

Being tough on crime sends the right message

TASMANIANS have a right to feel safe in our community.

They have a right to be free from crime, and they have a right to expect justice when they are made a victim.

The Hodgman Liberal Government makes absolutely no apology for being tough on crime.

We committed at the last election to building a safer Tasmania and that's what we are striving to do.

In one of his Monday musings, columnist Greg Barns (*Mercury*, August 14) came to the perverse conclusion that those who oppose our policies are somehow more committed to reducing crime than the Liberal Government.

With all due respect to Mr Barns, the idea that Labor and the Greens "genuinely care about reducing crime and creating a safer community" is frankly laughable.

No one should forget that it was the previous Labor-Green government that cut Tasmania Police.

They took 108 officers off our streets and diminished our policing capabilities in public order response and cold case investigations.

The Liberal Government is well on track to delivering on our commitment to restore police numbers.

In fact, we are going further than that because we are recruiting additional officers to enhance our response to family violence — a scourge on our community that very much impacts on feelings of safety.

There are a range of other initiatives that we are taking to strengthen Tasmania Police and its ability to keep us safe.

In the current Budget, for example, we announced an investment in body-worn cameras, which will be rolled out to all uniformed officers.

These will not only help in deterring assaults against police, they will also help officers by providing evidence that can be relied upon later in court.

Mr Barns focuses his criticism on the Liberal Government's policy of introducing mandatory sentencing for several serious offences — a move we certainly do not back away from.

Tasmanians were outraged when Labor blocked our legislation in the Upper House to introduce minimum mandatory sentences for those convicted of serious sex offences against children.

Labor's attempt to explain its opposition as somehow being in the interests of

The Government is striving to meet community expectations, says Guy Barnett

victims was rightly condemned by victims' advocates and support groups.

The Liberal Government strongly believes that serious offences, like child sexual abuse, should be met with prison sentences that are in line with community expectations.

Anything less not only fails to deter crime, it also sends the message that victims are not important.

For the same reasons, the Government has announced we will be taking action to prevent the early release of prisoners under remissions granted through the Corrections Act.

It has been a significant concern for us that prisoners are being given remissions that allow them to be released up to three months before the date handed down by the court.

We will be preparing legislation to end remissions and make it very clear that, if you do the crime, you do the time.

The Department of Justice will now develop alternative models for incentivising good behaviour in prison — models that will not involve prisoners simply being let out to walk the streets.

In regard to concerns about conditions at the Risdon Prison Complex, the truth is that the Liberal Government is delivering additional resources to support staff at the prison to do this difficult job.

We have increased staffing levels at the Tasmania Prison Service by 47.3 full-time equivalent staff since coming to Government and up to 30 more correctional officers are actively being recruited, with applications currently being assessed.

This will see capacity grow by about 80 inmates.

We have increased recurrent funding as well as invested in various capital projects.

I stand by what I said recently: Prison is not a holiday, it is not a Club Med, and our message to offenders is very clear — do the crime, do the time.

Guy Barnett is Acting Minister for Corrections.