

conviction may be legally disclosed by a law enforcement agency to other law enforcement agencies, to the prosecution or in submissions on sentencing.

A person's criminal history may sometimes be relevant information for police in the investigation of a crime. The Northern Territory Police have access already to the records of a person's criminal background. However, these records may not be disclosed to other law enforcement agencies interstate. This limitation is out of step with modern policing given the increasing mobility of criminals between states and territories. For the police to be able to do their job effectively requires an increasing level of cooperation and access between the various law enforcement agencies. The amendment provides that section 12(4) will allow disclosure of spent convictions to other police forces for criminal investigation purposes. I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

CORONERS BILL
(Serial 220)

Continued from 3 March 1993.

Mr BELL (MacDonnell): Mr Deputy Speaker, this is a significant piece of legislation. It replaces the existing Coroners Act with completely new legislation. A number of important policy issues are involved in it. It implements a number of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which has been a highly topical issue. A number of policy issues surround the proposed replacement of the current act and they deserve some discussion.

The coroner's position is a very ancient one. I crave the indulgence of honourable members because the term always puzzled me. The word 'coroner' appeared unrelated to any other English words of which I was aware. I noted its similarity to the Latin word 'corona'. Thus, a coronial investigation is a Crown investigation. That is not particularly satisfying because most of us realise that coronial investigations are investigations into deaths. Some deaths are not the subject of coronial investigation. However, society requires certain classes of deaths, including violent or unusual deaths, to be investigated very closely.

The first reference that I found to the coroner was from the 12th century in the Hoveden Rolls. It is in Latin: 'In quolibet comitatu eligantur tres milites et unus clericus custodes placitorum coronae'. The original coroners were 'custodes placitorum coronae', which is to say that they were the guardians of the pleas of the Crown. The reference in that 12th century ordinance referred to 3 soldiers and a cleric as the coroners, which was the Latin form used after the Norman Conquest of England. We also find it in the 18th century, in Blackstone's Commentaries: 'The court of the coroner is also a court of record to inquire when anyone dies in prison or comes to a violent or sudden death'. The specific reference by Blackstone to anyone who dies in prison presages the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

I believe I have established the ancient nature of the institution for which we are providing a new legislative framework in line with changes in the jurisdiction elsewhere in the country. The minister referred to substantial amendment to coronial legislation in Victoria which seems to have established a significant number of changes in the coronial process and has been followed in a number of other jurisdictions. I should note in