

BRAKES ON POLICE CHASES



A car involved in a police pursuit crashed in Tullamarine.

VICTORIA Police's new pursuit policy, which will see officers give chase only in the most extreme cases, has sparked fears criminals will be free to cause havoc in the community.

The new policy was announced yesterday and comes after a 2014 coroner's report recommended that police "never pursue a vehicle simply because it is fleeing".

But Police Association secretary Ron Iddles has questioned how effective the new policy will be.

MARK BUTTLER AND DAVID HURLEY

"Left unchecked some offenders may cause further harm to the community before police have an opportunity to stop them," Mr Iddles said.

"We expect Victoria Police's revised policy to be met with a mixed response from both members and the general public alike.

The coroner's report on which the new guidelines are based states police should pursue only if "alternative means

for apprehending the vehicle occupants are not feasible".

Assistant Commissioner Robert Hill said the new policy encouraged officers to think about alternative policing methods to chasing offenders.

"Offenders involved in pursuits are often known to police and, in many cases, it is possible to apprehend them at a later stage by using an investigative approach," Mr Hill said.

A pursuit will only now occur when there is an urgent need to apprehend a vehicle's occupants. Resources such as

the Police Air Wing will also be used to help catch offenders.

Officers must now plan chases and consider factors such as environment, location, roads, speed, car type and driver behaviour before deciding to start a pursuit.

Ruth Parker, senior associate at law firm Galbally Rolfe, welcomed the new policy.

"Victoria Police have sophisticated investigative methods and in most cases do not need to pursue a vehicle in order to locate it and effect an arrest," Ms Parker said.

But one officer told the *Herald Sun* he believed there were many unanswered questions over how police would now have to operate.

He said there was a risk of drivers thinking they could make a U-turn and drive away if they found themselves approaching a booze bus.

"What's the definition of a minor offence. Isn't drink-driving serious?" He said he feared police could now be blamed for not pursuing, rather than coping criticism because they did give chase.

TO CHASE, OR NOT CHASE?

A known offender is spotted running a red light and speeds off when ordered to pull over by police.

NO

A car matching the description of one used in a recent armed robbery refuses to pull over.

YES

Unknown person throws a bag of litter from a car and doesn't pull over.

NO

Police out on patrol notice a car perform a sudden and suspicious U-turn and speed off.

NO

Police spot a man wanted over historic sex offences. He doesn't pull over when officers try to stop him.

NO

A person known to police and who is a suspect in a recent drive-by shooting refuses to pull over.

YES



He said a motorist travelling at 20km/h over the speed limit was a serious hazard to others.

"What happens if we do pursue and he has an accident a kilometre down the road he said.

"Who's to blame for that?" mark.butler@news.com.au EDITORIAL, PAGE 20