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GOVERNMENT CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL DRUG EQUIPMENT

Possession of equipment used in the hydroponic cultivation of cannabis or in drug labs and so-called drug recipes are to be banned under new laws announced today by Premier Mike Rann and Attorney-General Michael Atkinson.

The *Controlled Substances (Possession of Prescribed Equipment) Amendment Bill 2007* will make it an offence to possess regulated equipment without a reasonable excuse and attract a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment or a fine of \$10,000.

The same penalty would apply for being found in possession of a document containing instructions for the manufacture of a controlled drug or cultivation of a controlled plant without reasonable excuse.

Mr Rann says the laws he is announcing today go much further than the pledge he made at the last election.

“We said then that this law would attract a maximum penalty of one year in jail or a \$4000 fine, but this is far tougher,” Mr Rann says.

Mr Atkinson says the Government has worked with South Australia Police to identify the items most closely associated with hydroponic cannabis cultivation and in illicit drug laboratories.

“We are putting the onus back on the possessor of this equipment to provide a reasonable excuse for having such equipment or face prosecution.”

The law will prescribe equipment such as:

- Some types of carbon filters used to filter the powerful smell of hydroponically grown cannabis plants;
- Lighting used in the cultivation of cannabis to heat the seedlings and plants and to provide lighting for their growth; and
- Drug laboratory equipment including items such as manual or mechanical tablet presses or encapsulators, distillation heads, condensers and reaction vessels.

Mr Rann says hydroponic cannabis growing has become a lucrative business and police intelligence indicates that it has now become one of the many organised criminal businesses pursued by bikie gangs.

“Similarly we know the bikie gangs are also behind the widespread manufacture and sale of drugs like ecstasy in their backyard drug labs. These laws are designed to rub these operations out.

“Over the coming months people in South Australia will see a number of new laws introduced to disrupt the activities of the criminal bikie gangs. This is just the beginning.”