

HEMP SA inc

PO Box 1019, Kent Town SA, 5071

phone info: (08) 8297 9442

e-mail: hempSA@va.com.au

internet: www.hemp.on.net



MEDIA RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Mr Hydes' Dr Jeckyll plan : "Madness" Say law reformers

It is Police Commissioner Mal Hyde who is "schizophrenic" on the issue of cannabis, claims leading Cannabis law reform lobby group HEMP SA. Last year at the SA Police's own Drug Conference it was Mr Hyde himself, who spoke of the need to "look beyond the square" in terms of solutions to the problems posed by illicit drugs in the community. Yesterday Mr Hyde backtracked, claiming that SA laws that have been nationally lauded, should instead be scrapped, and SA should regress to a total prohibition stance.

Ironically, SA's laws, the focus of the comprehensive Social Impacts study just two years ago, came out on top of total prohibition in every respect. Less people used Cannabis across the board, the system was fairer and had less negative consequences. In addition, it was cheaper to administer and more cost effective. Supported by law enforcers, the Attorney General's department and the DPP, SA's CEN laws have provided the model for the ACT, NT and even the New Zealand government are examining the scheme with a view to adopting it.

Mr Hyde acknowledges that the laws haven't stopped larger growers, with large plantations of over 14,000 plants seized in recent months, but these have always been considered major criminal offences with corresponding penalties. SA has the nation's toughest laws for large scale cannabis cultivation (up to 30 years jail and million dollar fines) – yet he claims this is "no disincentive". If this is no disincentive, just what penalties does Mr Hyde propose? Even countries with the death penalty for cannabis use/production have not stopped it, but surely not even Mr Hyde is suggesting we go that far!

What Mr Hyde must acknowledge is that many of the 40% of Australian adults who have tried Cannabis will continue to use it, despite the laws, and that "tougher" laws just make the situation worse. With over 36,000 criminal convictions in SA alone, for minor cannabis offences since the CEN scheme began, it is clear that we cannot arrest our way out of this mess the government has created. Mr Hyde is correct though, when he states that the law does send mixed messages. It's time we sent the right message. Cannabis use by adults should be legal, regulated, taxed and controlled by the government, not by organised crime. HEMP SA want to see the recommendations of the Australian Institute of Criminology in their paper "Legislative Options for Cannabis" adopted, which echoed those of the SA Legislative Council Select Committee and the SA Royal Commission.

We want Regulation across the Nation! Regulated availability with coffeshop sales and legal backyard homegrowing. Mal "Canute" Hyde's Dr Jekyll -like plan to re-criminalise Cannabis users and growers will only make matters worse and does nothing to address the real issues: Organised crime will be rubbing their hands in glee at the prospect of homegrowers being forced out of production and will be looking to expand their control by introducing Cannabis users to other more dangerous and profitable drugs. Meanwhile, concerned parents and Cannabis users themselves are aghast at the prospect of the "Al Capones" regaining their market dominance through prohibition as they did in America during the 1930's with its attendant crime, corruption and violence.

For further information: Mr Jamnes Danenberg on (08) 8297 9442.

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