

conforms with what was agreed by police ministers at the May and July meetings, but also is a sensible and practical approach to firearms control. I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

ENVIRONMENTAL OFFENCES AND PENALTIES BILL
(Serial 190)
WATER AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 191)

Continued from 17 October 1996.

Ms MARTIN (Fannie Bay): Mr Deputy Speaker, I certainly welcome the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Bill*. It is good to see that the Territory is finally moving into line with other jurisdictions on the penalties that are imposed for environmental offences. The government's approach in choosing a stand-alone bill has merit. The penalties outlined by the minister in his second-reading speech indicate a significant change in terms of what kind of penalties can be imposed on individuals or companies breaching environmental standards. They are certainly getting much tougher. There are 4 levels of penalties ranging from about \$5000 at the lowest end of the scale to \$1.25m at the highest end. It is a steep change. This is something that we welcome. I congratulate the hard-working public servants who were involved in developing and drafting this bill.

Unfortunately, at times the somewhat flowery rhetoric of the minister in his second-reading speech does not stand up to a closer examination of the legislation. There are 2 cognate bills: the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Bill* and the *Water Amendment Bill*. No matter how tough it can be, at this stage the *Environmental Offences and Penalties Bill* will apply only to some sections of one of our acts - the *Water Act*. Despite the fact that the minister is talking and looking tough, there are major gaps in what will happen. The bill will have application only if other environment-related legislation is amended to which the new offences will apply. At this stage, it is merely to apply to some parts of the *Water Act*. Not only is the opposition concerned about that, but so also are many other Territorians. They have had that concern for a considerable time. Their concern is justified by the actions of the government and is not allayed by this legislation.

In his second-reading speech, the minister made promises about the future - promises about next year. Next year, a waste management and pollution bill is to be introduced. That is the future. As matters stand now, we have plenty of tough talking, but not much application of the new penalties. When we hear tough talking, we think there may be tough action. We think the Country Liberal Party will actually be concerned about the environment - about pollution and breaches of environmental legislation. But what is the reality? The reality is that there have been 2 prosecutions since 1938 under the *Water Act* and its predecessor. That is an average of one offence being actually followed up every 29 years. One would have to say that such a record might give rise to a slight blush from even this minister. It does not inspire a great deal of confidence in this new *Environmental Offences and Penalties Bill*, no matter what it looks like on paper. This minister and previous ministers of the Country Liberal Party have taken no action. There have been 2 prosecutions since 1938. At that rate, there will not