

NEWS

Illegal prison recordings review to start

Matt Maloney

A REVIEW of police surveillance operations can now proceed, one year after it was revealed a botched operation at Risdon Prison secretly recorded privileged conversations between inmates and lawyers over three months.

Police, acting under a warrant, bugged a meeting room at the prison on June 15, 2017, to record a meeting with lawyer Jeffrey Ian Thompson, who was linked to convicted murderer Sue

Neill Fraser's appeal case.

However, the recording devices were not switched off until August 17, and subsequent meetings were picked up in the room.

Attorney-General Elise Archer told parliament this month the room had hosted 723 meetings over the recording period of 90 days.

Tasmania Police, on August 31, 2002, announced it would conduct an independent review of police surveillance operations and protocols, to be led by for-

mer state Solicitor-General Michael O'Farrell.

The review came to a halt when it was identified that most information required for the review was protected information, and it would be an offence for Mr O'Farrell to access it. An amendment bill to allow for Mr O'Farrell to access the required information passed in the Legislative Council yesterday.

Leader of Government Business in the Legislative Council, Leonie Hiscutt, said the amendment bill would

specifically be contained to the O'Farrell review and not any future inquiries.

Concerns were raised as to whether Mr O'Farrell would be given access to the illegal recordings, particularly that which involved Mr Thompson.

Ms Hiscutt said the review's terms of reference did not require Mr O'Farrell to listen to the recordings as the focus was on reviewing warrants, mitigation of the risk of capturing private conversations, and police compliance

with warrant conditions.

"It is not anticipated any recording would be given to the reviewer," she said.

"If the reviewer seeks a copy of the Thompson recording, the government would take further legal advice before making a decision."

Nelson independent MLC Meg Webb said it would potentially be a contravention of the Listening Devices Act if Mr O'Farrell was to access the recorded material.

She said she did not sup-

port the amendment bill as she did not support the O'Farrell review.

"I do not believe the O'Farrell review is the appropriate response to the illegal surveillance that occurred," Ms Webb said. "There are numerous things that it does not cover, including the failure of oversight mechanisms. It doesn't look like we'll come out of the O'Farrell review knowing what happened, how the failures happened and why the oversight mechanisms failed."