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MEDIA RELEASE

NSW CORONER'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO SCRAP POLICE SEARCHES AND INTRODUCE PILL TESTING For immediate circulation

Rev Fred Nile yesterday delivered an Adjournment speech to the Legislative Council criticising the recommendations of the NSW Coroner to scrap police searches at music festivals and introduce pill testing for dangerous narcotics. Below is his speech extracted from the Parliamentary *Hansard*.

PILL TESTING

Reverend the Hon. FRED NILE (22:31): Tonight I wish to speak about the recommendations of the New South Wales Coroner concerning the manner in which dangerous use of narcotics should be dealt with at music festivals and public parties. I believe that the recommendations from the Coroner, which have been reported on today in *The Daily Telegraph* by the paper's crime editor, Mark Mori, and are also the subject of an editorial in the same issue, are a very bad move in our fight against drug abuse in New South Wales. In particular, the report by the Coroner recommends that the use of police sniffer dogs and body searches should be scrapped, while drug users should be able to have their drugs tested. This represents yet another policy surrender to a blight which has ruined so many lives of our citizens, especially among our young people. The report was drafted in response to the recent deaths of six New South Wales young people at music festivals.

The Daily Telegraph quoted one government source correctly stating that, reading the terms of the report, "you might as well legalise drugs". I fear that that is no exaggeration. Any policy that effectively gives consent to the consumption of so-called "safe" narcotics is sending one message: that it is okay to use drugs and that the only problem is the quality of the drugs. This is certainly not the message that any responsible authority should be sending to the community. While I understand and appreciate the intention of the Coroner, which is to minimise the risk of dangerous drugs at festivals, I believe testing will have the opposite effect in the long term.

Some dangerous drugs may certainly be filtered out, but such a system will only give a false impression of a safer drug culture in New South Wales. What is likely to occur in the long run is that the stigma will come off the use of illegal drugs and the pressure to reduce consumption rates will be removed. That will be great news to the supply side of our drug culture. Is that the kind of policy that we should be pursuing? Are they—the manufacturers of narcotics—the constituents that we should be doing favours for? Obviously the answer is no. I note that the police oppose the concept of pill testing as a solution to the drug abuse problem among the youth.

In November last year the Police Association congratulated this Government on investing in more police officers. That was one year after the association stated that more police numbers were needed to stop the spread of the drug ice throughout the State. I note also that the Government has indicated that pill testing will not form part of its policy to deal with drug-related crimes. That is certainly heartening. I mentioned that the Coroner's report was made in response to the deaths of six New South Wales young people. They were Alex Ross-King, who was 19, Joshua Tam, who was 22, Callum Brosnan, who was 21, Diana Nguyen, who was also 21, Joseph Pham, who was 23, and Nathan Tran, who was only 18. Let us remember the names of these young men and women.

Our duty should be to protect others like them from drugs at the source, not make the culture that gives rise to the spread and consumption of illegal drugs allegedly safe. Policies directed at making drug use safe ultimately protects the culture of drug taking, not the people taking those drugs, and this is the fundamental difference. The Coroner was reported as attending two music festivals as part of her personal research concerning how the police search for drugs. She was reported as saying that she was nervous because "there were lines and lines of police and dogs". I do not know why she would be nervous. She added that she was surprised at how intense it was.

All it takes is a little common sense and one should be able to see the problem here. What we are witnessing is a drug culture and drug market that is extremely well developed and widespread. That is what accounts for the police presence. We are witnessing the near complete desensitisation to the use of dangerous drugs among youth. That is where public policy should be focusing. Instead we have a Coroner who recommends we effectively surrender to the status quo by simply changing the administrative response to a crisis from trying to fix it to simply accommodating it. If we did follow the recommendations there is no guarantee that the rate of drug consumption would fall. As I already mentioned, I believe there are strong grounds to think that it would in fact go up.

That would be an insult to the memory of the six young people I have named here today. They would still be with us if more was done to target the source of the problem—the suppliers and the fact that the buyers seem to think that it is okay. Government-funded campaigns have done great things in the past. We have managed to change the culture of drunk-driving. We have changed people's attitudes with respect to various health issues such as smoking. Why can we not apply these successful techniques to this issue as well? I sincerely hope that the Government is true in its renunciation of pill testing and does not follow the Coroner's well-meaning but very misguided and dangerous recommendations. [Time expired.]

END

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Fred Nile". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rev Hon Fred Nile MLC