

NSW: Sniffer dogs being used unnecessarily: liberties group

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Sniffer Daylead

SYDNEY, Nov 2 AAP - A 13-year-old girl was subjected to a sniffer dog search and accused by police of being a drug dealer, a civil rights group claimed today.

NSW Council for Civil Liberties president Cameron Murphy said the case was one of many which highlighted the unnecessary use of sniffer dogs by police.

"A thirteen-year-old girl was just with her friends, waiting to go to the pictures and she was pulled over by police and a dog started sniffing her," Mr Murphy told Channel Seven's Sunrise program.

"They accused her of being a drug dealer in front of all of her friends and this is the sort of attitude that's got the public offside and made the use of these dogs unnecessary."

Mr Murphy's comments follow a magistrate's ruling that the use of sniffer dogs to search people for drugs in public places is unlawful.

NSW police, the only service using sniffer dogs, said it would ignore the ruling and continue with the practice.

But the move has been branded irresponsible, costly and an abuse of power.

Mr Murphy said police should concentrate their efforts on nabbing big-time drug dealers rather than individual users.

"(Sniffer dogs) could be a useful tool, the problem is it's being misdirected where the primary focus of these dogs has been against drug users," Mr Murphy said.

"What the government needs to do is focus their efforts on the Mr Bigs of the drug business, people at the top of the drug pyramid instead of users in the way they have."

High profile drugs raids using sniffer dogs, such as those conducted recently on five Sydney nightclubs, were a waste of time because they generated few results, Mr Murphy said.

NSW Premier Bob Carr has offered to sit down with NSW Police Commissioner Peter Ryan and civil libertarians to discuss any concerns they had.

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