

The Rann commitments to police

Premier Mike Rann made some serious pledges to the Police Association before his re-election to office last month. But how and when will he deliver on them?



To what do you attribute your success in this election, given the extreme difficulty that any government faces in winning office for a third term?

Winning a third term was very difficult, but we had a good story to tell. When people went into the polling booths they compared their and their state's situation with what it was eight years ago.

Then, we were described as the basket-case state or the rustbelt state. No one does that now. We now have the lowest unemployment of any state. With so many defence contracts, infrastructure projects and new mines coming on, we've built a platform for future growth, prosperity and more jobs.

It hasn't all been about the economy, of course. Labor has toughened up more than 100 laws, recruited record numbers of police and built record numbers of new police stations.

We've also massively invested in health, with nearly 1,100 more doctors and 3,700 more nurses, and more beds per capita than anywhere else in the country. With an infrastructure spend five times greater than eight years before, our state is like a building site for new roads, rail, tram, desalination plant and many other projects.

Do you believe your government's strong stance on law-and-order policy played a part in Labor holding on to office?

Absolutely. I think people saw that we were prepared to take a much tougher stance, whether it was about Nemer, or ordering the Kapunda Road Royal Commission, toughening up the laws covering bikies in a whole range of areas.

I think people have seen that we have been constantly attacked by lawyers for

trying to tilt the balance of the criminal law to give greater rights to the victims of crime rather than the criminals.

What key message did you take out of the swing away from Labor?

Successfully winning an election is about getting the majority of votes in the majority of seats. The result we got was the biggest third-term majority of any Labor Government in South Australia's history.

There was a swing away from us, particularly in our safe seats. We've heard the message that people want us to continue to be bold, and for the state to keep moving forward, and not stall or lose momentum. But South Australians want us to consult with them more, and that's what we'll do. We're now embarking on a major community feedback programme.

Are you confident of delivering on the pledges you made to fund extra police numbers and improved technology for police?

Absolutely. We've delivered to the police in our first two terms, and we will continue to deliver in our third. The Minister for Police has already met with the Commissioner of Police to start planning the implementation of all policy commitments made during the election campaign.

What do you see as the most critical issues facing police officers today and into the future?

Policing in South Australia has undergone significant changes over recent years. While resources available to the police service have increased considerably, tasks police have to manage have also considerably expanded.

Alcohol-fuelled violence is a pressing social challenge around the country and continues to be an issue facing our police. We're equipping police with metal detectors and more powers to make our designated entertainment precincts safer, and we're conducting a review of late-night operators in areas including Hindley St and Glenelg.

The Government is aware of the concerns of officers in relation to the increase in the time it takes to deal with offences, such as taking DNA samples and hoon seizures. We are also aware of the impact our toughening of hundreds of laws has had on day-to-day policing.

That is why we have committed to work with the Commissioner of Police to streamline policing processes that currently divert our police from more pressing priorities.

What areas of the law will you now look to strengthen in order to assist police in their pursuit of criminals?

New laws set to be introduced over the term of this Government include:

- » Introducing South Australia's first-ever crime-reducing community court, where low-level criminal matters are brought before a magistrate within 72 hours of the offence being committed.
- » Giving police powers to take weapons away from violent offenders and take pre-emptive action on those who pose a threat to public safety.

- » Giving police new powers to scan people for knives with hand-held metal detectors in entertainment precincts.
- » Making drug trafficking in, or around licensed premises and events, an aggravated offence with a maximum 15-year penalty.
- » Changing the law to allow juries in appropriate cases to hear evidence of relevant prior criminal behaviour and offending by the accused.
- » Banning the sale, or supply, of a document containing instructions on how to make illicit drugs.
- » Stopping the revolving door of suspended sentences by making serious, violent and repeat offenders serve more time in prison.
- » Making it tougher for child sex offenders to get out of prison by setting a new benchmark for the Parole Board.
- » Hitting drug-dealers and traffickers where it hurts by targeting their illegal profits.
- » Continuing to support police and prosecutors with our nation-leading anti-bikie legislation to help disrupt and dismantle serious and organized crime gangs.

How soon do you expect legislation, which affords police limited exemptions for urgent-duty driving, to be in place?

Police v Hughes raised significant concerns among officers who engage in high-risk and pursuit driving as well as the general demands involved in driving in operational conditions.

We will introduce amendments to the current legislation that will recognize the distinction between the operational realities of police driving from that of the general public in the first half of this year.

In light of the stabbing of Senior Constable Jeff Allen last year, by parolee Shane Robinson, what legislative amendments will you bring forward to address the issue of parole?

The Rann Labor Government believes community safety should be the paramount consideration before any prisoner is released on parole.

During our last term we introduced laws that required serious and repeat offenders to serve more jail time before parole could be considered.

We also abolished automatic parole for violent offenders, removing the provision that saw offenders serving a sentence of less than five years (with the exception of sex offenders) being released from prison without the approval of the Parole Board.

SAPOL has also committed additional resources to manage parolees and is looking at a number of ways to improve the management of parolees and reduce reoffending.

In this term we will compel convicted sex offenders to serve no less than four fifths of their sentence before they are eligible for consideration for release on parole.

What incentives will your government consider to attract police officers to serve in rural and remote South Australia?

The 2007 enterprise bargaining agreement included incentives to attract police officers to hard-to-fill positions in remote and regional parts of SA. The incentives have proven to be very successful in filling hard-to-fill positions. It is highly likely that those incentives will again be looked at in the next bargaining negotiations.

How will your government go about reducing what police regard as excessive red tape and bureaucracy in policing?

This Government will work with the Commissioner of Police to streamline policing processes. We understand that the public wants to see highly visible police tackling crime and providing reassurance and we will consider every possible solution to enable our police to work more effectively and more efficiently.

This will include looking at ways we can remove time-consuming legislative and administrative requirements which currently divert our police from more pressing priorities. As well as looking at how we can move police away from certain functions such as the management of prisoners in police custody.

We have also committed to amending legislation that will allow identification of a person suspected of committing an offence via photographs or video (including still or moving digital images) in lieu of time-consuming physical line-ups. **PJ**