

REVISED CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2005–06

Melbourne — 13 May 2005

Members

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Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

Staff

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Witnesses

Mr T. Holding, Minister for Police and Emergency Services;
Chief Commissioner C. Nixon, Victoria Police;
Ms P. Armytage, secretary; and
Mr A. Clayton, executive director, police, emergency services and corrections, Department of Justice.

The CHAIR — I welcome our new witness, Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon. We appreciate your time this afternoon. We will try to allow you to leave to catch criminals as fast as we possibly can.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Thank you for that. It is very kind.

The CHAIR — Over to the minister to give us an outline of the police and emergency services portfolio.

Mr HOLDING — Thank you, Chair. With the committee's indulgence if I could just begin by clarifying a matter which was the subject of the exchange between Mr Forwood and I before. We were discussing design capacity and what beds were included in original design and what beds were not. I said that the six relocatable cellular accommodation would have been flexible capacity and not included in the original design. That advice is correct. But where additional permanent beds are provided, like the Nalu Challenge beds, the design capacity is adjusted along the lines that Mr Forwood was actually suggesting.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. Now to the overheads that have been distributed.

Overheads shown.

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for an opportunity to present on a very important part of what makes Victoria a very special place to live and raise a family.

The first slide shows how successful the government's strategy has been in recent years in terms of focusing on reducing the crime rate. You can see on the slide the offences per 100 000 population and it shows the trend from 1996–97 through to 2004. You can see the blue line ending and then the red line kicking in. What it really shows is that since the change in government there has been significant new investment in police services and resources, and that over time that investment has had an impact in terms of reducing Victoria's crime rate. The latest crime statistics tell us that crime is at its lowest level in a decade. For the first nine months of this financial year, although the data is not incorporated in this slide, we saw an 8.1 per cent decrease compared to the same period last year. Crimes against property are down, drug offences are down and other crime categories are down. We are very pleased with what has been achieved so far.

There are some areas, which we will talk about later on, where over time we would expect to see some increases occurring. For example, as I will outline — and I am sure the chief commissioner will do the same — the government is taking some very significant initiatives in terms of reducing the incidence of domestic violence. One of the challenges for Victoria Police in terms of operationally responding to that is that inevitably it will need to draw out a much higher level of reporting than may have occurred in the past, and that will obviously have an impact on our crime statistics over time. Many of these reductions in crime are the direct result of specific initiatives that Victoria Police has taken, particularly its Operation Vehicle Watch, which has delivered significant reductions in car thefts, and the Purana task force of which we were talking about before. Before the arrival of the chief commissioner I was congratulating the members of the Purana task force for the enormous contribution they have made to tackling organised crime in this state.

I might just skip to the next slide which shows police numbers. Here we see very encouraging results and figures. The numbers dropped significantly in the late 1990s. We can talk further about the impact that that had on the organisation if members are so interested, but we can really see that following the change in government significant reinvestment has taken place in Victoria Police, including the focus on increasing police numbers, sworn police officers, and police officers doing policing work throughout the state and local stations on task forces et cetera. That is very important in encouraging development.

The important thing that I just note here is that one of the reasons why we have been able to achieve this significant increase in the mustered strength of Victoria Police is that we have been able to get the attrition rate down. In the late 1990s the attrition rate in Victoria Police was 6.2 per cent, which was the highest of any state or territory in Australia with the exception of the Northern Territory. What we have now seen is the attrition rate fall in 2003–04 to 2.3 per cent, which is the lowest rate of any state or territory in Australia. It is a credit to the culture that has been developed at Victoria Police, but it also ensures that we are able to keep some of our most experienced and most valued members. That is one of the great things about keeping the attrition rate down; not only are you introducing into the organisation a large number of new recruits but you also keep those more experienced members.

The next slide is a bit of a gratuitous one, Chair. It notes the close correlation between the reduction in the crime rate and the increase in police numbers. The total number of police officers is on the left-hand axis and on the right-hand side is the number of offences per 100 000 population. It is a very encouraging slide which shows that the government's investment in additional police is paying dividends. Of course it is not an inexorable process; there is a point at which you see the law of diminishing returns, but we have certainly achieved a lot and we are very proud of what Victoria Police has achieved working with Victorians.

The next slide shows some of the key initiatives in this year's budget. I referred to the record police budget earlier at the commencement of the corrections presentation, but it is a very significant investment in terms of dollars. New police stations across the state are part of our LFS commitments being rolled out over the term of this government, and in this budget more of that tranche of additional police stations is coming on line, many of them in regional areas and many of them in rural communities where additional police resources and new infrastructure will be greatly appreciated.

Just two specific things which are an important component of this year's budget activities: firstly, the additional resources for the fight against organised crime, which is very important in terms of providing specialist investigators and new crime fighting technology — which is so important — and extra resources for controlled operations, which is part of a very significant Victoria Police organised crime strategy.

If I could also touch on the marine security environment: obviously following the events of September 11 and the international war against terrorism, it has been necessary for Australia to reflect on the security of some of its port assets. This is in line with requirements being driven internationally, in the US et cetera, and being driven nationally. This will mean that five of our highest profile ports — Melbourne, Hastings, Geelong, Portland and Welshpool — will be getting additional resources, including police having access to five extra vessels and specialist diving gear and assorted security equipment. So that is a very important one.

I want to touch on the road toll. This is always a matter of public interest, and from time to time public controversy, but as a government we make no apology for focusing so strongly on it. In fact I am certain that in years to come when people talk about the achievements of this government one of the things they will emphasise is the significant efforts that have been taken to reduce the road toll. Last year's result was a disappointing one in some respects, because we achieved our record result in the year before, but nevertheless it was still our second lowest road toll. It shows the results of the work that had been done over several years. I do not have the graph here, but going back to 1970 the road toll graph shows that very interesting progression from 1061 road deaths back in 1970 to where we are today. The interesting element of that graph is the significant progress that has been made since 1989. Even in 1989, or thereabouts, the road toll was in the mid to high 700s, so the significant progress that has been made over that 30-year period has been made in the last 10 years, and that is the period when we have focused most on speed and most on drink-driving. They are just a touch on some of the things that we will be focusing on in the next couple of years.

The CHAIR — Minister, you might have to make it a little more succinct. All of these are tabled with our report.

Mr HOLDING — The next overhead is the cost of road safety, so I would not elaborate on that. I shall touch quickly on emergency services, the other half of the portfolio. That overhead gives you a sense of the callouts and the responses by our emergency services throughout the state — the significant work that they do.

The next overhead shows a break-up of the volunteer percentages, which are quite interesting. The next overhead shows some of the things that have occupied our attention in the last couple of years including obviously the airport incident that occurred early this year in February; also the Melbourne storms were an important event for our SES. That little break-out graph shows the spike in calls as a consequence of that incident, and obviously the ongoing implementation of the Victorian bushfire inquiry recommendations. A particular asset initiative is the new headquarters for Lifesaving Victoria to be completed in March 2006, a very exciting new initiative and one that will help that new organisation go from strength to strength.

I conclude on the issue of communications. Obviously it is a significant investment which will have a significant impact on all of our emergency service organisations in Victoria Police — new computer terminals, the mobile data network, the emergency alerting system, the pagers across the state, and also the MMR — the important secure radio network for our fire brigade and the police.

The CHAIR — I take you to the private security firms. I refer to page 141 of budget paper 3 where reference is made to building friendly, confident and safe communities. Will you provide the committee with information on how that performance measure will be achieved?

Mr HOLDING — I am happy to take this question in the context of our private security industry in particular, and obviously in terms of making sure our private security industry operates in the most effective way. Members of the committee would be aware that last year the Parliament passed the Private Security Bill which will take effect from 1 July 2005. In supporting that legislation we are currently in the process of finalising our private security industry regulations which will also take effect from 1 July 2005. A very important set of measures will put in place the best system for supporting and regulating our private security industry in this state's history. It was an industry that previously was regulated by a very outdated piece of legislation. A very large number of people are currently employed in different elements of our private security industry — something like 50 000 licences have been issued to something like 25 000 people across the state — crowd controllers; security guards — a whole range of different people, a large number of people who were not regulated under the previous regime. For example, people installing private security equipment, certain classes of bodyguards and other private investigators were not subject to necessarily the most appropriate means of regulation and registration.

What we are putting in place now is a comprehensive scheme that will ensure that over time training arrangements between the states are as consistent as possible. Most importantly, it will mean that people who are not of good standing and character are not able to continue to act as crowd controllers or security guards. We have just completed a significant process of evaluating the current licence-holders, and 250 people who were previous licence-holders and had been convicted of serious offences will now no longer be able to continue to operate within this industry. They are people who have committed serious offences, such as drug trafficking and cultivation, and serious assaults. Another 300 people are then required to show cause as to why they should be permitted to receive licences when the new regime takes effect. They are people who have potentially committed serious offences such as fraud, deception, burglary and a whole range of different offences that we think make them unsuitable to continue to act as crowd controllers or security guards. We think these new arrangements will give Victorians the confidence that the people who work in our private security industry are people of good standing and character. We think this is good for the industry. More importantly, though, we think this is good for the Victorian public who will continue to have confidence that the people working in this industry are appropriate, well-trained, appropriately qualified but most importantly, people of good standing and character.

The CHAIR — You said 250 for the first figure and — —

Mr HOLDING — Three hundred for the second. These are people who are required to show cause and they will have to obviously give pretty compelling reasons as to why they are suitable, fit and proper persons to hold a licence or be registered under the new arrangements.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, I refer you to page 158 of budget paper 4, table 3.5 regarding fines and regulatory fees. You will see on the top line that police fines are estimated this year to bring in \$324 million, of which I think a fair estimate of around \$300 million will come from speed cameras. For quite some time the protocol dealing with speed camera operations was a public document. They knew, for example, that concealment disguise would not be used under any circumstances. Of course, the police commissioner only two weeks ago said that it is now acceptable. We know that there are subtle variations in the tolerances, that some motorists get done at a lesser speed than other motorists get done. Will you explain to the committee, seeing you are raising \$300 million in this mechanism, why the public should not know what the tolerances are in relation to speed cameras in Victoria?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for the question, Mr Forwood, because it does raise an issue of great public interest and concern — that is, the measures that this government has taken to focus on reducing speed and getting motorists to slow down and making sure that everyone understands that if they do exceed the speed limit, even by a very small amount, they are risking lives and they will be caught and infringed. In relation to the tolerance levels and the reasons as to what information we make available, what we found in the past was that when people were aware of what tolerances were in place and what tolerances existed, they factored that into their driving behaviour. People took the view that they were allowed to travel over the speed limit up to a certain amount and they would not be booked because there was a tolerance in place.

We have made it absolutely clear that nobody should exceed the speed limit by any amount — by 5 kilometres, by 10 kilometres, by 2 kilometres, whatever it is. Our message to Victorian motorists is that you should not build into your driving a belief that there is a tolerance in place and that it is somehow safe to speed up to a certain amount. Everybody who has received a traffic infringement — and I have to confess, Mr Forwood, I have received a traffic infringement — will notice that it says on it what is the detected speed and the alleged speed. In my case I recollect that the detected speed and the alleged speed were 3 kilometres apart, so if you were detected at 67 kilometres an hour you would be infringed at 64 kilometres an hour. That is deliberately put in place to make sure that an appropriate set of checks and balances exists so that people can be absolutely confident that if they were infringed for speeding, that they were in fact speeding and that they had in fact exceeded the speed limit and they were deserving of receiving that infringement and penalty notice.

We have made it absolutely clear that people should not factor any tolerances or any leeway into their driving when they are out and about. If you exceed the speed limit, even by a very small amount, you run the risk of being infringed and fined, and that is appropriate. That is the view that the state government takes. We make no apologies for taking such a tough line in relation to speeding. We believe that over time we will continue to get the road toll down by sending the message to Victorians that any level of speeding, even very small increments, is dangerous, that it cost lives, that it causes accidents and that it causes serious injuries.

Mr FORWOOD — If that is the case, why do you set tolerances in the first place?

Mr HOLDING — We had the first legislative tolerance in place, which people are aware of, which is the tolerance that is made clear on your infringement notice when you receive it.

Mr FORWOOD — That is the 3 kilometres?

Mr HOLDING — It is more than 3 kilometres in the case of speeds in excess of 100 kilometres an hour.

Mr FORWOOD — Perhaps you should just let us know what they are?

Mr HOLDING — I will read it out, if you like:

The Road Safety (General) Regulations ... provide for a legislative tolerance to be applied when alleging an offence against a person detected by an automatic detection device...

Regulation 306(b)(ii) provides that in the case of a mobile camera the limit or error is not greater than plus or minus 3 kilometres per hour.

Regulation 306(b)(i) provides that in the case of a fixed digital camera the limit of error is not greater than plus or minus 2 kilometres per hour.

They are the legislative parameters put in place. They are published. People are aware of them. It is made clear on your speeding infringement fine when you receive it. People should be under no illusions about it.

Mr FORWOOD — Are you saying they are the only tolerances that exist any more?

Mr HOLDING — Any other tolerances that are in place are an operational matter for Victoria Police, but the legislature framework that is applied is declared, it is made clear and it is enforced appropriately.

Mr FORWOOD — Okay, but we are getting there, aren't we? Now we know that, yes, there is a legislative tolerance, but there are also operational tolerances, which vary in different parts of the state and which are decided upon operationally by the police commissioner, which people do not know and are not allowed to know. So what we are looking for is some description — —

The CHAIR — What you are looking for?

Mr FORWOOD — What the people of Victoria are looking for is some understanding of how these other tolerances at the operational discretion of the police commissioner actually operate, whether they are over 100 or below 100 and whether they are geographically based — western suburbs as opposed to Malvern or somewhere else — we do not know. No-one in Victoria knows how these tolerances work, so we are looking for a bit of information.

Mr HOLDING — I will invite the chief commissioner to make a comment in relation to this.

Mr FORWOOD — Thank you.

Mr HOLDING — But, Mr Forwood, I would reiterate the comment that I made at the start of my response to your question — that is, that in relation to the disclosure of this information we make no apologies for making it clear to Victorians that they should not factor into their driving some form of tolerance or allowable or permissible speed limit over the speed limit. If they exceed the speed limit they run the risk of being infringed and fined.

Mr FORWOOD — We are happy to accept that. I am interested in what the commissioner will say, but —

Mr MERLINO — We can forget that if you keep talking.

Mr FORWOOD — What we would be interested to know — —

The CHAIR — What you would be interested to know.

Mr FORWOOD — If that is the case, why you have the thresholds at all?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I absolutely totally agree with the issues the minister has raised about the Wipe Off 5 campaign. All of the research that we have had says that Victorians should understand that 60- 60, 50-50 and 40-40, and I have said that all along. The issue about the discussion actually has some history. That was that in previous times there are discretions to be exercised within Victoria Police, and it was really to do with our traffic people and various people who ran traffic policy within Victoria Police. But what we had come to quite some time ago was to make decisions ourselves, and in a sense we also have said that 60-60, 50-50 and what the tolerance is is not all that relevant. We try to take that into account. I am not sure of your point in the sense of saying it is different in the western suburbs. Are you suggesting that we discriminate about people who live in the western suburbs?

Mr FORWOOD — I do not know how you pick the tolerances.

Chief Comm. NIXON — In a sense we have a whole lot of police officers who work out in operations, and we manage them and we suggest to them that they take into account circumstances — the whole set of issues — if there is to be any tolerance, but it is in fact our decision operationally.

Mr FORWOOD — For example, what do they take into consideration when they set the tolerances?

Chief Comm. NIXON — A whole set of issues.

Mr FORWOOD — Like what?

Chief Comm. NIXON — It is an operational decision. It is one that the government allows us to make because it is not an issue. It just says to the people and what the community needs to know, and you know, is that it is 50-50, 60-60, 70-70'. Whether there is a tolerance is really related to the set of conditions that police officers locally and operationally will take into account.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, I refer to page 148 of budget paper 3. It deals with various performance indicators, but lists the number of drug-impaired driver assessments conducted. This trial has generated a great deal of community and media interest. I am interested in knowing how the drug-driving trial is going, when it will finish and what will happen after that point.

Mr HOLDING — Firstly, thank you very much for that question as it is a matter of great public interest.

Mr HOLDING — This first slide indicates the latest tranche of our drug-driving results. These are figures as of 6 May 2005. You can see there that Victoria Police has now conducted as part of our drug-driving campaign 5598 targeted tests. We have had 83 positive laboratory tests. I want to stress what that means. All of you would be aware that our drug-driving testing regime is a three-part process. There is a saliva-based roadside test followed by a test that takes place in the drug-driving caravan — or the booze bus-style arrangement — and if both of those test positive, then that analysis is sent off for full laboratory analysis. It is only on the back of that laboratory testing that an infringement notice is issued and a person has effectively breached the law. What this ensures is that no innocent

motorist will be charged — no innocent motorist has been charged — as a consequence of these new arrangements, but most — —

Mr FORWOOD — Just publicly vilified.

Mr HOLDING — But what is most concerning from the Victorian public's perspective and from the Victorian government's perspective is the high number of positive tests. What we are seeing is a hit rate of 1 in 67, which compares to, for example, the drink-driving hit rate, which is about 1 in 250. The longer the testing regime has been in place — and this was commenced in December last year — the higher the percentage of people who have been found to have either methamphetamine — the active ingredient in speed — or cannabis in their system. This means that we have a way to go to get the message out in relation to drug-driving. We want Victorians to understand that 31 per cent of motorists killed on our roads in 2002 had a substance other than alcohol in their system, and that this shows there is a strong causal connection between road fatalities, driving fatalities and drug taking. We want this message to get out to all Victorians. We are obviously alarmed by these figures.

We have announced through the Road Safety (Further Amendment) Bill, which was second-read in the Parliament on 5 May 2005, that the trial program will be extended, and there will be a sunset date for the drug-driving offence extended until 1 July 2006. This will enable the trial to be completed and a proper evaluation to take place during that process. My message again would be to say to all Victorians that they need to understand the dangers of taking drugs and attempting to drive a motor vehicle. They need to understand that Victoria is now the first jurisdiction anywhere in the world to have a random drug-driving testing capacity at roadside, and we will be using this to keep pushing this message to the Victorian people.

The CHAIR — Is the technology we have developed able to be sold internationally?

Mr HOLDING — It is not our technology; we did not develop it. I think it is from the United Kingdom and Germany.

Mr FORWOOD — I want to follow up my previous question. Minister, does the Chief Commissioner of Police know what thresholds are set in what areas? At what level is it set? Is it set by the traffic sergeant or the regional divisional commander, or how many different thresholds exist throughout Victoria?

Mr HOLDING — Let us make this clear. There is not a series of rolling thresholds, and nobody has implied or suggested other than you that there are.

Mr FORWOOD — Except you this morning when you talked to the media.

Mr HOLDING — What is in place is a set of operational judgments made by Victoria Police based on the operational circumstances that particular police face in any given situation. That is appropriate. The only mandated threshold or tolerance that exists is that which is legislated and that which I referred to earlier, which is made very clear through act and regulation and which Victorians are able to access.

Mr FORWOOD — We are not interested in that one. We are interested in the operational flexibility of the police force. We are wondering how many of these flexible tolerances there are and how often they change.

Mr HOLDING — I think the chief commissioner has made it very clear that it is an operational judgment made by traffic management units, by Victoria Police as is appropriate. I have got to say, Mr Forwood, that there is a whole range of policing activities across the state where we expect and demand that police members exercise operational judgments.

Mr FORWOOD — This is the only one which brings in \$300 million a year and of which there is the widespread perception that this is not about road safety, this is about revenue raising.

Mr HOLDING — We discussed the standing orders in relation to overacting before.

Mr SOMYUREK — I would like to move on to crime prevention. I refer you to budget paper 3, page 143. I refer to the output summary relating to reducing the crime rates and ask you to indicate how the Victorian crime prevention awards contribute to that goal.

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for that question. It does emphasise the importance that the government places on making sure that we do promote and reward and support innovation in terms of crime prevention across the state. One of the initiatives we have in place is the Victorian law enforcement drug fund. It is a fund that is the result of fines imposed for drug-related offences by courts. Those funds have been used to support a series of crime prevention initiatives and to support crime prevention activity throughout the state, particularly where it has a drug or alcohol focus. We have given priority under this fund to projects that are built around offender diversion; an assault prevention strategy, which is obviously very important; a drink-spiking community education program; and also a whole range of alcohol and drug-related campaigns that support good outcomes for the Victorian people.

In January this year approval was given to recommendations which were made by the Victorian law enforcement drug fund advisory committee to support seven projects. I just wanted to touch on some of those projects and what some of the focus was, because the fund distributed some \$769 337 to metropolitan and regional communities that were responding to crime-related issues in their local areas. One of the grants focused on alcohol-affected young people in entertainment venues. Another one looked at alcohol and drug education for at-risk young people. One was focused on encouraging young people to report crimes.

One important issue is that people who are most likely to be the victims of crime are young Victorians, and yet they are some of the most reluctant to report these crimes, so initiatives which encourage them to increase their likelihood of reporting crimes are obviously very important. One of the grants was in support of a mentoring program for Koori youth, which was aimed at addressing and reducing alcohol and drug-related violent crime. We also had a program in place for under-age drinkers which achieved support through this fund, as well as things which improve the perceptions of safety and promote and support residents in local housing estates that may be facing safety-related issues. We think this has been a very effective fund and a good way of putting back into the community some of the money that has been raised through court-imposed orders and fines on those who have committed drug-related offences. It has worked very well.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to the mobile data network. I ask first of all: can you confirm that the system will not give police online access to images of wanted or suspected criminals or other images? Secondly can you tell the committee what the bandwidth will be of the connection to police cars under the mobile data network?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for asking that question. It enables us to emphasise something of which this government is very proud — that is our rollout of the mobile data network. For the benefit of the members of the committee, this will provide leading-edge technology which will ensure that not only Victoria Police but also our ambulance service will have access to data from up to four different databases in real time to remote locations around the metropolitan area when they are conducting their various operations. It is a very important capability for them to have. Mr Clark's first question related to whether or not it was able to capture images as well as data. I can confirm that in fact the technology will enable images to be captured.

Mr CLARK — I was talking about transmission rather than capturing, but information on capturing is of interest as well.

Mr HOLDING — It will enable images to be transmitted, as I understand it. The answer is yes. It will enable images to be transmitted, so the first premise of your question is not correct: I cannot confirm that. In fact they are able to be transmitted. On the bandwidth question, we will come back to you in relation to bandwidth. Obviously as the network is enhanced with future software opportunities coming online, then the scope for the different things that can be done in terms of image transfer will also be able to be enhanced as well. But you will be able to transmit images as part of the initial rollout of the mobile data network.

Ms GREEN — I would like to refer you to the output and asset measures relating to the organised crime strategy which are listed in budget paper 3 on pages 297 and 300. Could you explain what activities Victoria Police will be undertaking to combat organised crime under these measures?

Mr HOLDING — That is a very good question, a very important question and today a very topical question. The organised crime strategy that Victoria Police has put in place has been developed in consultation with the Australian National University. That research and an organised crime workshop that was conducted in August 2004 enabled Victoria Police to consult with a wide variety of agencies external to Victoria Police to provide the basis for the development of this organised crime strategy. Earlier you saw a range of initiatives contained within

the budget around the organised crime strategy that are particularly relevant for this year's budget. I thought I might just touch on some of the elements of the strategy particularly from a 2005–06 budget perspective. But I would make it clear that this in no way encapsulates all of the things that Victoria Police has done to respond to organised crime. These are just some of the newest and latest initiatives that have been put in place.

Part of the funds will go towards supporting research and analysis of organised crime over time — \$1 million to support expert research and analysis; \$9.6 million will be provided to fund the recruitment of up to 27 specialist operational staff such as forensic accountants and intelligence analysts. I want to stress to members of the committee how important this is in terms of building Victoria Police's capabilities. The Purana task force and a lot of the activities around that task force have shown how important it is to have comprehensive skill sets to respond to the challenges of organised crime. Crooks are becoming more sophisticated; they are engaging in a broader variety of activities. They are more likely to use technology to conceal their own activities as well as to commit further crimes or engage in other criminal activity. Their communications capabilities are better; their ability to evade detection is better. Therefore our ability to put in place skill sets and specialist staff who have the capacity to look into those things needs to be enhanced if we are to keep up with them. Increasing that capacity is a very important part of the strategy.

There are also some upgrades occurring to the LEAP database. Some \$4.9 million will support the organised crime strategy. There will be additional resources to manage police informants — \$1.6 million has been put aside in relation to the management of police informants. Obviously it goes without saying that this has been an area that has been the subject of significant public scrutiny and interest in recent years. Victoria Police recognises the need to ensure that police informers, the files and the data they produce are managed and handled in a secure way, and part of the organised crime strategy funding will be to support initiatives to ensure that that information is securely and appropriately held and that those informers are appropriately managed, and that opportunities for corruption are reduced.

There is \$800 000 for controlled operations, and also additional resources for the office of the chief examiner and the special investigations monitor. I mention that in passing because those are the resources which oversee the coercive questioning regime put in place. This is one of the most significant powers given to the fight against organised crime, to ensure we have in place a mechanism to lift the veil of silence that exists in relation to organised criminals. We also have in place some additional resources to support the Major Crime Legislation (Seizure of Assets) Act 2004, which is the asset confiscation regime. A sum of \$7.3 million will support that strategy.

There is a comprehensive set of mechanisms to reflect the fact that our criminal underworld has become more sophisticated, that new technologies exist and that we need the skills set, the resources, the technology and the capability to respond to that changed environment.

The CHAIR — Minister, you mentioned the LEAP database, and \$4.9 million to upgrade that database, and you also mentioned its security. Could you give us some outline of how you will measure its security, to ensure that confidentiality is maintained?

MR HOLDING — Thousands of pages have been written on the LEAP database in recent years. One of the things that is now apparent is that we have in place full processes for auditing — not only retrospective audits but those that can occur in real time to ensure the information is securely handled — and Victoria Police is now acutely aware of the things that need to be in place to ensure that that information by Victoria Police on behalf of Victorians is securely held.

Mr FORWOOD — Will you give an undertaking that if the audits show any misuse of LEAP, you will make that information public rather than hide it?

MR HOLDING — Mr Forwood, I do not necessarily receive information about misuse of LEAP, but if the Office of Police Integrity makes a report in relation to LEAP misuse, as the director did recently, it is a matter of judgment for him whether or not he releases that information to the public. Obviously in the most recent LEAP inquiry he conducted, he did release that information to the public, and I think that is appropriate.

Mr FORWOOD — But what you are saying in relation to that is that every time there is a breach of LEAP, the Office of Police Integrity will be notified, and it is its choice about whether or not — —

MR HOLDING — I will let the chief commissioner comment.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Because of the way we work with the Office of Police Integrity, it is notified when there is a breach, and then it oversights the investigation and makes sure it is a legitimate investigation. Then the office can, as the minister said, report or otherwise. We have also reported, ourselves, publicly.

Mr FORWOOD — Good.

MR HOLDING — But I will just stress that second-last point: it is a matter for the Office of Police Integrity as to whether it makes that information public, and it is not for government to direct that office to either not make it public or to disclose it.

Mr FORWOOD — Sure. I just wanted to make sure the loop had been closed. That is all.

The CHAIR — We now move to Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD — I return again to the traffic camera protocols, and in particular to 24.1 which said:

To maintain community confidence in the speed camera initiative it is important for the operational use of the devices to be seen as fair and reasonable. Under no circumstances are speed camera vehicles, tripods or flash units to be disguised by signs, logos, breakdown of vehicle, (for example, boot open or spare wheel/jack visible et cetera.) tree branches, lamp posts, dust bins or any other means that would generate public perception of sly operations.

We now know, of course, that the government has changed its view on this, and that disguised cameras are now a necessary police tool, and I wonder if you could outline to the committee why this decision was made, and whether or not you agree with the police commissioner who believes that this is a decent and legal way to stop people hurting themselves on the roads.

MR HOLDING — Firstly, Mr Forwood, I want to make this absolutely clear, even for you: that the government has not in any way changed the guidelines that operate in relation to the placement of speed cameras. We have what is a transparent process in relation to those guidelines. They make it absolutely clear that speed cameras are to be located in places where there has been a history of accident data. Secondly, failing a history of accident data there needs to be a likelihood of a real risk to public safety and a documented series of complaints — not just one complaint and not a complaint from an anonymous person — to justify the placement of a speed camera in that location. That is the regime in place, and it supports the location of those speed cameras. That is the regime that Tenix Solutions operate under when they deploy the mobile speed cameras, and that is the protocol that has been developed with Victoria Police, the guidelines that Victoria Police effectively impose on Tenix Solutions in relation to how mobile speed cameras are deployed across the state.

Mr FORWOOD — Who decides which speed cameras will be disguised?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think the issue of whether they were disguised was a matter that was raised with me by Neil Mitchell on his program. The point I was making was that people often do not even notice these speed cameras when they are there. They can be placed on the side of the road, and some of us have seen them in locations where people would suggest they are not signed and not visible, but the current strategy is appropriate. The speed cameras fit the guidelines. All of the rules the minister just explained are absolutely true about where we put them; and as much as people talk about other places we put them, they do fit all of those guidelines.

Mr FORWOOD — Are you saying that this paragraph still exists in the protocol?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I do not know what you are reading.

Mr FORWOOD — I am reading from the Victoria Police, Traffic Camera Office, Speed Camera Policy and Operations Manual, which was withdrawn; and I am asking whether you are saying, in the new one which no-one is allowed to see, that this paragraph still exists?

The CHAIR — ‘This paragraph’ — —

Mr FORWOOD — The paragraph I have read just 2 minutes ago.

MR HOLDING — Mr Forwood has the benefit of a document in front of him that I do not have, and he is quoting from it. That is his right, but it is a little difficult drawing respondents into a dialogue — —

Mr FORWOOD — Perhaps you can take it on notice.

MR HOLDING — I want to make this absolutely clear: there is no regime across this state of concealed speed cameras; but to the extent that people may say a speed camera placed in a vehicle that does not have, ‘Speed camera’ slapped on the side of the car is a concealed speed camera, I will cop the criticism that that is a concealed speed camera, but you are not suggesting that. If you are suggesting that we are digging little holes around the place and concealing speed cameras in them, the answer is that we are not.

Mr FORWOOD — Tree branches, lamp posts — —

MR HOLDING — So let us be clear about it: there are not concealed speed cameras operating around the state unless you consider fixed speed cameras on the Western Ring Road or whatever, when they are reactivated, if you consider them to be concealed, then — —.

Mr FORWOOD — The commissioner has undertaken to get back to the committee on whether or not — —

MR HOLDING — No, do not start verballing people, Mr Forwood.

Mr FORWOOD — On whether or not this paragraph exists in the new protocol.

The CHAIR — The minister answers the question, and if he wishes he directs those to the chief commissioner — —

Mr FORWOOD — Could I ask whether the minister could investigate and advise the committee whether the paragraph I read exists in the new protocols or not, in the substantive form? I do not mind if the odd word has changed, but whether this particular issue is dealt with in the new protocol. That would be good.

MR HOLDING — I undertake to provide to the committee information in relation to the concealment or otherwise of speed cameras and the protocols in relation to them.

Mr FORWOOD — Thank you.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, I refer you to the output summary in budget paper 3, page 142, ‘Reducing the crime rate’, and also to the first few slides of your presentation. Can you outline to the committee the trends and your expectations of the crime rate going forward? Is the rate in Victoria continuing to decline?

Mr HOLDING — That is a very important and welcome question and one that Victorians are acutely interested in. Obviously a significant measure of success in terms of our efforts to increase public safety are the things we do to reduce the crime rate and make people feel safer in their local neighbourhoods and communities. We have achieved a great deal in this area in recent years as I pointed out during the presentation. You saw a very significant drop in Victoria’s crime rate — in fact it is now the lowest it has been in a decade. We have seen a fall of something like 13.7 per cent reduction between 1999–2000 and 2003–04. I am very encouraged about the unpublished data I alluded to when we were going through the initial presentation. Victoria Police indicates these good results are continuing with recorded crime in the nine months to 31 March 2005 coming in at 277 636 offences, which is a decrease of 8.1 per cent compared with the same period in the previous financial year. This means that over the two years to 2003–04 we experienced successive drops in crimes against the person with rates falling from 755 per 100 000 in 2001–02 to 706 per 100 000 in 2003–04. We have also seen a significant reduction in the property crime rate. I will not read out all the data, but suffice to say it has been reduced by 17.8 per cent over the period 1999–2000 to 2003–04. Particularly encouraging have been the significant drops in burglary and motor vehicle thefts and a decrease in residential burglary down by 26.1 per cent. This is a real credit to those police members who have been involved in those activities.

Earlier this week, on Monday in fact, I visited the Glen Waverley police station which has resources from the regional response unit allocated to it from the ACROBAT team — this is, aggravated commercial, residential and other burglary action team — as well as regional response unit resources which support the Embona operation activities. As well, in visits to other police stations I have seen the measures they have been taking to reduce vehicle

theft and assault reduction strategies and it is really encouraging to see the regional as well as local police activities occurring right across the state in all different stations to tackle particular crimes, particular categories of crimes in those areas and to respond to those in a way which reflects the needs of that local neighbourhood or community. They are impressive members doing a fantastic job on behalf of Victorians working with the community now more than at any other time in Victoria Police's history. We are now seeing those results coming through in the ongoing, sustained, significant reductions across a whole range of categories of crimes.

Mr CLARK — My question again relates to the mobile data network. In relation to your previous answer can you confirm, firstly, that photographic images will be available to police cars using the system from the time the system becomes operational; secondly, whether the cost of the provision of images, if that is the case, forms part of the \$171 million-odd price contract; and thirdly, is it correct that some parts of the operational specifications of the contract have been omitted from the copies of the contract and the schedules to the contract that has been made available publicly on the contracts.vic.gov.au web site?

Mr HOLDING — I will have to take some advice in relation to what is available on the web site. In relation to photographic images, yes, photographic images will be available from the commencement of the mobile data network and they will be the sort of image that would support the physical identification of a suspect. We will check the web site. We are not aware of anything being dropped from it, but we will check that to confirm.

Mr CLARK — The cost of the images is within the \$171 million signed contract?

Mr HOLDING — Yes, it is. Mr Clark, you asked three questions. Firstly, can digital photographs be transmitted from the start of the contract? The answer is yes. Secondly, are the costs for doing so embedded within the contract price? The answer is yes. Thirdly, has any information been omitted from the web site in relation to the contract operational specifications? The answer to that is we are not aware of any, but we will check.

Mr FORWOOD — Are you aware of any limitations on the useful transmission of images that will be in place on the day the system operates?

Mr HOLDING — I do not know how many different ways you can ask this question, Mr Forwood. All I would say is this: I am happy to take on notice the basic premise of your question which is what limitations may exist. I make the point that with any new technology like this no-one would ever expect that on day one every different element and facet would necessarily be rolled out with such a significant purchase such as this. But I would reiterate this is leading-edge technology. It will give Victoria Police and the Metropolitan Ambulance Service a capability that they otherwise do not have. It will be comparable with the technology that exists in many other parts of the world. It will provide them with an ability to interrogate data from four different databases in real time from remote locations around the state. That is a massive operational improvement for Victoria Police and will enable them to do a whole range of policing activities that would currently require either transmissions over an unsecured voice network or they would be unable to get that data in real time for any practical application during their operational policing.

Mr Clayton has just given me some information in relation to the pilot of the mobile data network. Members would be aware the pilot program that is currently operating was rolled out across a range police data terminals and also a small number of MAS data terminals. There were 479 330 MAS transactions from MAS vehicles; Victoria Police transactions, 276 823; LEAP transactions 169 843; Sheriff's Office notices — they can interrogate the Sheriff's Office database at the same time — 1036; that is very important in terms of unexecuted sheriff's warrants and those sorts of things. It gives police a huge operational capacity that they did not previously have.

The CHAIR — You would be scared to be a crim in Victoria. Can I take you to the police stations program in budget paper 3, page 300 where you outline that we are looking at \$31 million in the forthcoming financial year. What proportion of that is for country or regional police stations?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you very much for that important question. One of the most significant investments in supporting Victoria Police that this government is making is in our police station construction and replacement program. We are funding something like 136 new police stations over the life of the government. That includes the additional police station at North Wyndham which was not part of the original LFS commitments. We are very excited about that. This will involve a significant number of new police stations as well as significant refurbishments of existing police stations. There is a strong focus obviously on rural areas. They include new stations. I will just go through some of the rural upgrades to give members a sense of just how many there are: a

new 16-hour station at Bannockburn; stations at Edenhope, Mount Hotham, Myrtleford, Robinvale, Swifts Creek, Tallangatta and Woods Point; new stations in Beaufort, Bendoc, Bunyip, Cressy, Gordon, Inglewood, Macarthur, Merbein, Pyramid Hill, Smythesdale and Whitfield; rural upgrade 4 at Apsley; new 16-hour stations at Eildon and Kaniva; and new stations at Romsey, Skipton, Underbool, Violet Town, Yackandandah and Yea.

It is a fantastic investment in regional Victoria and it can give all Victorians the assurance that no matter where they live, in regional Victoria, in our rural areas or in metropolitan Melbourne, there will be new investments occurring in police assets to make sure that our police can work in an appropriate environment that supports their operational needs, but at the same time have police stations that look good in the local community. Many of these new stations are environmentally sustainable buildings, which will mean that their operating costs will be decreased over a period of time, as well as their environmental footprint being lower than they would traditionally have been.

The CHAIR — There is a supplementary question from the top of the table.

Mr HOLDING — I am happy to keep going and going and waxing lyrical about it.

The CHAIR — I think Hansard would be happy if you passed the list.

Ms GREEN — Just a supplementary, Chair.

Mr HOLDING — Is it a particular one you might be interested in?

Ms GREEN — Just for the benefit of the committee and also for the benefit of the Warrandyte Community Association where I was last night, where the member for Warrandyte swore black and blue that it is not in the budget.

The CHAIR — Excuse me, is there a supplementary question?

Ms GREEN — I just want to make sure that Warrandyte police station is in the budget, as well as Hurstbridge.

Mr HOLDING — A really good question! I can confirm that the Warrandyte police station is in the budget. It is a 16-hour police station. The Hurstbridge station is also in the budget.

Ms GREEN — Thank you. I will correct the record.

Mr HOLDING — The residents of Warrandyte can be assured that they will have a first-class police station, and also the residents of Hurstbridge, and I know you will let them know.

Ms GREEN — Thank you, Minister.

The CHAIR — There are supplementaries from Ms Romanes and Mr Clark.

Mr HOLDING — Everybody wants to get their stations confirmed.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, I heard you say that many of the new police stations would be environmentally sustainable. Would we not expect them all to be?

Mr HOLDING — I am sorry. They are all environmentally sustainable buildings. I guess the point that I was making is that many of the stations include different forms of environmentally sustainable measures. Earlier this year I opened the new police station at Endeavour Hills, and one of the things that station includes is an arrangement with the local pet store, believe it or not, to provide shredded paper which can be used to support the pet stalls activities. I know Mr Somyurek joined me for that opening. Not only does it have systems to catch rain water and a whole range of other environmentally sustainable features, but also many of the stations have new design elements to them which will reduce their heating costs and many different measures which we think will make them fantastic.

Mr CLARK — Is it correct that the new police stations at Rowville, Belgrave, Gisborne and Kilmore, which were supposed to be 24-hour police stations, are operating for 16 hours or less at present, and that the Bellarine police station that was also supposed to be a 24-hour police station has been forced to close twice in recent weeks because it has had inadequate police to staff it?

Mr HOLDING — The first thing I would say is that there is a lot of misinformation circulated, tragically by some people who are honourable members of these houses, in relation to police station opening hours and also in relation to how Victoria Police utilises its resources to make sure that communities have 24-hour responses in their local areas. I would encourage any member of the community who is receiving misleading information from members of Parliament or, alternatively, members of the community about the operational responses for those stations to ensure that they get accurate information. I am happy to provide accurate information to the honourable member about the things he alluded to, but I would make the point that this government takes its election commitments very seriously. When it was elected to government it was elected with a series of new police station initiatives which it has worked very hard and diligently to deliver. In a couple of instances we have made changes in rural police station locations in consultation with local communities and members of Parliament which have been agreed to and accepted. Our commitments in relation to police numbers are also something we took very seriously when we made those original commitments, and which we believe we have kept faith with and delivered — in fact, over-delivered. So we make no apologies for making ambitious promises, and then working very hard to make sure they are implemented appropriately and effectively.

The CHAIR — Mr Clark, regarding the Liberal Party press release from which you quoted, and about which the minister said he undertakes to provide detailed information, do you want to give him a copy of it, or just refer to the date?

Mr CLARK — I have named the relevant police stations.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, on 8 July last year I wrote to the chief commissioner, with the encouragement of the Attorney-General, seeking an investigation of some documents that had been leaked to me. On 25 July, Superintendent Ken Lay, who was then the chief of staff for the chief commissioner, wrote back saying that according to protocols this had been sent to the minister's office and I would receive a response in due course. Four months later, at the end of November, not having received the response, I FOI'd the police to see what had happened with my original request, and just before Christmas, on 21 December, I had a response from Bruce Thompson, the Acting Superintendent, FOI, saying that no record existed of anything being done with my original request. But then he finished by saying that 'notwithstanding further inquiries conducted with the staff of the chief commissioner's office, I am advised that your letter was sent to the Department of Justice for the attention of the minister. For your information, a response is yet to be received from the Department of Justice. We were now at the end of December. Not wanting to give up then I contacted the Office of Police Integrity.

Mr HOLDING — Any threat of a question here, Mr Forwood?

Mr FORWOOD — We are getting to the question. The Office of Police Integrity went and investigated this matter and responded to me on 13 April saying, 'In brief summary it seems that a protocol between the chief commissioner and the minister for police in relation to referral to the minister of policy and procedural issues raised by members of Parliament has been misapplied to your correspondence'. Could you advise the committee what the circumstances of the misapplication were and what the policy actually is meant to do?

Mr HOLDING — Firstly, can I start with the issue of what the policy is supposed to achieve? What the protocol that exists between the chief commissioner's office or the Chief Commissioner of Police and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services seeks to do is to ensure that the operational independence of Victoria Police is protected. That is an appropriate thing and something that all Victorians would support and seek, and it is something that as a minister I take very seriously. I have no interest in the day-to-day operations of Victoria Police insofar as they pertain to specific allegations of the commission of a crime or whatever. Therefore it would not be appropriate for my office or me as minister to seek information about those operational matters, and the Chief Commissioner of Police would be under no obligation to provide me with that information were I to formally seek it — or informally seek it, for that matter. That is what the policy you have alluded to is designed to achieve, and it is based on sound legal principles. It is based on a sound interpretation of the Westminster system of ministerial responsibility, which is also designed to ensure that I have sufficient information to be able to discharge my responsibilities as Minister for Police and Emergency Services to provide relevant and accurate information to, for example, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee or, alternatively, to provide information to Parliament insofar as I am required to do so. That is the purpose of the policy.

In relation to the specific correspondence that you refer to, I recollect this issue being raised in the public domain several weeks ago, and my recollection of the investigation that I undertook in my office is that in fact the letter you

alluded to has not been received by me as minister — that is, by me in my time as Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and it does not reside in my office. I cannot find a copy of it. So it would be normal practice for a minister receiving correspondence of that nature to seek advice from the department.

Mr FORWOOD — Let me just follow the issue up. This is clearly an operational issue, so I want to know why the police in the first place sent it to the minister, and the second thing I think we ought to know is why, when I followed it up with an FOI four months later, and they said it was up with the minister, they did not realise then that it was an operational matter and do something about it. The question we now have is that the Office of Police Integrity has said the protocol was misapplied to my correspondence. Surely it must have been misapplied at the police department, not in the minister's office, otherwise it would not have been sent there in the first place. So the question is: how did it get misapplied? Who misapplied it? How often are these things misapplied? Are there other examples of misapplication of these sorts of issues?

Mr HOLDING — Given the nature of the things that Mr Forwood has identified it might be appropriate to enable the chief commissioner to respond.

Chief Comm. NIXON — In this particular instance I note the response of the Office of Police Integrity to this application, and he has spoken to me personally about the matter. During my time we have tried very hard to make sure we do not get confused about whether it is a political issue that someone is raising or whether it is a police operational issue. Other members of Parliament write to us. We are very clearly able to make those decisions generally. In this case I am not exactly sure why. The matter went to the minister's office but it was interpreted by a member of my staff that they saw this as an issue that should have been sent to the minister and dealt with through the justice department. That was the reason it was sent. I understand your point and I take it. I apologise if it was dealt with in that fashion, but it was. An honest mistake was made. I can guarantee you there are other correspondents that we deal with properly. It slipped through my role in this. It is a very rare error and one we will not make again.

Mr FORWOOD — I need to thank the Chief Commissioner of Police for her answer, and I genuinely do.

Mr HOLDING — Victoria Police, particularly in terms of dealing with correspondence from members of Parliament, are in an invidious position in that often but not necessarily in this instance the issues that are raised with it are in an intensely political environment. My recollection is that it resulted from an exchange that occurred in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing that involved the former Minister for WorkCover, the Attorney-General — —

Mr FORWOOD — The Attorney-General.

Mr HOLDING — In a sense, police obviously need to make a judgment about whether it is an operational matter and handle the information accordingly. Nevertheless this information is often raised in a way where it is deliberately put into the public domain at the same time that correspondence is sent to various authorities. Police obviously need to make sure they manage that correspondence accordingly. The Chief Commissioner of Police has quite accurately described the circumstances that surrounded this particular piece of correspondence.

Mr FORWOOD — And — —

The CHAIR — If it is to do with this particular matter, Mr Forwood, we will deal with it, otherwise we will move on.

Mr FORWOOD — It is to do with this particular issue. I have another example which I would like to bring to your attention. Are you happy for me to do it?

Mr HOLDING — Perhaps we should move on. There might be 50 examples. We could sit here all afternoon. Let us move on. I would prefer to move on.

Mr FORWOOD — I have one other example.

Ms ROMANES — I refer to the output initiatives for the government's new social policy statement *A Fairer Victoria*, which is about creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage in Victoria. Those output initiatives are outlined on pages 270-71 of budget paper 3. In particular there is an output initiative:

There are budget allocations for four years ahead. Could you tell the committee, Minister, what role Victoria Police will play in the new strategy to combat family violence in Victoria?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you, Ms Romanes, for what is a very relevant question and which is of a great deal of interest to many Victorian families. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee members will be aware that the government has committed \$35.1 million over four years to implement our new response to addressing the challenges of family violence. A lot of those resources, \$6.625 million, have been allocated to the Department of Justice to strengthen the justice system response, to obviously enhance women's safety, to also enhance the safety of children and to hold perpetrators of domestic violence more accountable.

This challenge affects a large number of women in Victoria, 1 in 5 women in Victoria. It is a leading contributor to disability and death in Victorian women aged 15 to 44 years, so it is very important that we get this framework and response right. Some of those funds, the element that is administered by the Department of Justice, will be used to purchase specialist family violence response capabilities at three court locations. That will include specialist magistrates courts, staff and police prosecutors. Some of it will be used to establish an early intervention program for young men who exhibit violent behaviour. Some of it will be used for a work force development strategy for magistrates and court staff regarding best practice and family violence matters.

One of the things I have noticed visiting various police stations as Minister for Police and Emergency Services is the roll out of the Victoria Police code of practice for the investigation of family violence. This is a code which is strongly supported by Victoria Police. Whilst it will have significant implications for the way in which policing is done at a station level, from the members I have spoken to they understand the need for it. They respect it and are enthusiastic in terms of their implementation of it. I would like to invite the chief commissioner to comment a little more. She has been a great champion of this strategy and worked very hard to see it resourced in the way that it needs to be to make sure it is as effective as possible.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I would like to add to the question about budget initiatives. Victoria Police gained some resources from the budget but is also redirecting resources of its own into the family violence area. Because it is such a major issue and underpins so much crime that occurs, we appointed full-time family violence liaison officers and a major rollout of the education program. Probably 70 per cent of police have undergone the education program, which was a 12 month program. What we are seeing as a result of that is a substantial increase in: the reporting of assaults; family violence intervention order applications; and the success that those police are having with those orders. In some cases, there has been an increase of 70 to 80 per cent in family violence intervention orders. We are looking at about a 10 per cent increase in people coming forward and reporting family violence. It is having the effect of unearthing family violence. It then allows us to then use a lot of that other resource the government has made available to have counsellors involved with families and to have programs and resources for women and families and offender behaviour programs, which will make the whole of the government approach a far more effective approach than it has been in the past.

The CHAIR — With your permission, Minister, I would like the chief commissioner to explain a little more on the training that you said 70 per cent of the force have undergone. I ask this question particularly in view of country police and their strong connection with their local community. Do you ensure that a percentage of each police station staff undertake this training? Hypothetically could it be that at one station a commanding officer did not want their staff to do it, that your checking would ensure that all stations and a significant percentage of all stations have undergone this training?

Chief Comm. NIXON — What we have is a number of ways of evaluating the training. Firstly, the full-time family violence liaison officers are spread across the state. They keep accurate records on who attends so we can actually see the rollout of the program. As an example, yesterday the divisional superintendent from Warrnambool, which covers quite remote areas of the state in places like Hamilton and Portland that have one-person stations — I think he has 21 one-person stations — was able to report that three quarters of the staff had been involved in the education program. It is being monitored across the state by a central team. They started with high-volume locations principally within the metropolitan area. That was where the main effort was and now they are rolling out to the rest of the state. It was to be a 12 month program, so by August this year we believe that we will have been able to cover it. Then it has a continuous update program as part of it.

We also have within our stations portfolio or part-time family violence officers as well. What we are seeing now is that a lot of busy divisions are putting two or three people in a team together to work on family violence. It is quite a change for us. On a regular basis I do a Comstat process, which is a fortnightly review to make sure this is one of the key indicators for divisions to make sure that training is in place. Then we look in very great detail at the changes in family violence intervention orders, the arrest rates and the follow-up after those. It is quite a comprehensive follow-up as well.

The CHAIR — Are those two to three person teams that you were talking about supportive of single-person station staff who may be vilified for proactively policing in the area?

Chief Comm. NIXON — They understand that issue. We also deal with that in a number of other ways, like traffic law enforcement which is quite topical with this committee. We often send in other officers from other locations to work in those locations. They are aware of the difficulties particularly faced in one person stations.

Mr FORWOOD — I turn to the issue of police protocols. Last year, on new 9 December, a woman and her young toddler were on the sporting oval at Langwarrin when a man flashed himself, exposed himself, and this guy was standing between the woman and her car. She rang 000 and later received a call from the Frankston police who said that they could not come down even though she said, 'I can't get to my car, this guy is between me and my car'. This woman was not satisfied with the assistance she got from the police. Luckily a tradesman came along to have his lunch and he escorted her to her car. This woman was cross and she went and saw Kim Wells. This was not a branch member, he had never seen her before, this was a person caught in a situation where a guy flashed himself and the police were unable to assist. On 14 December he wrote to the police commissioner. The response was from Andrew Allen, the acting superintendent, chief of staff, who said:

You would beware of protocols ...your request has therefore been redirected to the office for the required ministerial approval.

Some months later Mr Wells again wrote to see what was going on, and on 6 May he received a letter from the minister's chief of staff, saying:

I can advise you that he is seeking further advice on this matter from the Department of Justice.

I put it to you that this is an operational matter — this is a member of the public with her kid in a public place putting up with a flasher, and the fact that it is raised by Mr Wells on her behalf rather than her particularly — if she had raised it particularly, written to the police commissioner and said, 'We are not happy with this', you would not have sent it to the minister in that case, would you? In these circumstances perhaps you could outline how these work?

The CHAIR — In the first place the 'you' is totally inappropriate.

Mr FORWOOD — Sorry, the chief commissioner.

The CHAIR — And the way the PAEC operates is that we quiz the minister, and the minister, if he or she wishes for anyone else who is a witness can take the question, they direct that. The 'you' was an inappropriate comment. I presume you should be referring your question to the minister as per our protocols, Mr Forwood. Over to you, Minister.

Mr HOLDING — Thank you, Mr Forwood, for the question. I accept your assurance that she is not a member of the Scoresby branch — that would be very difficult now that the branch has been suspended. Nevertheless, in this instance, without reliving the correspondence trail, we do not have the benefit of the director of police integrity making a judgment about whether or not it was a misapplication of the policy. You have brought this to our attention. Can we take it on notice and reflect on the matters you have raised for our attention? We are not in a position to comment on every piece of correspondence.

The CHAIR — Thank you, very much, Minister, we appreciate that.

Mr FORWOOD — I finish by saying — —

The CHAIR — The Minister has taken it on notice. He cannot do any more than take it on notice.

Mr FORWOOD — You do not know what I am going to say, do you?

The CHAIR — Don't shout at me. The minister has said he will take it on notice. You asked the question. It was very clear and he is taking it on notice. We now move on to the next question, which comes from Mr Somyurek.

Mr FORWOOD — The woman in question is keen to get a response.

The CHAIR — You can have a chat after the hearing.

Mr FORWOOD — You are ridiculous!

Mr SOMYUREK — Minister, I refer to the 2003–04 annual report of the Department of Justice and refer you to page 37 under the heading 'Encouraging water safety' where it states that as part of the 2004–05 budget the government is providing \$10.2 billion to develop a water safety initiative. Will you update the committee on the government's water strategy?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you very much for the question, Mr Somyurek. The cameras have left, Bill!

The CHAIR — Can you give Mr Somyurek your undivided attention, thank you, Minister.

Mr HOLDING — Firstly, I thank Mr Somyurek for his question, which is a very important one and again a very topical one. Victorians and members of the PAEC will be aware that since Christmas Day 2004 there have been 14 reported deaths by drowning. We had a couple of tragic incidents in Warrnambool and in the Grampians, at Halls Gap, which reminded us all of the dangers not just of people who seek to swim and then get into trouble but also people who use our beaches, our waterways, our inland waterways or whatever, maybe not planning to swim or not planning even to go into the water but who nevertheless find themselves getting into trouble and facing tragedy. That is one of the reasons why we have asked Lifesaving Victoria to develop a new water safety program which will combine existing national and Victorian training standards for safety while in the water, along with information and skills for people who are near the water. We will be reinforcing our Play it Safe by the Water campaign messages. Lifesaving Victoria has already been seeking media coverage for those key water safety messages which will be translated into 14 community languages which can be distributed to ethnic media across the state. As well as that, multicultural spokespersons will be briefing on water safety issues and making sure that they are able to conduct interviews with ethnic radio stations. Some of the key messages that we are reinforcing through the Play it Safe by the Water campaign are the Who is Looking Out for You messages; Always Swim between the Flags, Check It's Okay to Swim First, which is a particularly relevant message for our inland waterways; and Never Take Your Eyes off Young Children, which is also a very important message to be pushing.

We will also be conducting some significant research to make sure that our water safety messages are consistent and creatively developed, and making sure these campaign messages are developed in partnership with our aquatics industry. What we are also looking to do, and I want to stress this in passing, is the importance of making sure that people are prepared and pushing messages around making sure that you are prepared and have the skills when recreating safely in and around the water — for example, knowing the environment that you are swimming in; knowing the environment that you might be having a picnic in, or sitting on the beach or whatever; wearing a life jacket if that is appropriate; learning to swim; and learning CPR. Those vital minutes can make a big difference between saving somebody and a drowning occurring. I saw an incident recently where one of the chief commissioner's members, a female constable who was off-duty, was able to use CPR to keep someone alive, which made a big difference and saved someone's life. That is a real reminder to us all that those skills should be widely shared and widely spread through the community.

We will be using the Who Is Looking out for You message as a television, radio and billboard advertising campaign — members may have seen some of those out and about at the moment — and we will be making sure that these billboards have an immediate impact on the way to locations where people are likely to be playing or recreating near the water. We have also sent a comprehensive education pack to schools, which were sent out prior to Christmas. As well as that, in November 2004 during Water Safety Week we distributed a large number of campaign brochures which were sent to schools, pools and community groups and other lifesaving clubs et cetera.

One of the first things I did as emergency services minister was to take to the national emergency services ministerial council — the Augmented Police Ministerial Council it is called, believe it or not — a set of water safety signage which will promote and support a consistent set of national signs. This is very important because obviously people often swim interstate, and it is important when they are recreating interstate that they understand

consistent signage. This signage has also been developed to be easily understood by people from overseas. Obviously a lot of people who use our waterways — their first language is not necessarily English, so the signs need to be clear, and as much as possible internationally consistent. When we took it to Canberra to gain endorsement from my fellow ministerial colleagues they were able to point out some of the shortcomings in our signage — for example, we had no signage to indicate crocodiles. That had slipped our attention, but our friends from Queensland and Northern Territory were quick to remind us of that, so some very useful suggestions have been made.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, you mentioned the need to use the signage so that people who have come from overseas, from different cultures and who speak different languages can have access to those important messages that you have just outlined. Are there any other groups that need to be especially targeted in regard to communication of these key messages? I suppose I am thinking: are there any groups, like mothers, Muslim women and others, who are not likely to be able to swim and who might be tempted to go in after a child to try to rescue them in certain situations?

Mr HOLDING — We are acutely conscious of the fact that many people who are using our waterways and indeed our beaches may not have had a lot of experience themselves in terms of using these sorts of facilities. They may come from cultures or backgrounds where there are not the same opportunities to swim on fabulous beaches like we can here in Victoria, and they may be supervising children in those circumstances. Our message as part of this campaign is not only is it important to teach young people to swim but perhaps it is an opportunity for parents or older brothers and sisters who may be of an adult age or whatever and are called on to play a supervisory role may want to refresh their swimming skills. Having met with Lifesaving Victoria, I know they are looking to work closely with some of our local government areas where there are very strong concentrations of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds to make sure that these campaigns are disseminated as widely as possible.

Mr SOMYUREK — Just continuing on that issue, Minister, do you have any figures to indicate that there is a disproportionate share of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who are drowning?

Mr HOLDING — Certainly the 14 since Christmas 2004, you would be aware, are disproportionately from non-English-speaking backgrounds. I do not have the figures in front of me, but in both instances that was a factor. Obviously that in a sense reiterates the importance of pushing those messages. But also it reminds us of another thing — that is, if those communities feel uncertain about using our waterways, then that is equally undesirable. People should feel that they can share equally in the great, abundant natural resources that our state enjoys. We should be pushing those messages to as many different communities as possible so that people can feel safe using inland waterways and beaches.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to police numbers. You will be aware of your government's promise in the 2002 election to increase police numbers by 600 to bring the force to a size of 10 900 full-time equivalent police officers. Looking at the chart you displayed earlier — and I apologise if you gave a precise number; I did not hear it — but it appears that as at the end of 2004 police numbers were around 10 350. I understand that as of very recently only around 232 of the additional 600 extra police have been able to be added to the force so far. Is that the case? If so, can you outline whether you still plan to deliver the balance of the 368 police in the remaining 18 months of your government's current term, and are you confident that you will be able to achieve that?

Mr HOLDING — There are three questions. One is: will we achieve it? The second one is: can we achieve it in the period of time that is available to us? What was the third question?

Mr CLARK — One is: are my numbers correct; how do you propose to achieve the balance required over the remaining 18 months of your government's current term; and are you confident that you will be able to achieve the 600 in total?

Mr HOLDING — Great question! Thank you, Mr Clark. Could we bring up slide number 6? This government takes very seriously the promises it made both in 1999 and in 2002 in relation to delivering police numbers. I will make a political point, Mr Clark, because it does contrast with the previous government, which promised 1000 extra police and cut 800. We promised 800 police in our first term; we delivered 800 plus. This chart shows how we will deliver 10 900 police on the beat by July 2006. What this means is that not only will we deliver our commitment but we will be making it absolutely clear to Victorians that this will include police who exited the academy — that is, it will not include recruits in training at the Victoria Police Academy in Glen

Waverley. They will all have been exited, and that responds to a question that I think Mr Wells asked a couple of years ago by way of the adjournment debate in the Legislative Assembly. You can see on this slide that that is the way we propose to stagger the recruitment over the period so that we will achieve those goals. We are on track to achieve them. We will be keeping our promise. All Victorians will know come 25 November 2006 that the Labor Party keeps its promises in relation to police numbers.

Mr CLARK — The minister has shown us a sequence of numbers. Can you indicate whether I am correct at the moment in saying that you are 232 into the 600? Secondly, can you describe how it is that you are going to achieve the increase in numbers that are on the slide you have shown us?

Mr HOLDING — I think it is closer to about 350. That is the first qualification I will make.

Mr CLARK — You have made 350 out of the 600 so far?

Mr HOLDING — That is what I am advised. Secondly, I think it is made abundantly clear there how we are going to achieve that. We will achieve it, you can see, and by July 2006 there will be 10 943 sworn police. I think the expression is that it gives us bragging rights, Mr Clark, between July and November 2006.

Ms GREEN — Minister, I refer you to page 35 of the annual report of the Department of Justice for 2003-04 — where I note there is a smiling photo of Lieutenant Brendan Mimmo from the Diamond Creek CFA brigade in my electorate, who is also a former PSO — but I was wondering if you could update the committee on the community safety emergency support program, which is also on page 35?

Mr HOLDING — Thanks very much for that question. If you could bring up slide 5: it is a very important program, which was introduced in two tranches. The first was a \$4.5 million program over three years, which enabled us to provide community emergency support grants to the CFA and to the SES. We have now expanded that program by introducing a \$10 million program over four years, but applying it not only to the CFA and the SES but also to Lifesaving Victoria and the Australian Volunteer Coastguard units. You can see there a significant spread of grants used to support a lot of different things. For example, the Mount Taylor CFA brigade in East Gippsland received a \$36 000 contribution for the purchase of a medium tanker; the Hamilton CFA brigade in the Southern Grampians received \$52 500 towards the purchase of a multipurpose vehicle for heavy salvage; and Frankston SES received a contribution for a four-by-four general purpose rescue vehicle. These are fantastic initiatives supporting local communities and supporting those who are supporting themselves. Many of the grants are on a dollar-for-dollar basis, so we are leveraging local capacity off government support. I will just show the next slide, if I could: this gives a sense of the distribution of the grants announced in 2004-05. They are spread right across the state and right across all the different elements — CFA, SES, coastguard and Lifesaving Victoria, as well as our alpine emergency response capability. They are really fantastic programs supporting local communities in a really practical way.

Mr FORWOOD — Last question, Minister. I am aware that recently you became a police statistic yourself in that your home was burgled just before you moved into your new \$1 million pad in East Melbourne. The question I wanted to ask was: were you able to get the first home owner's grant for your million-dollar house?

Mr HOLDING — Firstly, Mr Forwood's question is inaccurate. I have not moved into a \$1 million home in East Melbourne, but I thank him for his good wishes. Obviously I would not be eligible for that grant; it is not my first home, Mr Forwood.

The CHAIR — Minister, I thank you very much for your comprehensive answers. I thank the Chief Commissioner of Police for her attendance and the secretary of the department, the deputy secretary and the departmental officers who have put these extensive folders together. I also thank Hansard staff and the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee secretariat. The Hansard transcript will be sent to you, Minister, and we would appreciate your attending to it.

Committee adjourned.