

CALL TO MODIFY CHECK LAWS

By **CHRIS CLARKE**

May 16, 2014, 10 p.m.



Volunteering Tasmania chief executive Adrienne Picone, Tasmanian Premier Will Hodgman, Lyons MHA Guy Barnett and City Mission chief executive Stephen Brown. Picture: PHILLIP BIGGS

VOLUNTEER groups have called for the state government to make changes to police check regulations within Tasmanian community groups, amid concerns the current system is turning volunteers away.

Organisations can ask volunteers to participate in a police check if the volunteer deals with "vulnerable" people on a regular basis.

Premier Will Hodgman visited Evandale's City Mission rehabilitation facility yesterday to hear concerns from Tasmania's volunteering industry.

The topic of police checks sparked debate during the hour-long forum, with Kings Meadows Inner Wheel secretary Pam Watkins telling the Premier that amendments needed to be made to the internal policy if the sector was going to continue to thrive in the state.

"It's become quite daunting now for people," she said.

"We have lost volunteers because they don't want to go through the police check.

"These are drivers who have been with us for 20 or 30 years.

“I think in 20 or 30 years, if there had been a problem, it would have come up.”

Despite her concern, Mrs Watkins admitted the system was a “necessary evil” in the industry.

“For new volunteers coming in, I can definitely see why (it is needed).

“You see in the paper every day that someone has been abused, so not to do it and then find that someone is abused would be terrible.

“I think it needs to be brought in now, but for the old members, no.”

Mr Hodgman heard Mrs Watkins concerns and agreed amendments needed to be made to the system.

“A lot of it revolves around people dealing with children and the aged and those with disabilities.

“We want to protect those people. It's a matter of finding the right mix.”

Volunteering Tasmania chief executive Adrienne Picone firmly believed the process was for the best, however.

“We do need to have police checks. They're there for a reason and they're there to protect vulnerable people.”