INCREASING PENALTIES FOR SUPPLY OUT BUSH IS A HEADLINE, BUT THAT’S ABOUT ALL.

“The Government’s increases in the penalty for supplying cannabis and amphetamines in bush communities is more about getting a headline than stemming the flow of drugs into remote communities,” says Shadow Minister for Justice, Jodeen Carney.

The changes increase the maximum period of imprisonment for supplying cannabis and amphetamines from 5 years to 9 years.

“The Government has made much of the change to the Misuse of Drugs Act, which were debated in Parliament today,” says Ms Carney.

“The Minister says it’s all about making remote communities safer by increasing penalties for the supply of drugs in Indigenous communities.

“The fact is increasing the maximum sentence for supplying non-commercial amounts of cannabis or amphetamines will not significantly increase imprisonment rates.

“A look at existing penalties shows that very few people charged with drug offences are ever sentenced to jail’.

“Figures published in the December 2007 Crime Statistics, (July-Dec ’07) show that only 7% of offenders convicted of drug offences received an actual term of imprisonment as the principal penalty. (p96 & p98)’.

“The same figures show that 43% of offences were associated with a fully suspended term of imprisonment; and 32% were associated with a monetary order, (p96).

“This is despite the fact the existing Misuse of Drugs Act already provides for 14 years imprisonment, (S5(2)(a)) imprisonment for 25 years, (S5(2)(b)(iA) & (ii)), and imprisonment for life (S5(2)(b)(i));

“Once again we see the Government pretending that increasing maximum prison terms will lead to increasing incarceration rates.

“The fact is this particular legislative change will have minimal impact on the rate of imprisonment of drug traffickers and the Government knows it.

“We support the change, but the existing penalties, combined with the Government’s own figures, give rise to a range of questions, matched by a degree of cynicism.”

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