

Sexual assault trio

Attorney-General Daryl Manzie has introduced three Bills into the Legislative Assembly as part of reforms following the release of the Sexual Abuse Discussion Paper.

The Evidence Amendment Bill enables vulnerable witnesses to give evidence by alternative means, in accordance with the recommendations of the Working Party on Sexual Abuse.

The Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Amendment Bill extends the principal Act to all sexual offences, provides that Court approval must be obtained before evidence of the sexual history between the complainant and the defendant can be led, and amends the Act in relation to the need to corroborate the evidence of a complainant in a sexual assault.

The Oaths Amendment Bill provides a new test of competency for a child or other person giving unsworn evidence, which is that the court must be satisfied that person can give an intelligible account of his or her experience.

New sections to be introduced under the Evidence Amendment Bill provide for a Court to make arrangements for the taking of evidence from a witness (in certain circumstances) to protect the witness from embarrassment and distress or being intimidated by the courtroom atmosphere.

Changes under the Sexual Offences (Evidence and Procedure) Amendment Bill make provision for closed courts and for the protection of the identity of a complainant and regulate the circumstances under which a complainant can be cross-examined about prior sexual history.

War on crime in Alice

Legislation was expected to be introduced in the Legislative Assembly this month regarding several areas in the criminal code.

Minister Assisting the Chief Minister on Central Australian Matters, Eric Poole, said: "The NT Government will be introducing changes to the Summary Offences Act to update penalties for street offences such as offensive behaviour, indecent exposure and obscenity.

"There are also a number of ground-breaking legisla-

tive changes in relation to sexual offences. These changes will see criminals receiving harsher sentences as well as making it easier for victims of sexual assaults to give evidence."

Mr Poole said this might lead to an increase in imprisonments in the Territory, but said Alice Springs would cope quite well when the new prison was completed next year.

He also mooted the idea of surveillance cameras in the Todd Mall, but said it was up to the public to decide about cameras and possibly a police observation post there.

Urine tests in prisons

All inmates in Darwin Prison have been compulsorily urine tested for the first time this month.

Inmates at other institutions are in the process of being tested.

Correctional Services Minister Eric Poole said: "These tests will pinpoint those inmates who are or have been using illicit drugs."

He said the testing came after the NT Government passed legislation late last year, making it mandatory for inmates to provide breath, blood or urine samples.

He added that one of the pleasing aspects of the past few years had been the reduction in juvenile imprisonment and detention rates as well as a reduction in over-

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