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AUSTRALIAN FEDERAL POLICE ASSOCIATION MEDIA RELEASE

ACT GOVERNMENT CLOSE TO QUASI-LEGALISING ICE, HEROIN AND COCAINE

The Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) has reviewed the ACT Government's latest submission on its path towards decriminalising illicit substances such as heroin, ice, and cocaine in the ACT.

AFPA President Alex Caruana said that amendments to Mr Michael Pettersson's private members' bill were a small step toward more sensible allowable weight limits for possession, but they still grossly fell short of community needs and expectations.

"The proposed amendments by the ACT Government are one step away from quasi-legalising illicit substances such as heroin, ice and cocaine in the ACT. To this day, no one has been able to tell us how the government will enforce and police the proposed \$100 fine for possession of illicit substances.

"No one from the Government has said what happens if a police officer issues a person with ten infringement notices over a period of time. At the end of the day, regardless of what the ACT Government legislates, it's still a Commonwealth offence to possess these substances, and the repeating of an offence is always a consideration for arrest.

"If someone has ten unpaid fines, what is the point in continuing to issue fines ad infinitum? At some point, intervention - either by police, the judicial system or enforceable education - must come into play to stop a cycle of illicit drug use and breaching of Commonwealth law," Mr Caruana said.

The AFPA is concerned that unpaid drug infringement notice fines would become a burden for an already stretched ACT Policing to manage.

"I don't want to see ACT Policing officers having to chase people for unpaid fines. They have enough work and better things to do than be debt-collectors for unpaid drug infringement notices?

"If the ACT Government plans on effectively ignoring the fines by not enforcing their payment, then that's quasi-legalising the possession of illicit substances," Mr Caruana said.

The proposed amendments by the ACT Government lower the weight of illicit substances that a person may have in their possession.

"This is a good small step by the ACT Government, but it isn't enough. 1 gram of heroin and 1.5 grams of cocaine or ice is still a lot.

"Organised crime and drug dealers can still use this amended weight to peddle illicit substances that cause considerable harm. The welcome mat is still there for them to set up shop in the ACT; if their drug couriers are caught in possession, then all they receive is a \$100 fine which might not even be enforced," Mr Caruana said.

The AFPA also has concerns about the ACT Government's amendments allowing possession of up to two illicit substances - effectively doubling the weight of illegal substances someone can have for personal use.

"Under the proposed amendments, a person can possess 1 gram of heroin and 1.5 grams of ice - with the fallback defence of 'personal use'. The worst-case scenario is that they would possibly be issued a fine that may not actually be enforceable.

"That's 2.5 grams of illicit substances on their person, which is more than the amount outlined in Mr Pettersson's original bill," Mr Caruana said.

For comments:

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