

NEWS

Most want crackdown on bikies

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MORE than two-thirds of Australians believe the law should be toughened to control bikie gangs and three-quarters support the introduction of Australia-wide laws, according to research.

However, Australians are not in favour of the key element of the crackdown currently being embraced by several states, which prevents outlaw bikies associating with each other under threat of imprisonment.

KEY POINTS

- Poll finds two-thirds want tougher laws against bikies.
- Three-quarters would like uniform, national laws.
- Strong resistance to laws proposed by several states.

A survey of 1000 adults by leading research company UMR also found that support for new laws fell away markedly if they were to reduce the civil liberties of ordinary Australians.

The findings are likely to give some heart to Premier John Brumby, who insists Victoria's existing anti-crime laws are the best in the nation. He does not want new laws that single out bikies, and is resisting the harsh anti-bikie legislation introduced in South Australia, where gangs can be banned, leaving members unable to contact each other or visit specified locations.

The NSW Government is preparing similar legislation, proposing jail sentences of up to five years for those who ignore orders against associating with other gang members, and the

Queensland and Northern Territory governments have declared they will follow suit.

The UMR poll, taken online between last Thursday and Monday, found that Victorians were the least likely of all state respondents to support harsher new laws if they meant a reduction in civil liberties for all Australians.

Victorians were also the most opposed to laws that prevented bikies from associating with each other on pain of jail. Forty nine per cent of Victorians were against such laws, while only 29 per cent were in favour. This compared with the national average of 45 per cent opposing and 31 per cent in favour.

Queenslanders, Coalition voters and rural Australians were found to be most in favour of a crackdown.

However, the poll found 70 per cent of respondents thought current laws were not sufficient and stronger action was required to rein in bikie gangs. Only 18 per cent thought current laws were sufficient, and 11 per cent had no opinion.

Opinion in favour of uniform national laws was even stronger: 74 per cent wanted the Federal Government to act, 12 per cent were against the idea and 14 per cent were unsure.

UMR managing director John Utting said public support for tougher laws was no surprise, given recent bikie violence. "But one could make the point that Australians are cautious of a heavy-handed approach," he said. "The public's lack of support for anti-association laws and the demand that their civil rights are not infringed demonstrate that the public don't want a knee-jerk approach."