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MEDIA RELEASE

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DRUG DRIVING TESTS FAIL INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

Independent MLC Ann Bressington this week attended a conference in Victoria hosted by the Harrington Group, a company based in the USA that has researched drug testing technology. Ms Bressington was asked to present at the conference because of the Bills she has introduced in parliament relating to drug testing, and said she was shocked by what she discovered.

“I was surprised to learn that the roadside drug testing technology used in Victoria and South Australia has failed international efficacy standards and that the test will only produce a positive result for someone who has smoked cannabis within 30 minutes of being tested,” Ms Bressington said.

“It is totally unacceptable that South Australians are spending millions of dollars on a drug detection program that picks up only a tiny percentage of offenders”.

In a Ministerial Statement on Thursday 25th October Hon. Carmel Zollo said that “The Rann Government is committed to getting the message through to irresponsible drivers – they do not belong on our roads,” and went on to say that “The government has an ongoing commitment to this road safety measure and an extra \$11.1million (over 4 years) was allocated in 2007/08 State Budget for an expansion of roadside drug testing, reflecting the Government’s commitment to continue with the drug testing regime.”

However, Ms Bressington said the research undertaken in the Rosita-2 Report by the Department of Clinical Biology, Microbiology and Immunology at Ghent University in Belgium, a three year international evaluation of onsite oral fluid devices, shows that the detection ability of the tests are almost non-existent.

The Report concluded that:

“At the end of the study, no device was considered to be reliable enough in order to be recommended for roadside screening of drivers. However, the experience in the state of Victoria, Australia shows that random roadside oral fluid testing of drivers for methamphetamine and cannabis (using the Securetec Drugwipe followed by the Cozart RapiScan and chromatographic analysis in the lab) has a deterrent effect. Government officials should carefully weigh the pros (deterrent effect) and the cons (risk that drivers will realize that they often test negative after having used drugs due to the limited sensitivity of the test) of introducing random drug testing with the currently available devices. Detailed analysis of the data for cannabis showed that DrugWipe devices gave a negative result even when very high concentrations of THC were found with Intercept.”

Ms Bressington said the study reveals that the State Government's detection methods are seriously flawed, and are therefore an appalling waste of taxpayer's money.

"It seems that the government is committed to being seen to do something [anything] about the drug drivers on our roads, but in actual fact they are allowing drug drivers to continue driving," Ms Bressington said.

"Cannabis is the most widely used drug in Australia with an estimated 200,460 users in South Australia. We now know why there was such a low detection rate with the 10,097 tests undertaken and only 294 drivers testing positive. If we are serious about road safety then this test is obviously not going to achieve the results we want. The Rann Government has wasted \$4.3 million and will spend a further \$11.1 million for a very limited effect. It is totally unacceptable."