbal abuse, intimidation and harassment had been recorded against their officers.

While of course no-one likes seeing a fine left on their windshield, committing acts of violence against these hardworking men and women who are simply doing their jobs is totally unacceptable.

Section 21A (2) of the Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Act provides for aggravating factors which are to be taken into account by a sentencing judge.

Subsection 21A (2) (a) of the Act provides that it is to be an aggravating factor on sentencing if the victim was a police officer, emergency services worker, correctional officer, judicial officer, health worker, teacher, community worker, or other public official, exercising public or community functions and the offence arose because of the victim's occupation or voluntary work.

The bill amends section 21A (2) (a) so that it includes the words "council law enforcement officer".

This will ensure that these officers are covered by this section.

The bill also makes consequential amendments to the table in part 4 of division 1A of the Act to mirror the amended wording of section 21A.

Council law enforcement officers undertake a key role in the community.

Ensuring alcohol free zones remain alcohol free, ensuring that dangerous dogs in the community are managed properly and making sure that traffic regulations are dealt with appropriately are all functions undertaken by these workers.

And under recent changes introduced by this Government to help reduce incidents of alcohol-related violence, enforcement officers have been granted new powers to confiscate and pour out alcohol when people are drinking in alcohol free zones.

This bill will allow council enforcement officers to take on these duties with confidence that they have the protection of the law behind them.

These new protections are a great win for these workers, granting them the same level of protection already provided by the Act to other frontline professions such as teaching and community work.

And that's why these changes have already been welcomed by both representatives of local councils and their employees.

Ben Kruse of the United Services Union, which represents thousands of council employees across the State, said this in a media release on 30 March 2009, and I quote:

No one deserves to be bashed, spit on, punched, kicked or have objects thrown at them while they are at work, but this is the reality that these workers face every day.

We are pleased that finally steps are being taken to address this issue and protect council workers from serious abuse. And in correspondence with my office, the Local Government and Shires Association has also backed the proposed changes, saying this, and again I quote:

The Local Government and Shires Associations welcome additional protection for local government enforcement officers during the execution of their duties, which ensure the efficient functioning of our local communities.

The bill has also been publicly backed by individual council officers working on the front line.

For example, on 31 March 2009, the *Illawarra Mercury* reported that Shell Harbour City Council ranger supervisor Craig Nolan, a ranger for eight years, has welcomed the new laws.

The *Mercury* reported that Mr Nolan said this about the bill, and I quote:

It can only help ... considering that we're patrolling school zones to make things safe for the residents, verbal and physical abuse is just not warranted.

Council law enforcement officers should not have to put up with being assaulted for doing their jobs, and deserve the additional protection of the law.

This bill sends a clear message that assaults and other criminal conduct towards council officers will not be tolerated by this Government.