



Speech by

Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES

Hansard Tuesday, 31 August 2010

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

State Penalties Enforcement Registry

Hon. CR DICK (Greenslopes—ALP) (Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations) (10.18 am): On 1 January this year, a range of new State Penalties Enforcement Registry enforcement powers came into effect, giving SPER expanded options to recover unpaid fines from individuals who refuse to meet their obligations. Introduced by the Bligh government and supported by all sides of this House, these powers included a wheel-clamping trial and the expansion of driver licence suspensions to non-motor vehicle related offences. The broadening of driver licence suspensions is proving to be an effective tool in collecting unpaid fines for a wide range of matters, including court ordered fines for drug or break-and-enter offences or to recover compensation for offences such as assaults. The funds that SPER is collecting are being used to assist all Queenslanders to pay for roads, schools and hospitals and to hire extra teachers, nurses and police.

However, in the past eight months it has also become clear that some fine defaulters are still struggling to appreciate that they have an obligation to pay their outstanding fines or risk further sanctions. Responsible Queenslanders view driving as a privilege, not an entitlement, and they meet their obligations to society by paying their fines on time and keeping their address up to date, as they are obliged to do by law. Yet there remain some people who are not prepared to meet these basic obligations, even with the express threat of licence suspension hanging over their heads and even after being sent at least four notices. Losing your licence is a tough penalty, but it is a penalty that this government and every member of this parliament have agreed must be available as a sanction for those individuals who continue to purposely avoid meeting their obligations. It takes only one phone call, one letter, one email or one visit to enter into compliance. It is not a difficult hurdle to clear to retain one's privilege to drive.

There is no doubt that the new measures are having an effect. A record \$166.4 million was collected by SPER last financial year. The expanded driver licence suspension provisions have contributed to this, as have the new wheel-clamping and seizure-and-sale provisions. As at last week, SPER had 38,878 driver licence suspensions in place, with only about one-third of these for non-motor vehicle related offences. Getting a suspension lifted is easy: just pay your fine or enter into a payment instalment plan and SPER will lift your suspension the same day. During 2009-10, almost 40,000 suspensions were lifted as a result of debtors paying their fines or making arrangements to pay them off in instalments.

As I mentioned earlier, these new driver licence suspension provisions took effect at the same time as our 12-month trial of wheel clamping for high-value fine defaulters. Both of these enforcement mechanisms will be reviewed early next year as part of our ongoing commitment to continually improving the SPER system. We want this system to be fair and we are happy to evaluate the effectiveness of the new enforcement powers to ensure they are operating effectively and fairly. Nevertheless, I also want to reassert the government's determination to continue its pursuit of fine defaulters. If you simply refuse to pay or avoid paying an outstanding fine, you face the risk of tougher penalties. However, with one call to SPER on 1300365635 these tougher sanctions can be easily avoided.