

# Zero Tolerance: You Be the Judge!

Compiled by HEMP SA (Help End Marijuana Prohibition) [www.hemp.on.net](http://www.hemp.on.net)

## Zero Tolerance vs On-the-spot fines (CENs)

SA Premier John Olsen has recently called for Zero Tolerance regarding Cannabis users. This raises important questions such as:

- Would it stop or reduce Cannabis use or cultivation?
- Would it be socially less harmful?
- Would such a (total prohibition) approach be cost effective?

Luckily, a comprehensive study has recently been completed, definitively answering those very questions. In the *Social Impacts of the Cannabis Expiation Notice (CEN) Scheme Report*, SA's "prohibition with civil penalty" model was compared and contrasted with Western Australia's total prohibition approach, the very model advocated by John Olsen).

Unfortunately for Zero Tolerance supporters (and the SA public should the scheme go ahead) the study's findings suggests "toughening" our laws would be less cost effective, and more harmful, more expensive and more time consuming for Police and the Courts.

Despite (or perhaps because of) WA's more punitive laws:

- More people had used Cannabis in WA than in SA. (37% vs 33%)
- More people had used recently in WA than in SA. (16% vs 12%)
- More used on a weekly basis in WA than SA (21% vs 12%)
- More used on a monthly basis in WA than SA (33% vs 20%)
- More young people used Cannabis in WA than in SA. (26% vs 23%)
- More people thought it was ok to use in WA than in SA. (29% vs 27%)
- WA laws clearly encouraged more dangerous patterns of use (23% vs 10% used in a car in WA vs SA).
- More people in WA had a more negative approach to the Police than in SA. Less trustful of police (49% vs 18%) More fearful of police (43% vs 15%)
- More people in WA had negative outcomes from the legal consequences of being busted than in SA.
- More people in WA lost jobs or were denied jobs as a result of a bust. Negative employment consequences (32% vs 2%)
- More people in WA were evicted or denied housing as a result of a bust. Negative accomodation consequences (16% vs 0%)

Source: Makkai & McAllister. Marijuana in Australia: Patterns and Attitudes, NDS Monograph No31.1997, pp49-59) & Social Impacts of the Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme in South Australia, 1998, Ali, et al., pp22-25).

**Every single indicator measured was worse for WA than SA.  
Exactly which of these outcomes is John Olsen hoping to achieve  
with his Zero Tolerance proposal?**

**The Economics of the CEN Scheme vs Zero Tolerance**

Apart from demonstrating that CEN laws do not cause more people to use Cannabis, the study showed clearly that SA's CEN legislation was also far more cost effective (and therefore cheaper to taxpayers!) than prohibition based alternatives.

- Unit cost per CEN in SA was \$32.73.
- However, this rises massively to over \$600 when proceedings resulted in a jail term.
- The annual cost of the system (based on 1995/96 figures of 16,321 CENs with a expiation rate of 44%) worked out at \$1.24 million in costs, returning revenue of \$1.68 million.
- This resulted in a net profit to government of \$440,000.

WA's laws were more expensive to enforce up, taking up more court and police time and paperwork and were less cost effective. **Re-criminalising Cannabis users and growers in SA will see costs to the taxpayers increase significantly.** The study showed a return to prohibition would see costs skyrocket to \$2.01million with revenue of \$1.0 million (assuming 7,500 minor offences as compared to 16,321 CENS).  
Net loss to government \$1.1million.

(source: Social Impacts of the Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme in SA. 1998, Ali, et al., p31).

**Where is the cost/benefit analysis of the Liberals John Olsen's zero tolerance position?  
HEMP SA demand John Olsen's Zero Tolerance rhetoric must be exposed as cynical  
scaremongering, rather than a serious attempt to address the health, social and  
legal issues surrounding Cannabis.**

**Zero Tolerance: You be the judge!**

**Don't take our word for it! See the original government reports:**

Monograph 34 *The Social Impacts of the Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme.*

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/metadata/mono34.htm>

Monograph 35 *Cannabis Offences under the Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme in South Australia.*

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/metadata/mono35.htm>

Monograph 36 *Infringement versus Conviction: the Social Impact of a Minor Cannabis Offence under a Civil Penalties System and Strict Prohibition in Two Australian States.*

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/metadata/mono36.htm>

Monograph 37 *Effects of Cannabis Expiation Notice Scheme on Level and Patterns of Cannabis Use in South Australia: Evidence from the National Drug Strategy Household Surveys 1985-1995.*

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/metadata/mono37.htm>

Monograph 38 *A Review of Law Enforcement and Other Criminal Justice Attitudes, Policies and Practices regarding Cannabis and Cannabis Law in South Australia.*

<http://www.health.gov.au/pubhlth/publicat/document/metadata/mono38.htm>