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Rees applauds teen vandal's jail sentence

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New South Wales Premier Nathan Rees has welcomed a three-month jail term imposed on an 18-year-old woman for writing graffiti on the wall of a Sydney cafe.

Magistrate Ian McRae handed the sentence to first-time offender Cheyane Back yesterday for vandalising the wall of the Hyde Park cafe with a black marker last month.

The 18-year-old had pleaded guilty to damaging or destroying property.

She has been granted unconditional bail and has already lodged an appeal against the sentence, to be heard next month.

But Mr Rees says the jail sentence is fair.

"Everywhere I go, graffiti is an issue," he said.

"This sends a message that it's not something that the community regards as a frivolous offence.

"It is something that affects not only the aesthetic but people's sense of safety around the place if they see graffiti around and they think there is other anti-social behaviour going with it.

"I think a three-month jail term is absolutely appropriate."

But University of New South Wales criminologist Professor Chris Cunneen says the jail sentence does not match the scale of the crime.

"In the adult courts, a normal sort of penalty in relation to that offence would be a fine of some sort and some form of restitution for the property owner," he said.

"But I think there are other ways of approaching it. I'm not suggesting that a fine is the best way to do it.

"We've got some great examples from the Children's Court in terms of youth justice conferencing, which has been used in relation to graffiti, where you bring the offender together with the victim of the crime.



'Absolutely appropriate': Nathan Rees (AAP: Jenny Evans)

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"You reach some sort of resolution and the offender is held responsible for the offence that's been committed and I think that's a much more preferable way of dealing with this."

Professor Cunneen says the cost of imprisoning someone for three months is far greater than the price of cleaning up graffiti.

"We'd have to be talking \$30,000 or \$40,000 simply for her incarceration alone, let alone her legal costs," he said.

Anti-vandalism community group Graffiti Hurts has meanwhile applauded the sentence, saying graffiti costs Australian taxpayers \$500 million a year.

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