

POLICE AMENDMENT (POLICE PROMOTIONS) BILL 2013

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Second Reading

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.10 a.m.], on behalf of Mr Greg Smith: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Police Amendment (Police Promotions) Bill 2013 implements the recommendations of a review into the police promotions system, as established by the Police Act 1990, and the Police Regulation 2008. The bill proposes to reform the police promotions system to improve the ability of the NSW Police Force to fill promotional positions while protecting the integrity of the system. It aims to maintain corruption resistance.

Amid a regime of corruption alleged over many years, a ministerial inquiry was conducted into the police promotions system. This led to the current rank-oriented process being implemented in 2006, with the first appointments made in 2008. The scheme covers promotion to sergeant, senior sergeant, inspector and superintendent. Officers are selected for, and appointed from, promotion lists for each rank. Officers must pass a number of assessments to obtain an eligibility mark, which determines their place on the promotion list. Applicants are graded on their on-the-job performance, technical policing knowledge, examination, learning, and assessment components. Officers must also meet other specifications, such as time spent at rank, and pass an integrity clearance.

A review of the police promotions system was conducted by the Hon. Lance Wright, QC, former president of the Industrial Relations Commission. The review made a number of recommendations regarding specialist and leadership positions including superintendents and senior sergeants. The NSW public sector as a whole is focusing on improving leadership and strengthening its leadership levels. It is timely for the NSW Police Force to bolster its leadership ranks with improved ability to get the right people into the right jobs. A key concept of the current promotions system is that it is the same for all ranks, including superintendents. However, the NSW Police Force does not believe the present system delivers candidates who can perform in any position at the rank of superintendent.

There are few superintendent positions in the NSW Police Force—only about 130—and that reflects the seniority of these positions. Superintendents head up commands including local area commands. Some superintendent positions require unique skills, knowledge and experience. Some commands may have unique challenges such as counterterrorism. They are our key front-line leaders who manage serious incidents on a daily basis and front the media to report on issues. They provide strategic leadership to their officers, who at times number in the hundreds. That is no easy job. I have had the privilege of meeting a large number of our fine hardworking men and women, particularly superintendents, across the State. I concur that it is no easy job. I know they have the full support of everyone in this place. It is tough on the front line, where they put their lives at risk to protect the community. I am in awe of

them and pay tribute to them at every opportunity. That is why we need quality superintendents who can empower their teams, be they detectives or general duties, to provide superior policing that the community expects and deserves.

The bill gives the Commissioner of Police a greater role in the appointment of superintendents, given their importance to the management of the NSW Police Force. Appointment would still be from the promotion list, potentially out of ranked order but still on a merit basis. The current pre-qualifying process for superintendents would remain in place, with an additional interview and selection committee process to ensure the best officer is appointed to the role. This is required because the officer with the greatest merit for a particular superintendent position might not necessarily be the person who is ranked highest on the promotion list.

The NSW Police Force must use modern management techniques, supported by strong leaders, to be efficient and effective. At the same time a key component of good management is the integrity of the organisation, and officers are the foundation of this ethos. The bill promotes integrity and anti-corruption principles consistent with an increased emphasis on this culture across government. It builds on measures implemented by the NSW Police Force arising out of the Wood Royal Commission to prevent misconduct and corruption. To be promoted, officers must pass an integrity check at two stages in the process: once before proceeding to the eligibility program—one of the final assessment stages—and again when an officer is selected from a promotion list for appointment to a position. The commissioner may change a decision to appoint a person based on integrity grounds and can suspend or remove a person from the promotion list or process on integrity grounds.

However, at present the commissioner may only refuse a promotion if the integrity information is "information that was not previously considered". The bill removes this limitation. It allows the commissioner to consider all relevant integrity information regardless of whether it has been previously considered. This is crucial because pertinent and at times significant information relevant to an integrity check may come to light some time after the initial information was considered. It may occur because investigations can span many years—decades, in fact. No police officer is above the law and if criminal conduct is alleged they will be subject to the same processes and procedures as any other member of the community.

This Government has made sure the Commissioner of Police has strong powers to deal with misconduct, up to and including dismissal. The reforms outlined in the bill are prudent and should be strongly supported. They will deliver enhanced powers to the NSW Police Force to help fill positions against a backdrop of integrity and transparency. I commend the bill to the House.