

Question on Notice
No. 1352
Asked on Wednesday 1 November 2006

MRS SMITH asked the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (MS SPENCE)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the Burleigh Heads Community Corrections Office which I am advised is assisting with the implementation of a pilot program for traffic offenders at Coolangatta Magistrates Court—

Will she provide an outline of this program, how it was developed and anticipated outcomes?

ANSWER:

The Coolangatta Traffic Offenders Program was developed to address the growing number of traffic offenders in the area coming before the court and a rehabilitation gap for first and second time traffic offenders.

The Coolangatta Traffic Offenders Program is modelled on the Tweed Heads Traffic Offenders program and was primarily developed by the presiding Magistrate, a Legal Aid solicitor and staff from the Burleigh Heads Probation and Parole District Office.

The Traffic Offenders Program is an educational court diversion program that involves expert lecturers, from a diverse range of fields. The lecturers include driver safety experts, emergency service experts, substance abuse and alcohol counsellors, grief and trauma counsellors, police, lawyers and insurance specialists. The lectures focus on their involvement with the different consequences of alcohol abuse, like the adverse health effects and the impact on victims of road accidents. The many experts relate their personal experiences in relation to accidents including experts that will bring home the message of what drink driving and unsafe driving in a practical sense can mean.

Offenders can indicate an intention to plead guilty for traffic offences and may be granted an adjournment to complete the program. While there is no statutory basis for a reduction in sentences, Magistrates can take into account any changes in attitude exhibited by the offender while participating in the program. The fact that an offender has done something to address their offending behaviour demonstrates contrition for their actions which may be taken into consideration in the overall sentencing process.

The program is modular and runs on a continuous basis every week. There are five sessions which include driver safety and road fatigue, road trauma, grief and victim impact, drug and alcohol abuse and the law. Each session runs for approximately an hour to an hour and a half and is facilitated by volunteers from agencies such as Queensland Police Service, Queensland Transport, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service.

The participants pay a fee of \$80 for the program and any revenue generated in excess of the program running costs is distributed to community agencies on an annual basis.

The program is designed to increase participants understanding of their social commitments in relation to traffic laws in an attempt to reduce the number of repeat drink drivers and traffic offenders coming before the courts.