



Bail booze bracelets: Magistrate’s bid to use alcohol-detecting technology on Victorian criminals

Wes Hosking, Herald Sun May 10, 2017

HI-TECH bracelets would be used to ensure alcohol-abusing criminals stay away from the booze in an expansion proposed by a prominent Victorian magistrate.

Drug Court magistrate Tony Parsons wants his court granted power to force offenders to wear the devices.

Under existing laws only the County and Supreme Courts have power to impose electronic monitoring for offenders on a community corrections order.

Mr Parsons, in a submission to a parliamentary inquiry into drug law reform, said while the drug court could theoretically impose a condition to wear an alcohol-detecting bracelet legislative change was needed “for the avoidance of doubt”.

“Electronic monitoring is not confined to monitoring just the location of a person,” Mr Parsons wrote.

“A relatively new technology called a SCRAM bracelet, allows 24/7 monitoring of alcohol consumption.

“These devices are being used in a limited number of cases by Corrections Victoria.”



Victorian Shadow Attorney-General John Pesutto with Dandenong Magistrate Tony Parsons. Picture: Paul Loughnan



The SCRAM alcohol-detecting bracelet.

SCRAM — Secure Continuous Remote Alcohol Monitor — bracelets test for alcohol consumption using alcohol released through the skin as sweat.

The lightweight water resistant bands take samples every half-hour around-the-clock and are able to recognise the difference between ingested alcohol and that picked up through the environment such as via deodorant spray.

The units are fitted with temperature and infra-red sensors to detect obstructions and removals should the wearer try to cheat the system.

People on drug treatment orders — which can last for up to two years and combine a jail sentence with a treatment program — would wear the bracelets.

They would also assist in ensuring offenders comply with an initial 9pm-6am curfew typically imposed on sentencing.

The bracelet expansion is among several ideas flagged by Mr Parsons, who states he has the support of many magisterial colleagues but not all.

He also wants a stricter bail test for crooks who commit an indictable offence while on a drug treatment order or who abscond from a rehabilitation program.

The test would put the offender in a show cause position as to why granting bail would be justified.

“Such a reform will underline the importance of the privilege of being on a DTO and will serve to increase the security of the community,” Mr Parsons wrote.

“To be in the community undertaking treatment is obviously a privilege granted to very few prisoners.”

Mr Parsons called for legislative change so magistrates could consider the harmfulness of the drug involved when sentencing for trafficking.

“The state of the law in this regard is entirely at odds firstly with the usual rules of sentencing that require courts to take into account the seriousness of the circumstances surrounding a particular offence and secondly with the community understanding of the relative harmfulness of various licit and illicit drugs,” he wrote.

“To say that an offence involving an ounce of cannabis ought to attract the same penalty for an identical offence involving an ounce of heroin affronts common sense and broadly held notions of fairness.”

The parliamentary committee is examining how effectively law and regulations minimise drug-related harms.

It will report to parliament in March next year.



The Systems and Alcohol Monitoring Systems bracelet, known as SCRAM. Picture: Supplied

<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/law-order/bail-booze-bracelets-magistrates-bid-to-use-alcohol-detecting-technology-on-victorian-criminals/news-story/>

Herald Sun
Melbourne, Australia