

# Green MP says vandals brighten up city

# Ga-ga over graffiti

A GREENS MP has launched an extraordinary defence of spray can vandals, saying graffiti brightened up the city and could be attractive.

Sue Pennicuik told State Parliament new laws cracking down on graffiti vandals were draconian and unnecessary.

She said graffiti vandals were being treated more harshly than dangerous drivers.

Declaring that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", Ms Pennicuik said corporate logos were as much a blight on the landscape as graffiti.

People who sprayed graffiti should be called graffiti markers, rather than vandals.

"A lot of graffiti, including tags, can be political, aesthetically pleasing and thought-

**Ellen Whinnett**

state politics reporter

provoking," the Upper House MP said in a 48-minute speech.

She said there were two points of view about graffiti, and "not everyone hates graffiti and not all graffiti is bad".

Ms Pennicuik's speech, and her bid to amend the new laws, were attacked by her rivals from across the political spectrum, with Labor MP Martin Pakula saying graffiti vandalism was idiotic.

"The vast majority of Victorians absolutely detest graffiti. They detest it because it is mindless vandalism," Mr Pakula said.

He said that 95 per cent of graffiti was not art. "It is not self-expression, it is not clev-

er, it is not political comment, it is mindless vandalism."

Ms Pennicuik defended her speech, saying she was seeking to highlight concerns about the harsh penalties and police powers under the new laws, which were due to pass the Upper House this morning.

She said offenders, who were mostly teenagers, could be jailed under the new laws.

She said the laws also created a reverse onus of proof, meaning people found with suspected graffiti implements, such as spray cans and stencils, would have to prove they were in possession of them for legitimate reasons.

"I'm not saying there shouldn't be any penalties — there should be — but that there should be a diversionary program for young offenders.

"Graffiti is a problem, I agree. No one likes tags particularly, and I don't like them. But do we want two-year jail terms for 15-year-old kids to be the penalty?"

In her speech, Ms Pennicuik said the cost of cleaning up graffiti should not be the reason for making it a crime.

She argued some graffiti walls, such as those in Hosier Lane in the city centre, were tourist attractions.

"So what is the price of having clean walls?"

"This Bill ... is an over-reaction to the issue of graffiti."

Ms Pennicuik also told Parliament that "one could say the graffiti can break up the monotony of urban space".

"While in one way of looking

at it graffiti is annoying and costly, the other way of looking at it is that it is an acceptable way of expression and it could be tolerated, and is tolerated, in certain circumstances."

Liberal MP Matthew Guy has a different view of graffiti.

He and two friends recently chased a pair of graffiti vandals across three suburbs.

Mr Guy said the trio were leaving a hotel after a Liberal Party function when they saw two men spraying a wall in Gipps St, Collingwood.

They chased the vandals across three suburbs, but gave up when a 000 operator accidentally disconnected them as they tried to contact police.



Sue Pennicuik

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