

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2006-07

Melbourne — 3 July 2006

Members

Mr W. R. Baxter

Ms C. M. Campbell

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Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

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 — Good afternoon. I welcome Ms Christine Nixon, Chief Commissioner of Police. Minister, if there any new departmental advisers who have joined us, I also welcome them. To people who have just joined us: if you have a mobile, could you please turn it off? You have a time allocation of 10 minutes for the portfolio of police and emergency services' overheads. We will have questions at 3.00 p.m. through to 4.30 p.m.

Slides shown.

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for the welcome. This slide is the one we provide each year on how the crime rate is tracking down. We are very pleased about that. You can see the red line which very subtly shows that at one stage it was going up, and now it is coming down.

The next slide shows that police numbers were at one stage going down, and they are now going up. We are very pleased about that, too.

The next slide shows that if you put the two graphs over each other, there is a very interesting and strange correlation — that is, although it does not go on forever, there is a point at which if you reduce police numbers enough, you will drive the crime rate up. That situation was experienced by Victorians in the late 1990s when the previous government promised 1000 police but cut 800. When we came into office, we embarked on a very ambitious police recruitment campaign. You can see that as those police have come on stream, the crime rate has come down — and come down significantly. In fact, the Premier, the Chief Commissioner of Police and I were able to celebrate on Friday the recruitment of the police officers who unambiguously deliver Labor's commitment to take Victoria Police to 10 900 by the end of our second term in office. We have reached it ahead of schedule. We have more police earlier than we said there would be.

The next slide reiterates the key points. We have given Victoria Police its record budget. The budget itself is up 50 per cent from 1999. There is money in the budget to support crime scene investigation, to continue the fight against organised crime and terrorism. We have the police station construction program, which, as this committee would be aware, is the most significant police station construction program in the state's history, and also the rollout of the high tech mobile data network terminals in police vehicles. You can see a picture of that on the right.

This is just a follow-up to a question that was asked last year by Mr Clark about the photo downloading and transmittability on MDN. So that there is absolutely no doubt at all, here is a picture of MDN in the process of transmitting photos through the data terminals. This is a very powerful tool that enables Victoria Police and also the Metropolitan Ambulance Service to simultaneously interrogate up to four different databases. It is a great policing tool. You can see there how it works in a car-based or vehicle-based situation.

The next slide is again continuing the focus on the road toll. In the last three years we have had the three lowest roads tolls on record, and we are now something like 60 deaths per year below the average for the decade prior to 2003. You can see the correlation between our road safety initiatives and the reduction in the road toll, particularly those initiatives that were focused on getting motorists to slow down.

The next slide shows that again in this budget the initiatives focus on road safety. Now with the drug-driving arrangements in place permanently, we have provided an extra vehicle to help deliver those and also provided a program of in-car video which we will start to roll out, as well as funding to support our initiatives to tackle hoon driving.

The next slide, coming now to the emergency services side of the portfolio, the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority deals with call-taking, dispatch, handling a very large volume of calls, the fire brigade, both in the metropolitan area and in regional Victoria; and of course the SES which we have now established as a statutory authority. That organisation is really starting to come of age, and we are very pleased to see it is no longer the poor cousin of our other emergency services but is now on an equal legal footing with them, and Life Saving Victoria is continuing its important work on our beaches and waterways. That is just a slide that shows the break-up of emergency service volunteers. You can see the vast majority are in the Country Fire Authority area, but also other emergency services playing a very significant role.

On our CSESP funding, you can see there the distribution of funds across the state. Lots of funds are being accessed by lots of different organisations in all different parts of Victoria. We are very pleased that this program has successfully supported volunteer emergency service organisations right throughout the state.

The CHAIR — Minister, this committee in these budget estimates is particularly interested in security costs across a range of departments and portfolios. The big security cost in your portfolio was the Commonwealth Games. Could you outline to us details of the costs incurred during the Commonwealth Games for security and tell us major expenditure items, and if any of them have a long-term benefit beyond the Commonwealth Games?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you very much for that question, Chair. I would like to provide the committee with some information about the things that Victoria Police and our other emergency services did over the course of the Commonwealth Games because Operation Acolyte, as the Commonwealth Games security arrangements were called, was a massive event for all of our emergency services.

For Victoria Police it meant that between 1 February and 30 March 37 472 police shifts were worked across that period and it is fair to say that almost everyone involved in Victoria Police was either directly or indirectly supporting community safety and security in some way connected with the Commonwealth Games.

The busiest day was Sunday, 19 March, with 2390 shifts; 178 cars and buses were hired and 43 lease extensions on police cars and motorcycles, as well as additional police motorcycle resources. In all 13 393 pieces of existing and new equipment were managed by the equipment and logistics team at Victoria Police. The police operation centre ran 24 hours a day for the duration of the event and this is the longest ever period of continuous operation with four assistant commissioners sharing the command responsibilities.

The level of security that was put in place went without alteration and certainly without questioning, meeting the standards that Her Majesty the Queen would have expected, but also high-profile figures like Prime Minister Blair, Prince Edward and the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, who was in Australia at the time.

We attempted to put in place an appropriate balance between the overt and the covert security arrangements connected with the games, and I think people visiting Victoria as well as all Victorians were pleased to see the profile that the security arrangements had. It was not an oppressive, over-the-top security presence; yet at the same time it was appropriate and reassuring for people who were attending games events. The feedback has been extremely positive.

We saw, of course, the record ticket sales and the huge number of people who attended free events. We were very pleased with the integration also between our emergency service organisations and our security organisations: Victoria Police, the Australian Defence Force, the Australian Federal Police, our interstate police colleagues who provided support in lots of different areas and contract security. Obviously private security interacting with defence force, police and other organisations can at times be problematic due to different standards, different expectations, but on the whole we were broadly pleased with the relationships we were able to form with the private security operators who supported our games security arrangements.

We had a few incidents along the way which received some coverage at the time. There were a few events connected with games athletes who went missing; most of whom — I think all of whom — have now been found, some interstate. I do not know why they would have wanted to leave Victoria, but nevertheless they did. We were pleased that we do not have the legacy that I think was left with the Olympic Games in Sydney in terms of people who went missing. We were very pleased with how we managed that. There were some people who tried to break into the games village but the excellent security arrangements put in place there ensured that they were quickly caught. There were suspect packages that were identified from time to time, but again the excellent arrangements that had been put in place between Victoria Police and the Australian Defence Force kicked in and those packages were dealt with appropriately. There were, of course, a small number of other offences, but overall the level of offending in Melbourne over the course of the games was actually lower than the crime rate for that area during the non-games period, which shows that our sporting crowds are great, law-abiding people. We always knew that but it was great to see it endorsed statistically. Of course overall we were just really pleased with the level of co-operation between all of our security agencies, those involved with the delivery of the games, the games volunteers — who did an outstanding job — and those federal and interstate agencies who came to Victoria to support the work that we were doing.

Mr CLARK — I want to turn to the statements you made at the beginning of your presentation about the fall in crime rate. You may be aware that the police crime statistics data series shows that between 1999-2000 and 2004-05 there was a 23 per cent increase in crimes against the person. The budget papers this year at page 165 show a further 6 per cent expected increase in offences against the person in 2005-06 compared with a targeted

2 per cent reduction. The footnote to that says that it is partially attributable to the rise in the level of assaults. Given that, will you agree that there is in fact a problem in Victoria with a steadily increasing level of crime against the person? If you do accept that, what action do you and the government have planned to tackle that problem?

Mr HOLDING — If I could start by saying that there is a lot of nonsense written about violent crime statistics, and a lot of that nonsense is written by people encouraged to do so from time to time; opposition members who like to be a little bit mischievous with the figures — —

Mr CLARK — Are you saying that I am being mischievous with the figures or are you accusing other opposition members?

Mr HOLDING — I am happy to say I am accusing other opposition members of being mischievous with figures because I know that you are always very careful and considered in the comments that you make.

I would like to compare the level of violent crime in Victoria with the numbers of victims of violent crime under the period of the previous government, because I think it is very important that we put into perspective the likelihood of being a victim of violent crime in Victoria now versus the likelihood of being a victim of violent crime during the period of the Kennett government. We know that Victoria is the safest mainland state. We know we have had significant reductions in our crime rate in recent years, but what is less known is that we are reducing the numbers of victims of crime.

These are all violent crime categories. If we take robbery victims, under the Kennett government the victims of crime for the offence of robbery increased by 81 per cent; under the Bracks government they have declined by 17 per cent. If we take homicide victims, under the Kennett government the increase was 13.6 per cent; under the Bracks government it is a 2.2 per cent decline. For rape victims, under the Kennett government the increase was 23.8 per cent; under the Bracks government it is a 0.9 per cent decline. For sexual assault victims, under the Kennett government there was a 1.9 per cent increase; under the Bracks government it is a 23.2 per cent decline. For assault victims, under the Kennett government there was a 29 per cent increase; under the Bracks government it is a 13.6 per cent increase.

It is that last category of crime that I want to look at because it is very important when we talk about assaults. Assaults make up by far the largest percentage of violent crime statistics so it is understandable that any change or alteration in the occurrence of the violent crime of assault is going to have a disproportionate impact on the figures for violent crime. We knew that when we introduced our family violence code of practice. We expected over time that the level of the reporting of assaults would increase, and we have seen that occur.

To the extent that you can say that you are ever pleased to see a category of violent crime increasing, because you never are, we are pleased in one respect, and that is that it says this area of violent crime, which was significantly under-reported previously, is now being taken seriously by Victoria Police and members of the public are more willing to come forward and make a complaint, and we think that is a good thing. But we are very pleased to have our record of the occurrence of violent crime and the numbers of victims of violent crime compared to that of the previous government, because our record is across all of those areas of violent crime — and they represent robbery, homicide, rape, sexual assault and assault — and represents by far the vast majority of violent crimes that occur in Victoria, and the numbers of victims of those crimes all increased under the Kennett government. With the exception of assault, which I have just explained, they have all come down and come down significantly under the Bracks government, and we are happy to have our record in that area compared with that of the previous government.

If members of the opposition believe, Mr Clark, that there is some sort of violent crime outbreak infecting our suburbs and our regional areas at the moment, then you would have to believe there was a violent crime catastrophe under the previous government. Yet members of that government then, who are now members of the opposition, had very little to say about that at the time. The truth is that our performance in terms of violent crime stacks up well compared to other states and territories. You are less likely to be a victim of assault in Victoria than you are in any other state. We are very pleased about that, and we are pleased that we are doing everything we can to tackle violent crime.

Mr CLARK — The figures you cited are significantly different to the ones I have in front of me. Are you willing to make available to the committee the figures you have cited?

Mr HOLDING — I am more than happy to make them available to the committee. Just so that you are aware, they were: robbery victims under Kennett, 81 per cent increase, under Bracks a 17 per cent decline; homicide under Kennett, 13.6 per cent increase, under Bracks a 2.2 per cent decline; rape victims under Kennett, 23.8 per cent increase, under Bracks a 0.9 per cent decline; sexual assault victims under Kennett, 1.9 per cent increase, under Bracks a 23.2 per cent decline. We are happy to have those figures on the record.

Mr CLARK — For example, my figures show a 21 per cent increase in homicide under the current government and a 41 per cent increase in assault, so there is clearly a dramatic difference in the numbers. Are you citing aggregate numbers, or are you citing ratios of some sort?

Mr HOLDING — I am talking about victims of crime, Mr Clark, and that is a totally legitimate way of measuring the incidence of violent crime in Victoria. I am happy to provide those figures to you.

Ms ROMANES — I refer to budget paper 3, page 38, and the significant expenditure outlined there on counter-terrorism. Minister, is this expenditure contributing to providing effective protection against terrorism and also organised crime in the Victorian community?

Mr HOLDING — We think it is, and with the committee's indulgence I would like to outline some of the things we have put in place to increase the effectiveness of Victoria Police's counter-terrorism response, particularly the deployment of new equipment. New equipment is obviously extremely important in the context of counter-terrorism as we are compelled to respond to new contingencies that previously were not necessarily envisaged.

I will start with the Disaster Victim Identification, Chemical, Biological and Radiological Unit, which has procured and deployed state-of-the-art chemical detection equipment. This is very important equipment that we know will enhance Victoria's counter-terrorism capability. This is equipment that has the capacity to perform preliminary identification of unknown powders and liquids. It uses laser technology, and that technology is capable of penetrating plastics, glass and other substances. Obviously we have seen from time to time increases around the reports of unknown substances. Police are required to respond to those reports, and it is very important that they have the capacity to deal with those sorts of toxic substances without having to necessarily open the containers or expose themselves further to the risk.

We have also deployed a panoscan, which is a two-dimensional recording process using digital photographic recording methods. This was utilised extensively in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games and at all our major sporting venues as well as major hotels, critical infrastructure, Melbourne Airport — those sorts of things have been recorded. The images connected with these sites have been distributed for strategic use in briefings and familiarisation of venues as well as for tactical training exercises. It is a very powerful tool, and we are very pleased that Victoria Police has been able to use it.

The water police in our search and rescue squads have had a substantial upgrade in their equipment. We have seen additional boats and infrastructure provided as well as new technology which enables Victoria's water police to more accurately capture the images below the surface, analyse what they contain and to respond accordingly.

A marine response team has established a compliant ship-boarding capability, and this training has been conducted with customs, the Australian Defence Force, the New South Wales police and the Hong Kong police. It involves both tactics and boat handling, not just in the context of counter-terrorism but also in the context of illegal fishing and that sort of thing. It is important that Victoria Police has the capability to respond to those sorts of things.

The dog squad has increased firearms, explosives detection systems and canine teams which they employed in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games. A total of 1437 hours have been spent on searches, which is a significant increase on previous years. Passive alert detection teams deployed by the bomb squad have been used at sporting events, public gatherings and on the public transport system.

We have obviously improved our coordination between different agencies. Victoria Police has been working with international policing organisations to obtain the benefit of not just their intelligence collection but more importantly, often their training and equipment use so that we can deploy some of the latest capabilities.

We have developed a comprehensive database of critical infrastructure which has been prepared in consultation with ASIO. We have had a number of training exercises, including one involving the city loop, which was very

successful and enabled us to test among other things the deployment of our metropolitan mobile radio system which is a digitally encrypted radio system and works not just under the ground but in built-up environments where the analogue system would not be so effective.

Without going through all the other things, there is the crime scene division which is starting chemical, biological and radiological training in Canada — just a lot of different activities built around counter-terrorism that we think enhance our capabilities significantly.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask you about the use of speed cameras. The government's position has been that the cameras are used at times which coincide with injury collision data — that is, the high risk times. However, the data prepared by the traffic intelligence unit in VicPol, certainly for 2003 in various municipalities, suggested that the use of cameras coincided with high traffic volumes rather than recorded collision incidents time frames.

You have said publicly on Neil Mitchell's program, certainly as recently as April of this year, that you are happy to release information about speed cameras; yet Victoria Police is blocking an FOI request from the shadow minister for updated information on speed camera rosters so we can see at what time periods during the day the cameras are used and how that correlates to accidents data versus traffic data.

The CHAIR — Perhaps you are going to relate some of that to the estimates, Mr Rich-Phillips?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yes, I am coming to that in a moment. Minister, can you tell the committee why, given your public statement that you are happy to release speed information, this information is being blocked from public release? And will you give the speed camera roster data to this committee if you will not release it publicly?

Mr HOLDING — The first point I would make is that this government has been more transparent in dealing with speed cameras and road safety related activities than any government in Victorian history — in fact it was this government which earlier this year released firstly the speed camera policy guidelines — that is, the siting criteria which make very clear the basis upon which mobile speed cameras can be located around the state.

We have also released on our web site the full details of fixed digital speed cameras — that is, where they are located. We have also released on our web site, as of the day it was released — I think it was back in May — the full list of potential mobile speed camera sites across Victoria. This is the greatest volume of information ever provided to the Victorian people about the operation of our speed camera system in this state.

However, we have made it clear that there is some information that we are not willing to provide if we believe it will compromise public safety. This is a judgment we made because we think the program must support our objective of reducing the road toll, reducing accidents and injuries relating to road traffic events. In fact the decision that Victoria Police took — and we strongly support this decision — not to release the operational enforcement thresholds was supported by VCAT recently.

The opposition had the opportunity to go to VCAT and test whether that information ought to be made available in the public interest, and VCAT supported Victoria Police's view that it was appropriate to withhold that information, and we strongly support it. If the opposition seeks information from Victoria Police, for the most part Victoria Police will be very forthcoming in providing that information.

There will be things from time to time which are not released for good, sound policy reasons. If the opposition rejects that view, they are able to test that at VCAT. We have a very enviable record of success at VCAT in terms of protecting, preserving and supporting the road safety focus of our program. I think I will leave it there.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Just on the second part of the question, which is in light of the minister's answer, is he willing to provide that information to the committee?

The CHAIR — Minister, do you want to make any other comment?

Mr HOLDING — I am happy to repeat the answer.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — As a former PAEC member, you obviously appreciate how this committee operates.

Mr HOLDING — I appreciate that this committee has a strong interest in interrogating budget estimates and checking performance measures and relating those to government policy. We are very relaxed about that interrogation, but I make this point: the government has provided more information to the Victorian people about the operation of our road safety program than any government in Victoria's history. It is on the web site, it is publicly available, people can look it up.

There are some things that we are not willing to provide. Victoria Police can make a judgment about the documents that it has within its possession and whether or not those things should be made publicly available. If they make a judgment not to release it, it is not for the government to direct Victoria Police to release that information. Indeed, if it relates to the operational elements of Victoria Police, it would be improper for the government to direct Victoria Police to release it.

If members of the opposition are aggrieved by that, rather than using this committee, they can challenge it at VCAT. I would reiterate that we have an enviable record of having our judgments upheld and Victoria Police's judgments about what information is made available or not available. I make the point about the operational tolerance thresholds.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Chair, I am just not sure whether the minister has committed to provide the information to the committee on notice or not.

The CHAIR — In terms of the second part — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — In regards to the speed camera roster data, I am just not sure whether the minister said he was willing to provide it to the committee or not.

The CHAIR — He answered that in his reply to your question.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are we expecting it or not?

The CHAIR — I am not, unless I misheard what the minister said.

Mr HOLDING — I did not realise I was that subtle.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — If that is your interpretation, that is fine.

Mr MERLINO — Your comprehension is lacking, then, Mr Rich-Phillips. Minister, in your presentation you referred to the high-tech mobile data network. Can you inform the committee as to the outcome of that rollout, particularly if there were any teething problems, which there are sometimes with this type of technology?

Mr HOLDING — This is a really good program. This is one of the more significant enhancements that has been made to police technical capability in recent times. You saw the picture earlier which made very clear the way in which the mobile data terminals work in the vehicle context. I just wanted to provide some information to the committee about the mobile data network, the rollout and how it has been utilised. We now have something like 700 police vehicles that have been fitted with mobile data terminals. That includes divvy vans, sedans, traffic management units, station wagons, four-wheel drives and booze buses.

The terminals have been put on boats, as well as obviously in the mobile police stations that the government has been rolling out as of the last budget. The mobile data network is connected to the Victoria Police LEAP database as well as the VicRoads vehicle registration and drivers licence system database, the firearms registration system, the national vehicles database and the sheriff's office warrant tracking system. So it is a very powerful tool.

The MDN — mobile data network project — has been worked closely by the sheriff's office and that has enabled follow-up of unexecuted warrants and other sheriff's office proceedings. We have been very pleased with that. Since 17 November 2004, which was the commencement of the MDN live pilot, to the end of April 2006 there has been a huge use of the system. Two million vehicle registrations have been checked; 185 000 drivers licences have been checked; 228 000 persons have been checked, and 13 700 sheriff's warning notices have been issued. We have seen a significant increase in Victoria Police being able to issue traffic-related offence notices which they have detected using the data terminals, and these particularly relate to unregistered vehicles and unlicensed or disqualified drivers.

We really take this group of motorists very seriously. Unregistered vehicles obviously represent motorists who are driving around without third-party insurance, for example, so if they are involved in an accident, it creates real issues for other motorists. Those who are unlicensed or, more importantly, disqualified drivers are some of our worst drivers. They are people who have often committed a series of driving-related offences.

They might have been repeat speeders. They might have been drink-drivers. They are people we want to take off our roads. We have taken them off the road through the legal process but they insist on driving around, and unless they stand a really good likelihood of being detected by police and caught, they will continue to do so.

The mobile data network enables police to carry out those checks. In the past the checks would have to have been done over the radio network. It was a low priority in terms of the priority police afforded different radio-based activities, and so it often did not happen if there was a more significant incident under way. This has enabled police to have a tool which is much more powerful. It also supports the activities of the MAS which has been able to use it to more quickly and accurately identify addresses it might be despatching to or whatever.

We have already talked about photo image transmission. The police have been able to provide the committee with information about that. We have also been able to use the mobile data terminals for sending images, for example where a suspect is urgently wanted for a serious crime — a murder or something like that — or where a suspect is armed and has issued threats against police or other members of the public, or where a missing person is in some sort of immediate danger. They might be at risk of suicide or self-harm. Being able to transmit those images, even if it is not used all the time, is a really powerful medium for using the MDTs for that sort of transmission.

Mr CLARK — I have just been looking at the two pictures on your slides — —

Mr HOLDING — I hope it is no-one you recognise, Mr Clark!

Mr CLARK — I do not recognise the person there. It is the slide following your police versus crime rate slide and more resources for police, and then mobile data networks. The two slides seem to illustrate two different units assuming they are both pictures of the mobile data terminal.

I want to ask whether two different units are in fact deployed in Victoria Police cars? If so, what are the relative numbers of each? Also, the keyboard seems to be quite cumbersome where it is being used by the officer. Is there somewhere in the car where the keyboard is placed when it is not in use, or does it have to be detached and stored in the boot or somewhere else?

Mr HOLDING — The keyboard is utilised by the non-driving policeman. Obviously for occupational health and safety reasons as well as road safety, Victoria Police has been quite insistent upon that. From the vehicles I have seen, the keyboard normally sits next to the passenger. It works okay. I think police will understand that there is a trade-off between the amount of equipment they have in the vehicle and the functionality of that equipment, and the feedback I have had from police members has been overwhelmingly that having access to the keyboard and being able to type quickly on it is a trade-off they are more than willing to make.

There have been two versions of the screen. They are both provided by Motorola, but there have been two different versions of the screen, so that may explain why.

Mr CLARK — Is there a reason for the two? What are the relative numbers of each model, if you could tell us or — —

Mr HOLDING — I think it is about in each instance just improving the functionality of it, and there is a more up-to-date version. I do not have the details of the numbers.

Mr CLARK — Perhaps you could come back to us and let us know how many of each.

Mr HOLDING — Sure.

The CHAIR — That is another item taken on notice. Now we go to Mr Clark for his question.

Mr CLARK — Minister, I refer to an article that was in the *Age* of Thursday, 8 June in which it was alleged that Victoria Police and in particular the chief commissioner did not respond to a letter from the building

industry task force relating to an alleged incident when CFMEU organiser John Setka ignored police requests to leave a building site.

The newspaper was quoted as saying that the chief commissioner could not comment because police had been unable to locate the relevant correspondence. I imagine you, as minister, do not take kindly to that sort of administrative situation, where correspondence cannot be located. Can you tell the committee: does the government have a policy in relation to cooperation with the building industry task force, were you aware of this particular situation, and do you think that the way in which this situation was handled was satisfactory?

Mr HOLDING — The first point I would make is that I was not aware of this situation, and I do not accept all of the assertions that are made either in that article or the representations that you have just made based on that article, so it might be better if I provide the chief commissioner with an opportunity to explain how Victoria Police has been responding to issues connected with the building industry.

The CHAIR — Before the police commissioner speaks, it would be helpful if we could pass — —

Chief Comm. NIXON — I know the article, Madam Chair.

The CHAIR — You know the article? Right.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I do, thank you. We have a very positive relationship with the building royal commission and have in fact done a substantial amount of work with it. We were obviously involved in the original commission and then the continuing commission. That is the first part — it is a positive relationship, and we think it is important that we continue with that.

In terms of that particular article the journalist called the Victoria Police at 4 o'clock the afternoon before the story. He had in fact had the story for about nine months before that but chose to call us at 4.00 p.m. on the afternoon before he published it. Because of that I have written to the editor, privately in a sense as it is not to be published in 'Letters to the editor', asking that in the future if he wants us to respond, he might well give us a reasonable amount of time to do so. So that is a separate issue.

Regarding the actual incident that is quoted, we certainly did attend at the time; police officers were there. We had correspondence and in fact staff spoke personally with the building royal commission — the continuing commission; it is not a royal commission any more — about that particular incident and had correspondence backwards and forwards, which we were able to find, and we found the file itself.

We conducted an inquiry into what had happened and certainly were able to deal with the building commission itself, and it was very satisfied with it. We are still waiting for the investigator to return so we can have a chat with him about how the information became public in the first place, because we actually dealt with the matter and dealt with it appropriately.

Mr SOMYUREK — Minister, if I can take you to police numbers, your second slide shows that in 1999 there were 9500 or so police, and this year the numbers are up to about 10 900 — that is, an increase of 1400 police or 15 per cent. Can you advise the committee how the government has done this? You were talking about trade-offs earlier. There surely must be a trade-off between having more numbers and perhaps cutting services elsewhere, or has it been a case of increasing the size of the pie?

Mr HOLDING — This is one of those win-win stories, you will be surprised to hear, Mr Somyurek. I was going to bring a list of cuts with me, but there are not any.

I have to begin by saying that last year I misled the committee, and I should correct the record. I was reading through the transcript last night and realised that last year I told the committee that our aim was to have 10 943 police within Victoria Police by the end of June 2006. As at the end of June this year there are 10 950 police within Victoria Police, so there are actually seven more than the number I informed the committee of last year. I humbly apologise for understating the numbers of police within the organisation. This is something we are very pleased about. When we came into government we inherited a Victoria Police with extremely high attrition rates — the highest attrition rate of any state in Australia — at 6.4 per cent or thereabouts, which meant we were exiting some of our most experienced officers at the rate of about 18 a fortnight. Only the Northern Territory had a higher attrition rate than Victoria's.

We promised 800 additional police in our first term. Members of the opposition are on the record as saying at the time — one on 3MP radio — that it was impossible for Victoria Police to recruit 800 police in one term because they could not be put through the academy in a four-year period. We actually put them through the academy in a three-year period. We overshot our police numbers at the time and over delivered on our promise. In our second term we promised a net 600 additional police — net of recruits at the academy, including the full complement of graduated police. We have over delivered on that commitment as well. The Auditor-General has acknowledged in several places in his recent report to the Parliament on work force planning within Victoria Police that the Labor government has delivered both its 1999 commitment and its 2002 commitment.

We took the view that whilst recruiting additional police was not the only thing that should be done to strengthen and build Victoria Police as an organisation, coming into office as we did at a time when the organisation had gone through significant decline, we felt it was the most significant thing we could do at the time. We have reduced the attrition rate to 2.3 per cent or 2.4 per cent, depending on when you cut the figures, which is the lowest attrition rate of any police organisation anywhere in Australia. When the chief commissioner, the Premier and I attended the police academy to celebrate the graduation of squads 4 and 5 last Friday, the 58 new members who joined the organisation then took the total number of police in Victoria to 10 950. We are very pleased about that. It is a great achievement. Getting the attrition rate down is a greater achievement because it means that police want to stay in the organisation. They are enjoying their work as police officers and they want to stay.

We have increased the diversity of the organisation. There are more women in Victoria Police now than ever before. There are more people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which means that Victoria Police increasingly mirrors the broader community in terms of its ethnic make-up. We are recruiting older recruits. The average age of recruits is now 30 to 31 years of age, which means we are drawing into the organisation people who bring experience and perspectives from other aspects of their lives. I think this change in culture is the most effective thing that can be done in the long term to promote the ethical health of the organisation. It is much more effective and important than oversight mechanisms such as the role of director, police integrity. They are important, but changing the culture of the organisation is even more important, and drawing people into the organisation who have diverse life skills is a great way of doing that. It also improves the capability of the organisation. It draws people into the organisation who look at problems differently, who bring different styles of working, different ways of thinking and different experiences, and that is positive as well.

It is a very simple story, in a way. We came into an organisation where the attrition rate was up and police numbers were down. The previous government had promised 1000 additional police and it cut 800. We promised 800 and delivered them. We promised another 600 and we more than delivered those. The attrition rate is now the lowest of any state or territory in Australia. The organisation is going forward, and we are very pleased about that.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, can you tell us more about what have been your most effective strategies for recruitment?

Mr HOLDING — Yes, we can. We have obviously had a series of police recruitment campaigns, but we have done other things as well. I will get the chief commissioner to comment on some of those things.

Chief Comm. NIXON — We looked to work with communities that really had not thought that much about joining policing — a range of groups within multicultural and Aboriginal communities. We work with TAFE and university graduates to attract them to policing — a whole set of people. Our advertising has also been targeting women, particularly in women's magazines, using some of our police officers. It is also about the general belief from the community that policing is a good occupation and so the more profile and more community satisfaction, then more people would see they want to join us as well. We are also obviously moving to a model of police education which would be the provision of a degree qualification. We are still in the process of developing that model, but we think, too, that that will be a very powerful tool to attract others who might not have seen us as a career option, particularly from, say, Asian communities and others, immigrant communities that see education as a very important issue.

We think that will also help attract more people. Certainly in New South Wales that was one of the major differences in terms of who thought about joining policing, coming through that tertiary-based model of education. As we move through we will also bring people in from the broader community with older age and recognising their learning. We think that will put us in good stead.

The issue across the Australia is that not all of the states are having success in attracting people to join. New South Wales is, we are. South Australia is going overseas to hire people. Western Australia is doing the same. The Northern Territory, and the same with New Zealand, which is not a state, but New Zealand is having similar problems. It is all of those things together that attract people, and we need to continue on to see that policing is a job that people want to join.

Mr HOLDING — That last point was quite interesting. To give one quick example, South Australia celebrated its 5000th police officer graduating last week, and it was a person recruited from the United Kingdom. This is increasingly being used by police organisations to make up the shortfall in what they can attract locally. It is pleasing that Victoria Police has been able to draw them from the domestic population.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the ESD investigation into the latest LEAP database leaks. On 12 October last year Victoria Police released a press statement from the media and corporate communications unit titled ‘ESD investigation into release of LEAP information’, and it commenced:

Victoria Police’s ethical standards department has completed its investigation into the inappropriate release of LEAP data to two individuals in July.

The investigation was conducted in order to determine the circumstances surrounding the release of the data. The investigation carried out by Assistant Commissioner Kieran Walshe and Commander Peter Graham also examined police policy and practices relating to LEAP audit requests.

Following the release of that statement on 12 October, the shadow minister for police submitted an FOI request to Victoria Police seeking all documents in relation to that ESD investigation. That was on 21 October.

A full six months elapsed and the shadow minister, Mr Wells, received a response from Victoria Police on 13 April this year which in part indicated in the response from Lisa McMeeken, acting superintendent looking after FOI:

I am advised by Superintendent Wilson of the ESD that the investigation into the abovementioned matter is pending as one of the interviews to be conducted by the ESD has yet to take place.

Can you explain why a statement was released by Victoria Police on 12 October last year saying that the investigation had concluded, when six months later Victoria Police is using as a reason to not release information for FOI the fact that the investigation is still going on, and when you first became aware that the statement made by Victoria Police last October was incorrect?

The CHAIR — Minister, there are references being made there to documents, so to assist, we are happy to pass them over.

Mr HOLDING — That is all right; I think we know the documents. Firstly, let me assure Mr Rich-Phillips that that investigation has for all intents and purposes been concluded. It was concluded last year when I was provided with a copy of it and the covering letter indicating that the investigation had been concluded, but there was one caveat on that which was made clear at the time and which has been made clear several times since — that is, there is one officer who was not able to be interviewed as a consequence of various things which I am not going to entertain the committee with at the moment, suffice to say he was not interviewed and therefore when he is able to be interviewed at some stage in the future, if he is able to be, then Victoria Police is at liberty to do so.

However, it is not believed that he has any information which would add to the inquiry which has already been conducted, and that is why it has been concluded. What I might do is get the chief commissioner — this is not an investigation I have conducted, I do not conduct ESD investigations and people would be surprised if I did — to provide additional information about the way in which this matter has been handled.

The CHAIR — Does the police commissioner require any of those documents?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No, I am aware of the matter. I think the initial investigation, or the investigation was able initially to ascertain some information from this particular police officer involved. It was seen to be sufficient information. It was not a statement, but it was in fact an account of what had happened, and that was sufficient in the first instance to be able to allow the investigator then — Commander Graham, I think — to proceed with the investigation and come to a conclusion in terms of what had happened in that particular matter.

The issue around the police officer, who we still are unable to officially interview and in fact deal with in any way, is I guess the final piece of this matter. But we believed it was concluded sufficiently to a point where we could move forward and then explain what had happened in the circumstances. But in terms of whether any action might be taken with this police officer, he has to be formally interviewed, but we have been unable to do that because of his current situation.

The CHAIR — Right; thank you.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Okay, accepting that — —

The CHAIR — So the question related to ethical standards, that has been dealt with; the FOI request, that has been dealt with.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It has not to the extent that — —

The CHAIR — And the six months, and that has been dealt with — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The minister and the chief commissioner are saying the investigation has concluded for all intents and purposes.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Yet the release of information in relation to this investigation is being blocked by Victoria Police on the basis that the investigation has not concluded.

The CHAIR — The commissioner has established that and explained that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — We cannot have it both ways. Either they are happy to — —

The CHAIR — The minister and the police commissioner have just provided relevant documentation, or relevant answers to the three components of your question.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Does that mean that the information will then be released, because for all intents and purposes the investigation has concluded?

The CHAIR — Well, the minister and the police commissioner have answered that, but they can re-answer it if — it looks like the minister wants to.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I guess the issue is around releasing information on the ethical standards investigation in the first place, which I assume is the reason it is being blocked at this stage. We released a summary of the case itself, and that was the essence of the matter, and we believed that was appropriate at the time. In this case perhaps the request — I have not seen the request, so I do not know how much detail it is asking for or how much material — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Would you like a copy now?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I am happy to look at that and come back and respond.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I am happy to let the chief commissioner have a look and if she wants to respond, because the reason given for not providing information was that the investigation is still pending because that police officer has not been investigated. But the chief commissioner's and the minister's view is that for all intents and purposes the investigation has concluded.

Mr HOLDING — Sorry, 'interviewed', Mr Rich-Phillips. There is an important distinction. You said 'investigated'.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — 'Interviewed', sorry.

The CHAIR — 'Interviewed', and the commissioner has also outlined that she is not sure what is appropriate in relation to the ethical standards department for the release of information. As I understand, what you

have undertaken to do is simply look at the documentation being provided by Mr Rich-Phillips, and if, after consideration with ESD, you think it appropriate, you will get back to us.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yes.

The CHAIR — Otherwise you can let us know that you have a different opinion.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Thank you.

Ms GREEN — Thank you. Minister, I would like to take you to the important subject of road safety. In your slide presentation you indicated that \$12 million has been allocated to tackle hoon driving. I might say this has been very much welcomed by communities in my electorate. Can you detail for the committee what this will be for, and whether there is a cost recovery against any spending?

Mr HOLDING — Sure. Can I bring up the drug-driving slide? I would like to provide the committee with some more information about some of our road safety initiatives, particularly the drug-driving trial, which is now being confirmed as a permanent feature of Victoria's road safety strategies. That is just some data for the committee about, firstly, the number of tests that have been conducted over the period of the trial, the number of those that have tested positive and, if you like, the hit rate for those positive tests. This is a world first and something that we in Victoria are really pleased that we have been able to introduce as a feature of our road safety system here in Victoria.

We have been able to conduct — as you can see there — over 18 000 roadside tests, and the 2006–07 budget includes funding of \$3.28 million going as well as \$1.29 million in asset funding to purchase a new drug-driving bus. That will be an additional drug driving bus to the one we are already operating, and it will also provide us with the capacity to fit out the seven existing booze buses with drug-driving capability. Over time we will be able to increase the number of drivers who are tested for drugs quite significantly.

The trial that we have conducted has demonstrated that the devices, the police procedures and the laboratory checking of evidentiary samples have all worked well, and we are very pleased that, aside from the initial teething problems on the first day which related to making sure that the operating procedures were as effective as possible, we have had no false positives since then, which shows, I think, that the technology is working really, really well. As well as including it as a permanent feature of Victoria's road safety arrangements, we have also added the drug ecstasy, so in addition to methylamphetamine and cannabis, which are commonly used substances and were part of the initial trial, we have now been able to add ecstasy as well. The 1-in-46 positive rate overall is something we are quite concerned about. It is in fact significantly higher than the hit rate for drink-driving, which says we have got a way to go in terms of getting the message out in the community that this is unacceptable. Obviously we will continue to refine the arrangement in Victoria to see whether there are additional drugs over time that ought to be added to our drug-driving arrangements, and that will, of course, depend on continuing to refine the technology also.

Our statistical data tells us that a very significant number of motorists who are killed on Victorian roads do have drugs in their systems. In fact I think a report done for the coroner's office in the late 1990s and in the early part of this decade told us that something like 28 to 29 per cent of motorists killed on our roads have a drug other than alcohol in their systems. So this is not peripheral to our road safety message; it is central to it. We need to be able to get the message out that drug-driving is not acceptable, and that is why the resources in this budget, which go towards providing an additional drug-driving bus as well as expanding the capacity into our existing seven booze buses is so important. I can provide the committee with more information about the testing regime itself, if it is interested, but I would just say, by way of comparison with the 1-in-46 hit rate for drug driving, that the hit rate for drink-driving is 1-in-247 for booze bus operations. So obviously we do have a need to generate real communication and cultural change amongst Victorian motorists.

Ms GREEN — Minister, that drug-driving information was very useful — the \$14.1 million — but I was really concerned about hoons. So if you could detail that, that would be great.

Mr HOLDING — I had better tell you about hoons. We had the new arrangements kick in on Saturday. The new scheme started at midnight, and Victoria Police were able to impound the cars of our first three motorists. You were probably wondering what I was on there, Danielle!

Ms GREEN — I was thinking that maybe the drug-driving one was not as welcomed in some areas of my electorate as the hoon-driving one!

Mr HOLDING — The first three motorists have had their vehicles impounded. One was doing 140 kph in an 80 kph zone on Friday night or Saturday morning. The second did something like a 40-metre burnout along a stretch of, I think, Dandenong Road, and the third did a significant burnout also. In a sense these are exactly the sorts of offences that our hoon driving laws are aimed at picking up.

The CHAIR — Minister, I am going to have to interrupt you. You can give us as much detail as you like on hoons so long as it contains some facts and figures on budget, because this really is quite a long answer to a question some minutes back.

Mr HOLDING — Sure. I will be very brief. We put aside, I think, \$12 million in the budget to support our hoon-driving initiatives. Those resources are being used to support police in the establishment of new training regimes, the establishment of an impoundment and towing regime and a storage regime so that these vehicles can be effectively stored, particularly those that are impounded for three months or confiscated and disposed of permanently. It has also provide resources for an advertising campaign to spread the message about the dangers of hoon driving not only in Melbourne but also in regional Victoria where it is an issue. So that is how those resources will be used and we think this can be a very important part of our road safety initiatives.

Mr CLARK — Are you able to confirm whether Victoria Police has an outstanding fringe benefits tax liability of \$9.8 billion with the Australian Taxation Office that has accrued over the past six years in connection with police vehicles and penalties owing, and that Commander Danny Tuck has been commissioned to undertake a special report into the extent of that liability? If so, can you tell the committee when you were informed of this breach of Australian tax law and what action have you and the department taken to remedy the situation? Is the cost of paying this liability and penalties included in the 2006-07 estimates?

Mr HOLDING — My advice is that Victoria Police does not believe it has an outstanding fringe benefit tax liability with the Australian Taxation Office. Victoria Police has not had discussions with the Australian Taxation Office in relation to this?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No, that is not right. The Australian Taxation Office is currently conducting, as it does, audits within different organisations. In this case it is with the Victoria Police, and it is looking at our systems and practices around this particular fringe benefit arrangement. At this stage it has not finished the review. It is not an audit; it is a review of the way we go about collecting that data, and we are waiting for a response from ATO. We conducted a review to look at this issue around the use of motor vehicles which I think was the more important part of the review. Assessing where and how appropriately they were distributed within the organisation was the key piece of work done by Commander Tuck.

Mr CLARK — By Commander Tuck?

Chief Comm. NIXON — By Commander Tuck.

Mr CLARK — Has the tax office alleged or raised the \$9.8 million or any other amount of liability?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No, not at all. I have had no formal approach in any way or shape from the tax office about its concerns with our fringe benefit tax. As I said, it is currently conducting a review which is the standard arrangement.

The CHAIR — I would like to take you to the extensive police station building program, one of which I am particularly glad about. Over the last number of estimates hearings, we have been asking about stations and whether they are on time and on budget. Can you outline to us whether the initiatives announced in previous budgets have been delivered according to your requirements and any future initiatives that you might have?

Mr HOLDING — I am very pleased to inform the committee that our police station construction program continues with great enthusiasm. This is in fact one of the most significant commitments that the government has made in replenishing the asset stock of the organisation. Providing modern facilities in a sense is one of the things that makes policing an attractive job and helps retain existing staff and attract new ones, but it also sends a very powerful message to local communities across the state that Victoria Police is here to stay and that small one

officer stations in regional locations will not be shut down. That is something this government is very pleased about. We are not in the business of closing police stations. We have been in the business of refurbishing police stations and building new ones to make sure that we meet the needs of growing communities as well as those communities where police stations have in a sense been degraded over time simply because of age or whatever.

We are also very pleased that in this budget we have been able to make commitments to additional police stations which go above and beyond the ones that were contained in what we call LFS2 — Labor's financial statements for the second term.

We are well on track to delivering on all of those police station commitments. I know that many of those cover police stations in the electorates of the members of this committee, including the Fawkner police station, Chair, that you and I were very pleased to open last year. There are also new police stations which go beyond LFS2, which is another example of the Bracks government over delivering. In fact in this budget we allocated \$13.9 million for a new police station at Lilydale, which is again above and beyond the LFS2 commitments. I might add it is twice the amount that the opposition promised for building a Lilydale station only one month before we announced it, so we are very pleased in Lilydale that they will be getting a full police station, not half a police station. I know that is of great reassurance to people in the Yarra Ranges. It also includes resources for a police station at Yarra Junction and funds to upgrade the Hastings police station, and resources to acquire land to begin the process of a significant co-located emergency services facility at Swan Hill, where the police station there, which I had an opportunity to visit last year, does need significant work. The works probably cannot be done on the existing site, so we will be looking now to acquire a new site where we can have an integrated emergency services facility. That is something we have now started the planning on in this year's budget.

From time to time members of Parliament reflect on this very exciting program, and I saw a web site you can go to which lists Labor's broken promises. It includes a long and exhaustive list of police stations which the opposition claims have not been built, and in the interests of the provision of accurate information to the committee I am pleased to let the committee know that in fact I have opened the police stations at Manangatang, Speed and Endeavour Hills, and also at Quambatook, Woomelang and Linton, and many of the other police stations that are listed on this site as not being opened or as broken promises that have not been delivered. The Manangatang one says:

This station was promised at the last election but will not be delivered in this term of Parliament. The Bracks government has only recently allocated funding.

You can imagine my surprise when I got to Manangatang and found the police station was there and ready to be opened, so I am very pleased to inform the committee that you cannot believe everything you see on the web.

Ms GREEN — What about Hurstbridge and Warrandyte?

Mr HOLDING — They are well under way. You know that we will be opening those ones very soon.

Ms GREEN — Excellent.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the use of the LEAP database for the provision of crime statistics. In a Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee report of October 2002 of the inquiry into crime trends, the chief commissioner gave evidence to that inquiry where she said:

It —

the LEAP database —

is also a system that was put in place not necessarily to be able to produce accurate statistics or data. It was more a recording system so that one had the facility to record information about crime reports ... The point is that it was not necessarily designed to produce the sort of information that we are now looking for it to produce ...

Can you assure the committee that these statistics you presented to the committee earlier today are not based on the LEAP database that the chief commissioner has suggested does not produce accurate statistics, and can you tell the committee what progress the government has made on the recommendation that was made by the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee that an independent bureau of crime statistics be established, independent of Victoria Police, as a statutory body to record and report crime statistics?

The CHAIR — Could I have the reference for my own benefit and I would like to know the date of that Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The report was October 2002. The chief commissioner gave evidence on 11 September 2001.

The CHAIR — In relation to the stats in the LEAP database, the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee recommendation, have you got the government response to that?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I do not have that with me, Chair.

Mr HOLDING — There are essentially two questions. The first is are our crime statistics accurate, and the second is what progress, if any, has been made on a recommendation to establish some sort of statistical unit. In relation to the first question, which is, 'Are our crime statistics accurate' — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are they based on the LEAP database?

Mr HOLDING — I let Mr Rich-Phillips know that we have had a review of our crime statistics conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology; and the Australian Institute of Criminology says that our methodology, the collection processes for our statistics is sound and appropriate. What I would start by saying to Mr Rich-Phillips is: if it is good enough for the Australian Institute of Criminology, then it is good enough for me and I think good enough for most Victorians.

Our crime statistics compare nationally to a COAG process which is, I think, oversighted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and this enables comparisons to be made between crime trends between jurisdictions; but, Mr Rich-Phillips, it also enables analysis comparisons to be done with historical data essentially so we can, for example, compare our performance with the Kennett government.

I can understand why a member of the opposition would want to find some basis for undermining the statistics and crime data connected with the Kennett government because under the Kennett government, crime went up. I can also understand somebody who is a member of the opposition wanting to undermine the basis of and collection for crime statistics under this government, because under this government crime has gone down.

However you choose to collect the data, provided it is collected consistently and from a common source then I think you can conclude pretty readily which government was more effective in tackling crime if, from a common base, one government showed crime rates going up and the other government showed crime rates going down. So we are very happy to have our record in relation to crime and crime rates compared with other governments, both throughout Australia and also historically here in Victoria.

I make the point, that in relation to Victoria's crime statistics, the collection and methodologies surrounding them have been reviewed by the Australian Institute of Criminology and have been found to be sound and effective; I am happy about that and support it.

In relation to the second issue around the statistical unit, I might get the Chief Commissioner to comment on that. I might add that the Chief Commissioner has been leading a process across Australia which is seeing a rationalisation of our common and cooperative policing arrangements which include our policing arrangements with respect to the collection of policing statistics and it is something she has shown great leadership on. At the Australasian Police Ministers' Council last week we endorsed a proposal to take the next step in that process. It is something that I think will deliver common policing information bases on a more effective basis and we are pleased about that.

Chief Comm. NIXON — In going to the 2002 comment, I cannot quite go back four years to think of the context in which it was said, but the LEAP database — the law enforcement assistance program, as it is known — was designed as an operational tool and that was really the point. What we have had to do because that was the system we had was obviously refine it to make sure it is accurate and also bring outsiders in, which is what the minister referred to in terms of the Australian Institute of Criminology's review, to make sure that accuracy of our data was appropriate.

We have continued to work on that. There is a national crime statistics group that looks to make comparisons across the whole of the country in terms of the way data is collected and we are certainly part of that and have been

contributing significantly to make sure that the data that is produced is accurate and is able to be at least compared within our state. At this stage you may have noticed that the last crime statistics released Australia-wide did not have two categories of crime reported, and that is because we believed that there needs to be further work done on that.

We continue to try to reform the process but it is true to say that the LEAP system was not designed as a method to collect crime statistics. It was designed as a method to allow us to run our operations, to run our business and to put information on it. So it is a useful tool that will be released in the future. The government is determined to allow us to do that but we continue to try to refine it and to use it to have the most accurate data available for crime statistics.

Mr CLARK — Can I confirm that the review to which you are referring is the 2002 review by the Australian Institute of Criminology?

Chief Comm. NIXON — That is right.

Mr CLARK — If that is the case, then in major findings and recommendations it recommended quite a few changes that I think you, Chief Commissioner, have alluded to. To what extent has the government moved to give effect to the recommendations of the Australian Institute of Criminology in improving the Victoria Police statistics?

Mr HOLDING — That is the review that I was referring to, that those recommendations be put into place.

Mr CLARK — Have they been put into place?

Mr HOLDING — Yes.

Ms ROMANES — Minister, in budget paper 3 at page 165 under the section ‘Reducing the crime rate’ there is an output measure ‘reduction in car thefts’. That has been a significant problem in the past. Can you tell the committee how the government is performing in terms of affecting the rate of car thefts in Victoria?

Mr HOLDING — This is a really good question and one that relates to an area where there has been significant interstate cooperation and a great deal of success. I just want to dwell on it because if you look across the period from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2005 you will see that there has been a 50.3 per cent reduction in the annual total of motor vehicle thefts. That is quite an incredible result. This is a very high-volume crime. Theft of motor vehicle is a very common crime and a high-volume crime that affects a lot of people. Therefore getting it down by 50 per cent is a very significant police achievement.

The average recovery rate for stolen vehicles as at 31 May 2006 was 76 per cent. I want to just outline the basis upon which this has been achieved. The organised motor vehicle theft squad has assisted the New South Wales police property crime squad with Operation Mazerati, which was an investigation into the theft of stolen Subaru wheels which were being sold on www.ebay. Victoria Police has provided assistance in locating the victims and executing cross-jurisdictional warrants and in seizing stolen property.

Through Operation Confounded we saw cooperation between New South Wales and Victoria Police into the theft of 150 stolen New South Wales vehicles which were rebirthed in that state and subsequently sold in Victoria. In Operation Lictor there was a cooperative investigation into the rebirthing of stolen and illegally imported vehicles. A total of 81 vehicles were seized and 38 were identified as stolen New South Wales vehicles.

How have these things been achieved? They have been achieved because we now have a greater level of interstate cooperation. First through New South Wales and now in Victoria and other states and territories we have established a written-off vehicle register. This register enables us to record and exchange written-off vehicle data between states and territories. It records all late-model damaged vehicles, and we have implemented the register on 1 May 2002. As of 2005 all states have now been included on the register.

We have audited validation centres which are important in an organised motor vehicle theft context through Operation Outlast, which provides training and advice to regional police, insurance companies and vehicle auction houses. We have had strong liaison and support between the initiatives we have put in place here in Victoria at the national motor vehicle theft reduction council. We have seen a significant focus on VicRoads compliance audits which have been oversights by the organised motor vehicle theft reduction squad.

The VicRoads compliance audits have been conducted through its anti-corruption division, and we have also provided through that squad specialist training to VicRoads to make sure that vehicle identity validation inspectors have the appropriate training as do the registration staff, and all vehicles that fail the VIN inspectorate process are referred to the organised motor vehicle squad as a matter of course.

All of these operations that I have talked about — Confounded, Lictor and the other operations — have resulted in huge numbers of vehicles being seized. We have seen a significant increase in the number of vehicles seized as opposed to the normal amounts we would see on a monthly or yearly basis. We have seen strong cooperation with the courts in making sure that court cases are carefully prepared prior to their presentation to court and all the vehicles are able to be presented in each instance.

It has been a very effective example of interstate police cooperation, not only in terms of the national oversight through the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council but also the activities of different organised motor vehicle theft reduction squads in each state and territory. It is an example of how modern, organised crime which does not recognise state or territory boundaries is being tackled by police using more sophisticated technology, better training and greater levels of liaison and support.

The CHAIR — Minister, you mentioned taking cases to court and having the vehicles available as evidence. What kind of cost is incurred in storing vehicles for what could be many years, I imagine?

Mr HOLDING — The costs are significant, and Victoria Police is required to store them. We have had storage issues, and we have had to increase the size of the area that is utilised for that storage in recent years because of the large number of vehicles.

The CHAIR — So what are we looking at in storage costs?

Chief Comm. NIXON — We have entered into a recent deal with Prix Cars — I think it is called — which has actually reduced some of the cost on this. But the thing is that while court cases go through the system, you do have to hold the cars. In some cases we seized 230 cars in one operation, and you have to hold those until the court case is concluded. Sometimes it is to do with disputed ownership because the cars are stolen and rebirthed. There is a whole set of those issues, so it does turn out to be quite expensive whilst the court case is going on.

We have been looking for cheaper arrangements and in fact have found them with Prix Cars. We also had to strike a deal with them about seizing cars under the recent vehicle impoundment legislation as well, so have got a better deal than we had — but it is still expensive.

The CHAIR — How long does it take on average to have these cases come to court?

Chief Comm. NIXON — Those two cases, Lictor, are very complicated cases about ownership over three different states and three different arrangements. In some cases it could be in the vicinity of two years for these matters to go through.

Mr CLARK — My question relates to graffiti. As you probably know, and as you referred to earlier, it is a serious problem across large parts of Melbourne. It is certainly a growing problem in my own electorate and the surrounding province. Local police are keen to tackle it. You referred to a graffiti task force earlier. Tackling graffiti seems to take an enormous amount of time and effort for police; perhaps several days of surveillance in order to catch one graffiti offender. There also seems to be a degree of hesitation by the community to report graffiti on the 000 line, lest they be imposing upon an emergency service.

What actions have you been considering that might help the police in their role of detecting and apprehending graffiti offenders and deterring graffiti — for example, a 24-hour statewide hotline to report graffiti that people would feel comfortable making reports on? Also, have you been making recommendations to your ministerial colleagues about possible changes to the law that would make it easier to combat graffiti, such as restricting the sale of spray cans to minors or restricting the ability to possess implements of graffiti in certain circumstances so that the police do not have to catch someone in the act but can build a prosecution based on possession of implements in some circumstances?

Mr HOLDING — Thank you for that question, Mr Clark. It gives me a chance to reiterate some of the points we were talking about during the corrections answers where we talked about graffiti clean-up. We are very pleased that Victoria Police has seen fit to establish an anti-graffiti task force. We think this is a very effective way of providing dedicated policing resources for tackling this issue. As I was able to inform the committee in the context of the corrections discussions before, we have had more than 45 alleged graffiti vandals arrested by Victoria Police's new anti-graffiti task force since it was established. I mentioned some of those instances. These offenders have been charged with dozens of offences that relate to thousands of dollars of damage across different parts of the metropolitan area in particular. I mentioned a couple of instances that I will not repeat for the committee now.

In a sense Mr Clark has asked a series of questions. Firstly, would we consider what is essentially a graffiti hotline? My view about a graffiti hotline is that if somebody sees an offence being committed, whether it is a graffiti offence, a hoon offence, an assault or whatever it might be, the first thing they should do is ring 000. That last thing we want to do is create a myriad of offence-based hotlines across the state where somebody sees an offence occurring, has to work out what it is and then work out which number to call. That would be an unsustainable situation. The best and most effective thing to do is to have one single emergency service number which is 000 and which can make the judgment as to which emergency service is required and then dispatch them accordingly. That is the ideal situation.

The one caveat I put on that is it would only be appropriate to have a graffiti hotline, so to speak, if something was to happen as a consequence of your ringing the hotline. It is the easiest thing in the world to promise a hotline which somebody could ring. If you have pizza hotline, what do you expect when you call it? You expect a pizza to be delivered. If I called a graffiti hotline I would expect the graffiti to be cleaned up as a consequence of ringing it. The only context in which the government would establish a graffiti hotline would be if the resources were in place to make sure that graffiti could be cleaned up. The complexity is that in each instance it is often dependent on who the asset belongs to as to how the asset comes to be cleaned up — whether it is local government, state government, the private sector, a business, a home or whatever.

Obviously the government considers different policy initiatives from time to time: changes to the law, additional resources for clean up, additional resources to have offenders cleaning up graffiti, resources for community organisations to be able to deal with graffiti hot spots in a more sustainable way. In fact the government has already put many of those things in place in this budget. I described all of the corrections-based initiatives before when we were talking about the correction side of the portfolios. I would add that the Department of Justice has also been provided with additional resources to provide direct grants to community organisations to help clean up graffiti hot spots, and this is important because we know sometimes by treating particular sites in a certain way we can reduce the likelihood of them being hit again — for example, by painting a mural on them, some community art, or alternatively by growing trees, bushes, foliage or something in front of them, you can reduce the likelihood that an offender would hit that site because they know they are not likely to be able to see the benefits of their handiwork later on when they drive past.

We think that the initiatives we have in place are working well. We are always on the lookout for new things that we can do, but we are not interested in cheap, populist solutions that are not backed by the resources that enable amelioration to take place. In the context of a graffiti hotline, we would only be convinced if there were resources in place to ensure that when somebody rang it, the graffiti was removed.

Mr CLARK — For the moment you are saying if a citizen finds newly defaced walls, they should report that through 000?

Mr HOLDING — No, I said if they see a crime being committed — graffiti actually occurring, vandalism occurring, an assault or hoon driving for that matter — they should ring 000. If you want an immediate police response that is always what you should do. One thing I am concerned about with hoon hotlines across the state that different councils have sponsored — and I welcome council efforts to promote safer local communities — is that hoon hotlines and graffiti hotlines are incident based and are based on saying, 'A crime is being committed; come and do something about it'. The number to ring is 000. We cannot emphasise that enough. The last thing we want to do is undermine that. If you want graffiti cleaned up, that is a separate issue and it relates to ownership and having the resources to be able to clean it up, and that needs a more comprehensive response.

Mr CLARK — If you find a site that has been graffitied, that is evidence of a crime. I understand the police want to be able to photograph the tags and put them into the database, so how does the citizen go about reporting that?

Mr HOLDING — They would contact their local police in the normal way. Recently some graffiti occurred in the vicinity of my place. I am pleased to say that I am neither a suspect, Mr Clark, nor does the graffiti relate to me in any way, let me assure you; but that caused some distress for the residents in the area. They contacted the police, and obviously the police are in the best position to come and gather the evidence they need to see if it is part of a broader set of activities or whatever.

The CHAIR — So the answer to that is to ring 000, is it, if they see evidence of a crime? I am not sure what the answer is.

Mr CLARK — Yes, that was the question.

Mr HOLDING — Ringing 000 is if you see something happening. It is for an immediate police response.

The CHAIR — What does someone do?

Mr HOLDING — They contact their local police.

Mr SOMYUREK — Minister, with regard to organised crime, in 2005–06 and this year's budget, page 38 of budget paper 3, make organised crime a key focus of the budget. Can you please outline to the committee the success of your initiatives on organised crime?

Mr HOLDING — When we talk about organised crime in Victoria, we do not only talk about but we talk particularly about the Purana task force and the work that it has done in tackling issues surrounding the so-called gangland killings. I can tell the committee that from the outset of its work the task force took a broad view and focused on all of the conduct around which these murders were occurring and not just the actual murders themselves. They tried to understand the different criminal networks that were at work, the other criminal activities that these organisations may have been involved in endeavouring to understand exactly what was occurring. This meant that a lot of work had to go into drawing together the latest intelligence and the best information base, obviously working across a range of different media in terms of identifying information that was relevant to the operation of those criminal networks, and then collating and analysing that intelligence to see what could be deduced from it.

It was a very challenging environment, as you can imagine. These criminal networks are often very difficult to pin down. Allegiances change from time to time. The crime activities they might be involved in can change from time to time, and it is very important that the intelligence is assessed at the most up-to-date time possible and the information being relied on is not out of date.

Initially, the task force was made up of a core group of 25 investigators from the homicide squad, the major drug investigation division and the criminal proceeds squad. As the work intensified, the focus changed slightly. Investigators were brought in from other squads, including the major fraud investigation division and from regional criminal investigation units. This in a sense shows the dynamic skill set that exists within Victoria Police. As the nature of the organised criminal activity that was being investigated changed, as the intelligence material was able to be investigated, they were able to tweak the resources that were being used by the organisation to make sure they had the most appropriate and specialist skill sets to respond.

At its peak the task force had over 40 personnel. However, during some of the higher risk operations up to 150 personnel could be deployed at any one time. By the end of 2005 the task force had charged 40 people with a total of 173 offences. This included charging people with a range of very high-profile murders. That work is ongoing. A large number of persons have also been charged with the manufacturing of amphetamines, including the discovery of a clandestine laboratory in a shop adjacent to a primary school in late April 2006. Thus far the task force has achieved eight murder convictions in respect to five murders. They include the murders of Michael Marshall, Jason Moran, Pasquale Barbaro, Lewis Caine and Lewis Moran. The DPP has also provided indemnities with respect to certain murder investigations. There have been a further 3 convictions for firearm offences, 12 convictions for serious drug trafficking and 2 convictions for offences with respect to the Australian Crime Commission.

We think it has been a very successful task force. It has come at a considerable cost to Victoria Police. It is fair to say, over time these sorts of things do impact on broader resourcing across other crime areas, but we think investigating these particular offences should have been identified as a high priority within the organisation. We expect the work to be ongoing, and we make the point again of publicly thanking and recognising all of those personnel who have worked on the Purana task force and, indeed, all of those who work within the crime department on organised crime issues. It can be very stressful and a very challenging environment, and we are very pleased with the service and the dedication that those members provide.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to take you back to the issue of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee report and its inquiry into crime trends that made the recommendation about the statutory bureau of crime statistics. As you know, under the Parliamentary Committees Act the government is supposed to respond to parliamentary committee reports within six months. I wonder whether there is any reason why the government did not respond to that particular report of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee which made those recommendations?

The CHAIR — Have you evidence of that, Mr Rich-Phillips?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — There was no response.

The CHAIR — There was no response.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I cannot give you a response if it was not provided.

The CHAIR — No. I am asking the question of you whether — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — No response was tabled — whether that was because of timing; if the minister wishes to take this on notice, I am quite happy to — —

Mr HOLDING — My understanding is that we have rejected in the past the establishment of such a body, and that position would not have changed. But that is not really your question. Your question is whether or not there has been a response, and if not, why not?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is my understanding that there was not, but perhaps you could take that on notice.

Mr HOLDING — I am happy to obtain some information.

The CHAIR — Minister, that concludes the estimates hearing for the police and emergency services portfolio. Thank you to the witnesses who joined us here at the table, to the people from the department who prepared copious briefing notes for the minister's folder, and to those who have also provided answers to our questionnaires. In advance I thank them for their answers to the two follow-up sets of questions which will be sent to the minister, those that he has taken on notice. The second attachment will be the questions that we ran out of time to ask at the PAEC briefing.

Committee adjourned.