

CHAPTER 7: DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

Transcript of Evidence

7.1 Attorney-General's portfolio

The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.

Transcript of Evidence

7.2 Consumer's Affairs portfolio

The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.

Transcript of Evidence

7.3 Corrections portfolio

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2008–09

Melbourne — 15 May 2008

Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Munt	Mr B. Stensholt
Mr W. Noonan	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt

Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr B. Cameron, Minister for Corrections,
Dr R. Kelleher, Acting Secretary,
Mr K. Anderson, Acting Executive Director, and
Mr R. Wise, Acting Commissioner, Corrections Victoria.

Mr CAMERON — With me is Dr Kelleher, the acting secretary of the department; Kelvin Anderson, who is the corrections commissioner — he is acting deputy secretary at the moment, but his normal daytime job is the corrections commissioner; and Rod Wise, who is the acting commissioner, but is usually the deputy commissioner.

The CHAIR — You have a presentation for this portfolio which will take about 5 minutes; is that right?

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — As is the way, we have a presentation about the corrections system, and we will fire that off.

First of all, on the corrections system — this is at last week anyway — how many prisoners were in the system? You can see the numbers are there: 3940 male and 245 female. In addition, the corrections system has to look after people on parole — that is, 1458 of those. That is interstate and commonwealth. People are dealt with under the commonwealth system, but the states do it behalf of the commonwealth. There is also 7800 involved in community corrections, over 2500 staff, 11 public prisons, 2 private prisons, 60 community corrections locations and 1 transition centre, the Judy Lazarus centre, which was opened about a year ago.

The next slide shows you the average prison population. You can see the growth that has occurred. It dropped there for a couple of years, and again there was very large growth during 2006; more growth during 2007 but not as large as 2006. Obviously there have been some policy drivers around that: restricting the use of suspended sentences on serious offences has been a contribution; sexual assault reform; obviously issues around major crime have impacted there on sentences; domestic violence policing — we are seeing that more rigorously dealt with; longer sentences; drug trends; a tougher breach policy by community corrections where people are on order, and community corrections being tougher about breaches; and also a reduction in the number of prisoners in police cells.

Here is a just a little bit of a graph about imprisonment rates and where Victoria sits vis-a-vis the other states. Just around community work — there is a lot of work happening around graffiti, and certainly corrections encourages partnerships with councils, and that has been quite active. The Better Pathways program we continue to see in the women's prisons, involving infrastructure works and program initiatives achieved, and obviously the management of high-security prisoners has been a challenge also. What we have seen is a new facility being opened there in recent times down at Barwon Prison.

The recidivism rates — we have continued to see in recent years the recidivism rates decrease. We see a little graph there to that effect. When you compare that to other states, you will see where Victoria sits. This is a very hard thing to compare like with like.

Mr WELLS — You are using a sample?

Mr CAMERON — No, it is very hard to compare like with like here, because we have a different prison mix, for example, to Queensland or other states. We tend to have more high-end prisoners, who are obviously the harder set.

The next thing is the challenges. Obviously the challenges are around prison growth and work within prisons to detect contraband and drugs, sex offenders in the community — and the management of high-security prisons remains a challenge.

In terms of the budget this year, new facilities, new beds, 594 new beds will come online over time: at Ararat in 11–12, 350 beds; 52 beds at Port Phillip; in late 09, 52 beds at Dhurringile; 40 beds at Beechworth; and 100 beds across the system. This will ultimately lead to additional staff, and over 100 of those will be at Ararat when that is operational.

In terms of the conclusion and looking forward, environmental management in Victoria's prisons, that essentially occurs around the use of water and working on that, also around land care with minimum security prisoners at Ararat, Loddon, Langi Kal Kal, Dhurringile and Beechworth. Corrections is always master planning and planning for the future, because corrections is one of those businesses where people turn up at your door, and they always take them in.

They are not like a hotel. They cannot turn anyone away. Master planning and contingency planning is always important. Very soon we will be seeing the opening of the new centre for indigenous offenders near Yarram. That is going to be the learning place. That is for indigenous offenders on a community-based order. They do not have to go there, but that residential unit will be an option. We believe there will be good take-up. That is it, in a nutshell. Obviously you will have some questions to ask about that and other matters.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister, for that presentation.

Mr SCOTT — In the handout you have just given us, you list under ‘challenges’ the projected growth in prison numbers. What is the government doing to address the growing number of prisoners in Victoria?

Mr CAMERON — In relation to prison numbers we might just go back to the graph. You will see the prison numbers listed there. Obviously there are factors at both ends here. One of the factors is some of the policy drivers, which I outlined, but at the other end it is also about trying to work on some rehabilitation measures and trying to continue to bring down the rate of recidivism. I will ask the corrections commissioner to go over those things.

Mr ANDERSON — As you can see from the graph, there was a levelling off of the prison population between 04 and 06. Essentially that reflects the investment there was in a strategy called the corrections long-term management strategy, which provided for new infrastructure but also provided for a number of diversionary programs and rehabilitation programs. We are seeing the effects of those through that period, and then, as the minister said, there have been a number of policy decisions which have meant the increase to the current prison population.

Although we are always reviewing the demand for prison places, we are at the same time developing a demand management strategy. That demand management strategy will essentially look at those groups of offenders that we can invest in to either hold them safely in the community or to provide different types of rehabilitation programs, which again will put, if you like, a brake on this growth in the prison numbers.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In relation to the slide you had up there about new facilities — —

Mr CAMERON — Hang on, we will get the slide up, if you like.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You ran through the increase in the new beds. I was trying to write it down quickly. Can you just run through it again? I know it is on the record.

Mr CAMERON — Of those, there are 350 at the new prison at Ararat, which will be next to the old prison — so a doubling of its activity. That will be 350 beds. There will be 52 beds at Port Phillip; 52 beds at Dhurringile; 40 beds at Beechworth; and there will also be 100 beds across the system.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Relating it to the budget paper, this anticipation of growth, Mr Anderson made mention before about the increase because of policy decisions. I was trying to get clarity on what were some of the policy decisions and you say have impacted on the increase in bed numbers being required?

Mr CAMERON — If we just go back over some of the policy changes, you had the change in relation to suspended sentencing for various serious offences, which you will remember. That would have made an impact. Sexual assault reform and the way sexual assault matters are dealt with and the rates of conviction — that has obviously made an impact. We have seen the issues around major crime of recent years. Obviously that makes an impact and also makes an impact around high security prisoners as well.

Domestic violence policing and the fact that that is being more rigorously attended to also has an impact. The longer sentences — we are seeing longer sentences imposed by the courts. Also a toughening of the policy of community corrections, particularly in the last couple of years. People, for example, might be on an intensive correction order or a community-based order. The tolerance level there is substantially different to what it was. So we are seeing people breached more and taken back to court. That could result in any number of outcomes.

One of the outcomes of that clearly impacts on the number of people that are in prisons. We have also seen a reduction in the use of police cells. Now there is a lot less people in police cells than there were a couple of years ago. That also has an impact on the prison system. Collectively, in terms of cells and prisons, it does not change what the number might be, but you have more in one and less in the other.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — In respect of the increase, and it was one of my pet hates when I was there a while back — not in jail; I will clarify that — when I had shadow corrections I noticed the amount of relocatable prisons. Those increases that you have suggested — the 350 et cetera — are they a component of relocatables? Obviously Ararat is not, but are the others part of relocatables? If they are, is there a funding outcomes or requirements from the budget for those? Have they been moved from other prisons?

Mr ANDERSON — No, the 350 beds at Ararat will be stand-alone new facility. We will be co-joined with the existing prison. That will allow us to re-profile the existing prison also. We are calling the 52 beds at Port Phillip and at Dhurringile quick-build beds.

We will go to the providers and look for a solution to how quickly we can get those beds produced so that they will be online by late 2009. The 40 beds at Beechworth are the same type of construction as that facility which we opened only about two years ago, and the other 100 beds across the system will be a combination of better use of some of our facilities. At open prisons we have been able to use some existing buildings and convert those to accommodation, but there will also be an element of doubling up; for example, at the remand centre there will be a small number of double bunks put into a protection unit.

The strategy we have had for some time has been to use these flexible beds and to move into those flexible beds when our musters become high. Then, as permanent accommodation comes on, we are able not to decommission them but effectively mothball them and then go back into them as we need. You will see over the last two years we have opened the new remand centre with 600 beds at Laverton and the 300-bed facility at Lara. That allowed us to come out of some of our flexible beds and simply not use them. As the numbers have increased, as you saw on the graph previously, then we have been able to move back into that surge capacity. That is the same strategy we will use with the Ararat and Beechworth facilities. We will build new; that will allow us to come out of that flexible accommodation, and then if we do require surge capacity, then we move back into that flexible capacity.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — The quick-build beds — are they just a renaming of relocatables? Is that what you are calling them?

Mr ANDERSON — We are changing the name because we do not want to assume that it will just be a relocatable; it might be another way of building. For example, with the 52 beds at Dhurringile, because that is a minimum security facility, you would not need to build maximum security-type relocatable cellular accommodation. That might be a series of cottage-style accommodation where people can self-cater.

Dr SYKES — Are you increasing the Dhurringile ones because you are expecting to put a few quasi plug-the-pipeline terrorists away in the near future?

The CHAIR — I think that is probably off the subject.

Mr NOONAN — Just a quick point of clarification: these figures do not include youth detention facilities?

Mr CAMERON — No. The youth training centres are in DHS.

Mr NOONAN — Okay. My question goes to your second dot point in terms of challenges: detecting drugs and other contraband. As part of this budget what new measures have been or will be put in place to increase security and detect drugs and other contraband in the adult prison system in Victoria?

Mr CAMERON — Drugs and contraband have always been an issue in the prison system, but Victorian prisons are doing a good job on that front. We do not want to see them introduced into prisons, and obviously rigorous barrier control and systems are needed, and they have now been put in place. As part of the Victorian prisons drugs strategy, walk-through ion scanners continue to operate at Barwon, Melbourne Assessment Prison and the Metropolitan Remand Centre, and since they have been put in they have been very effective. They can also be used to detect explosives.

The Metropolitan Assessment Prison, Barwon, the Metropolitan Remand Centre and Marngoneet Correctional Centre all continue to use biometric identification systems — that is, iris scanning — to identify all persons entering and leaving the prison. You have to sort of register so they know that you are you. There are also security booths — you have to walk into the security booth — and that is in addition to hand-held scanners and X-ray

machines. I will ask the corrections commissioner to elaborate on that further and on how that regime continues to be effective.

Mr ANDERSON — Essentially what we are relying on is our intelligence collection system in order to target our effort at barrier controls. As the minister says, prisoners have a habit of trying to introduce contraband into our facilities, and it is not necessarily just the things that you would naturally think they would be interested in, like alcohol or drugs. For example, mobile phones would be a hot commodity, you can imagine, in prisons, and our challenge is that as those things become miniaturised with more and more plastic in them, detecting them through the normal means of metal scanning might not be that successful.

In our maximum security facilities we have moved to very sophisticated drug detection booths, which, as you have heard, can also be used to detect explosives. We then also rely very heavily on the use of our intelligence section and our passive alert detection dogs, which are trained to sniff around our visitors on a targeted basis looking for, in particular, drugs.

For an example of how successful we have been, from July 2007 to March 2008 we have conducted a total of 12 698 visitor PAD searches — that is, the passive alert dogs I was speaking about — and a total of 3231 vehicle searches. The vehicle searches are particularly important, because members of the public do not realise that as soon as they enter the car park of a prison they are in a prison — they are in a gazetted prison — and so that allows us to search those vehicles.

As a consequence of those searches the sorts of things we are detecting are cannabis, prescription drugs, alcohol, varieties of white powder, smoking implements and syringes, and we have even found weapons like knives, batons and tools being seized in those barrier controls. It is an important part of our work. To give you an example of the scale of this, at a recent search of a vehicle at the remand centre we detected 100 syringes in the car. Naturally when that occurs we involve the police, and then the police will take care of any criminal charges that follow.

Mr BARBER — This big upgrade to prison capacity seems to have taken a lot of people by surprise. What sort of exercise has the government been undertaking to project these numbers? If that has been done on the quiet, then what consultation do you do with stakeholders and with other groups before you move from predict to provide? What are the key findings of that research, and will we get to read about it publicly? For example, have you modelled the number of women or indigenous people who will be in this expanded system?

Mr CAMERON — I might get Kelvin to talk about that briefly, but as things change corrections has to forward project and forward plan. Obviously that is critical in the whole corrections system. As I said, people turn up at the doorstep and corrections take them in. To that end whenever corrections see a change in patterns they have to be able to adapt for the future. That is why we have put beds into existing prisons as part of the budget. On the existing Ararat site, effectively there has been a doubling of that. That is something which is supported by the Ararat community. But in terms of how corrections does its predicting and its modelling, the corrections commissioner will give you a run down.

Mr ANDERSON — Essentially we use two methods, but they both rely on a demographic model. We look at the growth in the population, the age and then work out what the offending cohort would be. On top of that we overlay some expert advice, and we certainly consult stakeholders at this point. Broadly though, stakeholders are in the legal or the criminal justice profession, and so what we say to them is, 'What will be the trends in the next five years? Will we see an increase in this type of offending?'. On judges, 'Do you think longer sentences will be given?'. That then goes into the mix. We are following very much on the projections that we have just presented in terms of the actual prison population, so we have been within — sort of — 5 per cent of those projections, and we are regularly re-doing them; we do them once every year.

Really the consultation with the broader stakeholders comes when we know that we have money to expand. In the Ararat facility, for example, we certainly went to the local shire and spoke to people locally about whether we would be welcome there. We were pleased to have their support, and then we knew we could expand that facility knowing there would be local support for it.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, I am interested in the new graffiti laws. Apart from knowing what the government is planning to do about graffiti, in terms of the forward estimates I would also like to know in terms of the corrections system what is the likely effect of those laws?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much. As you know there are new laws about penalties and on-the-spot fines which have been generally well received across the community; not by all sectors, but certainly by those who do not like graffiti. As part of that a continuing emphasis has been around community work involving graffiti. Corrections Victoria has ramped that up, and what Corrections Victoria likes to do is to work with the local community so that people who are on a community based order, for example, can do some graffiti clean up. Corrections Victoria had 8 graffiti vans. That has been increased by 6 in the last year so that there are now 14. They are in discussions with other councils — new councils — around the work that they can do. But they have been doing this program to a lesser extent for quite a while now.

Since 2005 the graffiti removal program has involved 7500 offenders who have completed over 84 000 hours of community work. They have removed an area equivalent to 13 MCG playing fields. Obviously we will be seeing more vans and an increasing ramp up of that, but we see this as an important way that community corrections can contribute to its local community, particularly where a council encourages it and wants to take part. But the corrections commissioner will elaborate further.

Mr ANDERSON — Yes, indeed. We are currently involved through 14 community corrections locations across the state, and we are in partnership with 26 local governments or community partners. There is a nice sideline to this. We have been able to produce the graffiti removal trailers at Ararat prison, so we have been able to build them in prison to our specifications, and then they are used by offenders in the community to go around and clean up the graffiti.

Essentially the graffiti removal is done in two ways. It is either done with the use of recycled water through high-pressure sprays or, increasingly, given the issues with water, we are painting out graffiti. The effect of this, apart from the aesthetics in the community, has been that recently I was able to view some of these programs. After they have been involved the offenders actually take some ownership of the site and are able to say, 'I cleaned that up. I would prefer it did not get done over again'. We have found that where graffiti is removed it stays removed for a considerable amount of time.

Dr SYKES — Is there a network there so the message gets out, 'Don't do it!'.

Mr ANDERSON — I think that might be pretty accurate.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I am just interested in home detention. Which section is home detention under in the budget papers? I am looking at page 176 of budget paper 3 — —

Mr CAMERON — Hang on. Budget paper 3 — —

Mr WELLS — Yes, page 176. There is a heading 'Prisoner supervision and support'. The other category is 'Community based offender supervision'. Which category does home detention fall under out of those two?

Mr CAMERON — Sorry. Which were the two you referred to?

Mr WELLS — Just on that page, Minister, page 176. There is 'Prisoner supervision and support' and 'Community based offender supervision'. Where does home detention fit in?

Mr ANDERSON — We fund and we have attached the home detention program through our prisons directorate and not our community-based corrections directorate. That is because it is both a front-end and a back-end system, meaning it can be given as a court option but also as an option that the parole board considers.

Mr WELLS — Why is that not in the budget papers? Or have I missed it somewhere? The program for home detention and the funding for it.

Mr ANDERSON — It is just not mentioned.

Dr KELLEHER — It is part of the bottom line.

The CHAIR — The 504.9 is part of the total. Presumably therefore the number of people on home detention is included in the daily average number of prisoners, is that correct?

Mr ANDERSON — No, it is counted separately.

Mr WELLS — Hang on, we need to clarify this. We have the chair saying one thing and you are saying another thing. Where do we find the number of prisoners who are out on home detention? Is it in the top section, or where is it?

Mr ANDERSON — It is just not counted.

Mr WELLS — They are not counted?

Dr KELLEHER — There is no specific output measure in relation to home detention, but the costs of home detention are included in the total output cost for prisoner supervision and support.

The CHAIR — Can you advise, either now or on notice, just how many are on home detention and expect to be on home detention?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, I think we know — —

Mr ANDERSON — We know how many people.

Mr WELLS — Has that always been the case, that you have not included it?

Mr ANDERSON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — Can I ask some questions then in relation to home detention? Obviously, how many do you have on home detention? How many breaches have there been for those who are on home detention? What have been the results of punishment in regard to the breaches by those who have been on home detention? I mean, how many have been returned to jail, for example?

Mr ANDERSON — Since the program started and until 6 May this year the referrals for the home detention program have totalled 705, but in total only 299 orders have been made — the rest having been found unsuitable. As of 6 May there were 28 orders that were current. That is not an uncommon figure. It hovers around that mark, maybe a little more, maybe a little bit less, but about 28. Of that, 249 orders have been completed; 17 were revoked due to breach, and those breaches have been dealt with by the parole board and resulted in imprisonment; and there have been 5 revocations on top of that 17 due to accommodation issues. Typically that might be where a co-resident has withdrawn permission for the person to remain. Out of that, 17 due to breach and then 5 due to accommodation issues.

Mr WELLS — I guess I was wondering about concerns about the partner not being satisfied, but that is fine. Kelvin, you said 17 were revoked, but how many breaches have there been?

Mr ANDERSON — That is due to breach. We treat all breaches seriously. The majority of those breaches related to the detection of drug and alcohol usage.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — All breaches result in revocation?

Mr ANDERSON — If we detect drugs and alcohol, we will put that to the parole board as a breach and it will consider what to do with it. If you are talking about a breach being outside of curfew hour, then I do not have that figure with me, but we could get it.

Mr WELLS — Can we ask for that on notice, please?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr WELLS — The total number of breaches.

The CHAIR — I know we have some fascination with figures and trends and statistics, but could I ask you what is the cost of prisoners per head of population, and how does this compare to other jurisdictions?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Chair. We do have some figures. Victoria had the third highest recurrent cost per prisoner day in Australia during 06–07. The recurrent cost per day is \$212. That is above the average around Australia of \$187. But it is a bit like I mentioned before in relation to the recidivism rates; it is very hard to compare the whole system with the whole system. That is because in Victoria we have a different

weighting of prisoners. We have far more medium and maximum security and a smaller number of minimum. Obviously maximum security costs more than minimum; there is obviously a hierarchy. The consequence of that is our system does cost more. That is really because of the lower prisoner rate. At the start I showed you that graph about what the prisoner rate was per head of population and Victoria was relatively low; I think it was only the ACT that was lower. That is because obviously we have the harder end of the market. I might ask the corrections commissioner if he wants to add anything further around those matters.

Mr ANDERSON — The per day cost also is influenced by the significant investment there has been in the rehabilitation-type programs, such as Better Pathways for women offenders. But also our expenditure per head of general population is extremely low. Victoria's expenditure is \$75 per head of general population, compared to the national average of 105. I guess that is all I would like really to add. Our costs in terms of prisons, the public prisons are currently averaging \$288.20 a day, compared to our private prison average of \$254.30. But these comparisons are very difficult because each of our facilities is different — different size, different profile, so there is quite a variation within those figures.

The CHAIR — There was some commentary on that in our outcomes report just recently, but we may well follow that up in the future as outcomes rather than necessarily estimates.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the expansion of facilities you mentioned earlier, just in relation to the timing of the commissioning of those and the capital funding for them, in particular Ararat, Port Phillip and Beechworth. Can you give us an indicative time when they will be commissioned and what the capital funding is?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. I went over that at the outset, around the time line. I will just go back to my presentation notes. At Ararat that will be in the 2011–12 year. It is late 2009 at Port Phillip Prison, late 2009 at Dhurringile, 40 beds at Beechworth by 2010, and then the 100 beds across the system will be earlier.

Mr ANDERSON — By the end of this year.

Mr CAMERON — By the end of 2008. In relation to the total cost, in the budget papers you will see — you will just have to excuse me for a moment.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It was \$12 million last year. Is that the funding for these?

Mr CAMERON — No. We will just get the figure out for you. Just give me one moment.

The CHAIR — In terms of what you are spending for assets for prisons?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

The CHAIR — Yes, in appendix A on page 339 of budget paper 3; I assume it is 'Building confidence in corrections'?

Dr KELLEHER — That is it.

The CHAIR — That is \$78.2 million, and \$316 million over the four years.

Mr CAMERON — Obviously when it comes to Ararat we would not want to be putting a figure on that because that might be a little bit indicative to the market, so we do not intend to do that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — But the Ararat funding, though, is built into that aggregate?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Ms MUNT — In your presentation you list 245 female prisoners that are currently accommodated within the system. I am no expert, but I would assume that female prisoners have issues that are specific to them. I was wondering if you could let me know if anything has been done in particular to address mental health issues of female prisoners and also to reduce the rates of imprisonment for female offenders.

Mr CAMERON — Having gender-specific initiatives is something that we support in Victoria. Victoria is a leader of this in Australia, and other states come to see what we do. There are different needs for women; they

are different from those of a lot of men. The 2008–09 budget provides an additional \$7.7 million on the ongoing delivery of programs under the Better Pathways strategy at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, which is one of the women's prisons. We have two: one at Dame Phyllis Frost, and the other one at Tarrengower, a smaller prison which is up near Maldon, in my electorate actually.

You ask me specifically in relation to a new mental health facility. That opened a little while ago; it is called Marmak at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre. We believe the establishment of that unit is very much a positive step forward, and to date all the feedback has been that that has been a very good advance. In addition there are other facilities which have just come online at Dame Phyllis Frost in the last 12 months, and I will get the corrections commissioner to take you over that, but also the reason why he so keenly supports gender-specific initiatives in the corrections system.

Mr ANDERSON — We were very fortunate to get \$25½ million for the Better Pathways strategy, and, as the minister says, \$7.2 million of that has been delivered on infrastructure; and in total it will go to about \$18.3 million for programs to strengthen early intervention, diversion, rehabilitation and transitional support for women. You are correct: women offenders, by the time they come to prison, have been through the system. They have very complex needs. They have high-risk behaviours, and it is true that they have a history of abuse, both self-abuse — it might be drug and alcohol taking — and certainly there has been a high level of other abuse, physical and mental abuse of them.

There is also a high level of psychiatric need, so the Marmak unit now provides 24-hour nursing coverage for 20 women offenders — prisoners, I should say. Why that is a benefit for us is that prior to having that facility the only options we could exercise for women who were displaying adverse behaviour, particularly at the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, were management options. We are now able to use a supported mental health facility for them within the grounds of the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre.

The transitional programs have also been particularly successful. We have invested in a women-for-work program. To date 80 women have been placed in employment on release, with 46 of those women being placed in employment for a minimum period of 16 weeks.

We have also created an integrated program called the Women's Integrated Support Program for Transition, and currently that has supplied support to 190 women exiting prison, including some supported accommodation; and that also includes two transitional bail support facilities that we have, one in Mildura and one in Shepparton, to place indigenous women offenders released by courts to bail.

Also money is available to support women to complete their community-based orders. That was something that we found in our Better Pathways research: that there was a high number of women who were not able to meet their commitments to their community-based orders, particularly the program commitment. Why is this all so important?

We believe that if we do intervene heavily with these programs, we will be able to do something about reducing the reoffending rate of what is a relatively small number of prisoners in our system — any day about 250 to about 280 — so we think the investment is well worth it. There has been a reduction in the number of women in prison from a high a couple of years ago, so there are some early indications that these programs are working.

Dr SYKES — I want to take the opportunity to make a positive comment to you, Minister and Kelvin, in relation to the role of the inmates, I think from Dhurringile and Beechworth, in the post-fire recovery activities. Their assistance in fencing and other recovery activities was really appreciated by the local community. It gave them a real lift, and I would like to think it gave the prisoners a sense of satisfaction. So if you could pass that on to those involved, I would much appreciate that.

Mr ANDERSON — We would be delighted to.

Mr CAMERON — Last year some of them were umpires. Are they still umpires?

Mr ANDERSON — Yes, they are still involved.

Mr CAMERON — There was a shortage of umpires in the area. It was a very innovative community engagement despite apprehension at work.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — From football to forward estimates: just a brief question and one you may wish to take on notice; the issue that you have raised during this presentation has been one of the matter of drugs in the prisons, and obviously drugs in the community and the impact that that has in terms of prison population and the like. I have gone through the budget but I cannot see any sort of indication as to how specifically drugs are being addressed in the prison population. I reference it back to your table in respect of recidivism. Whilst I accept that the percentage is lower comparatively, it is still a high figure and obviously drugs are a component of prison. You relate it to the home detention as well and I am just trying to work out given that — I think it was Bendigo, Rod?

Mr WISE — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Bendigo closed. That was a dedicated drugs prison. I have not used the right word but —

Mr ANDERSON — It had a large program.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It had a large part of the rehab population. What has happened to the prisoners from there and what programs do you have in place in the funding context to deal with those types of offenders who obviously have a high level of recidivism — I do not know but I gather they do?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. As you would appreciate from your past, if you took away alcohol and you took away drugs, there would be a large collapse in the corrections business, but of course we all face the realities of life. There was the program at Bendigo but as you know, there was a large rebuilding program and reconfiguration and there are now programs at Marngoneet. Kelvin, you might like to expand on that.

Mr ANDERSON — What we have at Marngoneet is a 300-bed program prison at Lara, co-located with Barwon, and that has three areas for therapy: one is sex offender therapy, the other being anti-violence therapy, and the third being our drug and alcohol program. While we do have drug and alcohol programs throughout the system, that ranges from drug and alcohol programs that talk about the harm that you do to yourself using drugs and alcohol, the intensive program is located at that facility. That is where we have focused all our clinical effort. Currently we have introduced a screening tool which streams people by their need for therapy, and they will be headed towards Marngoneet to get their drug and alcohol treatment.

In terms of proving the point, we have a random drug test program and during 07–08 it was 1.98 per cent of those tests that came back positive. Between the barrier controls and therapy we are seeing a reduction in the number of people returning positive results while they are in jail. This is one of our constant challenges, of course — to keep drugs out and to stop people from using drugs.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. That concludes consideration of budget estimates in the portfolios: Police and Emergency Services earlier; and Corrections now. I thank the minister and departmental officers for their attendance today. There are a couple of issues that have been put on notice there. We will follow up in writing on those and we would like replies within 30 days. Thank you very much, Minister, for your attendance.

Witnesses withdrew.

Transcript of Evidence

7.4 Gaming portfolio

The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.

Transcript of Evidence

7.5 Police and Emergency Services portfolio

VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2008–09

Melbourne — 15 May 2008

Members

Mr G. Barber	Mr G. Rich-Phillips
Mr R. Dalla-Riva	Mr R. Scott
Ms J. Munt	Mr B. Stensholt
Mr W. Noonan	Dr W. Sykes
Mr M. Pakula	Mr K. Wells

Chair: Mr B. Stensholt
Deputy Chair: Mr K. Wells

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms V. Cheong

Witnesses

Mr B. Cameron, Minister for Police and Emergency Services,
Dr R. Kelleher, Acting Secretary, and
Mr K. Anderson, Acting Executive Director, Police, Emergency Services and Corrections,
Department of Justice; and
Chief Commissioner C. Nixon, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2008–09 budget estimates for the portfolios of police and emergency services; and corrections later. On behalf of the committee I welcome Bob Cameron, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Corrections; Dr Roslyn Kelleher, the acting secretary, Department of Justice; Christine Nixon, the chief commissioner, Victoria Police; and Kelvin Anderson, acting executive director, police, emergency services and corrections. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings I remind members of the public they cannot participate in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers can approach the table if requested by the minister or his chief of staff. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming and recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room. I remind you that filming is to be of the person who is speaking. We have allowed two cameras in this year. I remember reminding people that last year, but one of the television crew did not follow the guidelines. If they are not followed, then obviously we will change the guidelines.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. There is no need for evidence to be sworn; however, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing are not protected by parliamentary privilege. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript, and the committee requests that verifications be forwarded to the committee within three working days of receiving the proof version. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee's website.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions relating to the budget estimates. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off. I ask the minister to make a brief presentation. Are you going to make both presentations together, or do you wish to do police and emergency services first and then follow it with corrections?

Mr CAMERON — My understanding was that we were going to do the police first.

The CHAIR — Okay.

Mr CAMERON — We are going to do 10 minutes on police — —

The CHAIR — Yes, 10 minutes on police and then 1 hour and 55 minutes for questions.

Mr CAMERON — Two hours altogether?

The CHAIR — Correct.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Chair. You have already said who is with me today. As will be the normal practice in answering questions, some of those people will be able to provide some assistance to you in your deliberations. We have a little slide show, as is always the way just to kick off with the PAEC, so I ask you to look at the slide show and we will go from there.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — First, we have the justice budget. This really just shows the budget breakdown in the justice portfolio. The total budget of the department is \$3.58 billion for the coming financial year, and that is up from \$3.15 billion in the current financial year. In my portfolio we have police & emergency services and corrections, and that accounts for 72 per cent of the department's budget. The Police & Emergency services budget for 08–09 is \$2.01 billion, which is an increase of 8.6 per cent on the current financial year. The total corrections budget for 08–09 has increased from 500.7 million to 570 million, or a 13.9 per cent increase, and no doubt we will deal with those issues later on in the morning. The police & emergency services portfolio budget consists of Victoria Police, the Office of Police Integrity and a component of the infringement management system. There is also the emergency services that obviously make up part of that total budget as well.

The next graph looks at the police budget, and you can see the increase that we have seen since 2000–01, and that represents a 73 per cent increase. If you have a look as it goes through, you will see that 73 per cent increase. Certainly a part of that has been the strong emphasis that the current government has placed on police, and also on

the effectiveness of the chief commissioner in advocating the needs of police to bring about that large increase since the time of her appointment.

The next one is about police numbers. Really it is just a slide that you are all pretty well aware of. During the 90s there was a decrease in police numbers, and the increase you see going through with the target at the end of this term of Parliament of 11 250.

If we go to the next slide, just to look at 07–08 and police flexibility. Certainly in “The Way Ahead”, which was launched earlier in the year by the chief commissioner and the Premier, it is really the next five-year plan for Victoria Police, with the resources that police have and what the focus is going to be. During that five years there is the target of a 12 per cent reduction in the crime rate and a 30 per cent reduction in road toll and trauma. Obviously there is a focus on crime, public safety and road safety, connecting the community and organisation wellbeing. No doubt during the course of the next couple of hours we will have a discussion about some of those matters.

If we go to the next slide, obviously flexibility is very important and something that the chief commissioner was very, very keen to see as part of the EBA between the police union and herself. That EBA settled last year. As part of those discussions and arrangements it was agreed that with the existing resources and the committed resources that there would be a 10 per cent reduction in crime in the next four years. It was good to see the police union and the chief commissioner coming to that agreement. Also a key part about the flexibility — and the chief commissioner will be able to expand on this later — was having the right people at the right place at the right time, and obviously some of the flexibilities that have to come about to bring about an even better police force is something that obviously we all have a vested interest in. Some of that of course is flexible rostering, new career structure, and also fixed part-time officers as well, to bring about flexible deployment.

If we go to the next slide, have a look at the crime rate there since 91–92. What we have is a situation where we have had decreasing crime during the time the chief commissioner has been in that post — a 23.5 per cent reduction since 2000–01. Crime statistics were computerised in the early 90s, and we have the lowest level that we have seen since that time. I know I only have a couple more minutes.

The CHAIR — That is correct.

Mr CAMERON — I will hurry along before getting prompted.

We go to the next slide. You see the areas of assaults and you can see what has happened with assaults in time. What we have done is we have categorised assaults around family violence and non-family violence. That is very important. As you will know, in 2004 there was a new code of practice introduced for the way police deal with family violence — that is, they will treat family violence just like other crime. Obviously that has made a difference to the numbers. But what you will see in relation to general assaults, as in non-family violence assaults, is that increase a couple of years ago. That has been of concern, and that is what there is a fair bit of emphasis on at the present time. Part of those initiatives has been the banning notices introduced around public order in entertainment precincts, of which two are in place; the statewide licensing task force; the safe city task force; the safe streets public safety research project; and what you have seen more recently announced in relation to the trial of the 2.00 a.m. lockout.

On the issue of road safety — no doubt there will be a discussion about that — there are always considerable challenges. We have seen the challenges with hoons and the way that is working, and drug testing, where Victoria is a leader in the world. The metro and country road tolls do vary, but they do present also different challenges. But what has to be said about the road toll is that Victoria has been a pacesetter and we do want to continue to see the road toll come down. This year, as in where we are at this time this year, is above last year, and obviously that is a great concern to police. Part of that also is the way overrepresentation of motorcycles.

In terms of the 08–09 budget initiatives, what we want to make sure is that by June 2009 there are 11 100 police; supporting forensic capability; the ongoing maritime security commitments; and also around audiovisual recording equipment — the upgrading of that and the benefits that that will bring to police. There is also the police stations priority upgrade program, additional funding for the OPI and the SIM, and also for specialist equipment.

In emergency services we have seen since 1999 large increases in the commitment to emergency services. They do a fantastic job. We believe that has been a very important initiative of the government. In terms of volunteer

numbers in emergency services, the graph there shows you the number of volunteers. Obviously sustaining volunteers is very important. All of the organisations are committed to that, and they are doing a great job.

We have seen big events in the last year: floods, in particular in Gippsland; the storms of more recent times; and wildfires. We have seen the CFA turn out to a lot of wildfires. It is a great credit to it that it has been able to get on top of them very, very quickly before they have been able to get out of control.

In terms of budget initiatives, the CFA radio replacement program is very important for the future; technical rescue vehicles and fire trucks for the CFA; replace and upgrade essential emergency response equipment for the SES; and also a CFA volunteer fund.

We can just conclude that the emphasis for police is around *The Way Ahead* — the strategic plan. In emergency services it is integration and cooperation and sustaining the volunteer base. Can I just say we are very fortunate as a state to have a great police force and great emergency services.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Just to start off in terms of questions, a question I am asking all ministers and departments is one of the areas we are looking at this year, and if you looked at the outcomes report we produced recently, is we are interested in revenue forgone, subsidies, concessions and this sort of area that many departments are involved with. I wonder if you could outline if there are any concessions or subsidies within your portfolio, and any changes in this year's budget.

Mr CAMERON — There are a number of areas in police and emergency services that provide concessions or subsidies. They range from Victoria Police, where Victoria Police provides waivers in relation to police attendance at charitable and community events. There are waivers of certain fees under the Firearms Act, and there are police record checks that are provided at a reduced fee. Also, with traffic infringements there are circumstances where police issue an official warning as opposed to a fine. If someone gets a fine and they immediately write to police, they have had a good driving record of recent times, they have not been going too far over, police instead will convert that to an official warning. Obviously there is revenue forgone as a consequence of that.

In the emergency services, both the CFA and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade acts provide for agencies to recover reasonable costs and expenses from uninsured property owners. It is at the discretion of agencies as to whether they waive those costs or not. In relation to corrections, they do not provide any subsidies or forgo revenue — —

Mr WELLS — Thank goodness.

Mr CAMERON — Which you would probably expect.

Just going to Victoria Police, the main thing is around events. When police attend large events where the organisers want police to go, and this is a long-term arrangement, there is a fee charged. Obviously if police are going to a fete or a charity, there are generally arrangements entered into as a consequence of that and my understanding is that \$0.347 million was waived as a consequence of that in the last year.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. Indeed there is an event on this weekend in my electorate with the police soccer team. We very much appreciate — —

Mr CAMERON — We will take that as idle commentary.

Mr WELLS — Minister, given the fact that it was part of Labor's election commitment in the lead-up to the 2006 state election to provide \$10 million funds to Victoria police command to enable them to equip all police with appropriate weapons for the job that they are undertaking, and further in the 06–07 Victoria budget overview for community safety and justice, a \$14 million commitment to provide police on the beat with improved weapons and equipment, can I ask you without the spin and excuses and bull dust when are members of Victoria police actually going to receive these new weapons?

Mr CAMERON — As you pointed out, part of our election commitment was \$10 million, but what you said was that it was actually \$14 million and that was a commitment in relation to weapons, of which \$10 million was to go into a weapon fund. We did that. As you did not mention at the outset, part of our election commitment was that for a strong society what we had to have was independent operational decisions, and one of those operational decisions would be that police themselves would determine what they wanted to do in relation to

weapons. To that end the chief commissioner and police command have been doing work around that matter. Do you want to add to that matter?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I do. I am quite happy to. Obviously the government did provide the initial funding and we then looked to establishing an external advisory committee which was made up of people from the community, from defence, from a range of other locations to actually consider the issue of the best firearms for the way forward. I understood from the government that I had the discretion to determine what was the most appropriate way to go forward and whether or not in fact it was a new firearm or whether the money was used on increased tasers or a range of other options. A week or two ago we received the report from the independent committee and they have made a recommendation. What I have now asked my finance and business management people to do is to look at the implications of that recommendation and determine a way forward: what kind of cost would be involved; what kind of firearm if we did move to a semiautomatic as the most suitable. I have also asked them to look at tasers — taser is actually a brand name — and these kinds of weapons and determine the best way to go forward. I very cautiously manage the money that the Victorian government has given me and did not want to go forward without having given due diligence to thinking through the issues and also the implications for the state in terms of changing to a different firearm.

Mr WELLS — To clarify that, Chief Commissioner, you are saying that it is an issue of finance in regard to selecting a new weapon moving forward?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No, it is not an issue of finance. There are varying views, as you would know, about the current firearm, which is a very stable, very successful model .38 Smith & Wesson firearm. It has been a good support to Victoria Police and many, many other police organisations and so it is also often described as police-proof. That means that when you fire it at someone it works and that has not been the history of semiautomatics. In fact when I have watched semiautomatics introduced in New South Wales, I have also watched a number of police officers shot during the training program. They can fire on occasion when you drop them so part of the point was to make sure what kind of firearm was available and then to determine how it would be implemented, whether it is personal issue, and then if there were additional costs to be extended we would obviously come back to the government and discuss that with them.

Mr WELLS — Just finally, to clarify: is it true that firearms training for recruits out at the academy has been reduced from two days to one day?

The CHAIR — I think that is a separate question and you can ask that next time.

Mr WELLS — What is wrong with answering it now?

The CHAIR — It is not a clarification. We are following normal procedures.

Mr WELLS — It is to do with firearms.

The CHAIR — You can ask it next time. Ms Munt?

Ms MUNT — Thank you, Chair.

Mr WELLS — I think you should give the chief commissioner a chance to answer that.

The CHAIR — You can, next time you ask the question.

Ms MUNT — Like most people in the community I have a deep concern with family violence, and I would like to commend Victoria Police for the zero tolerance strategy that has been in place. Are there any other measures or initiatives included in this budget in relation to family violence?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Ms Munt. As you set out in your preamble, family violence is obviously of great concern. Traditionally going back over the years we have seen a change in approach to family violence. Police now have an approach that family violence is violence, let us not try to talk about it in different terms. It is an issue that we need to tackle. Tackling violence in the home is also important because if children are brought up in a culture of violence then you obviously have the situation where violence begets violence. You do see that intergenerational violence which is obviously something we do not want to see, so being firm about family violence is very important. That is why the chief commissioner has really made this a substantial issue for Victoria

Police, and is why the code of practice was introduced in 2004. If you go back to that graph I showed you at the very outset you will see a large increase in the way police tackle assaults and do treat them as assaults. The chief commissioner might want to outline some of the initiatives and some of the things that are happening around family violence because it is such a serious issue.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think what we have seen is a gradual change in the way the community recognises family violence. I think since 2004 with the support from government in a range of ways a whole-of-government approach was adopted, which meant that we were able to work with both the community and other government departments in trying to raise the significance of this issue and then in fact ways to deal with it. We have seen an increase in reporting rates. We have also seen 183 per cent increase in charging rates for when police attend, and 169 per cent increase in family intervention orders being taken out by police. It is a gradual process of progression and change. Obviously courts have now been put into place as family violence courts, but it is a continuous process of reform and change and much of it is cultural. I think it has been very successful and there are other states that are following our model.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I would like to ask the minister about stress claims in Victoria Police. Before I do, I am just wondering if Ms Nixon wants to clarify the matter Mr Wells raised about the reduction in firearm training at the academy?

The CHAIR — As I have said before we are meant to be concentrating on the estimates, and the procedures follow the Legislative Assembly.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — You are happy for this to hang in the air, Chair, and not be addressed.

The CHAIR — If you wish to ask that question, that is fine. We all get to ask one question; we just keep going around. You can make your decision as to which one you want to ask.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, can you confirm that firearm training for recruits has been reduced at the academy?

Mr CAMERON — I do not know that — chief commissioner?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No, it has not been reduced for recruits at the academy at all. Recruits are still given the same length of training in firearms they always had. I think what you might be referring to is that we made a decision recently that officer safety training, which is conducted at the academy for experienced police officers, be reduced for one particular period of time from two days to a day. We have four days training a year, and we decided to reduce it. But it was not actually the weapons training that was reduced; it was the lectures and other parts of that training — but certainly not for recruits.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Why was it reduced?

Chief Comm. NIXON — We made the decision that that was a reasonable thing to do. Our officers had told us that they thought it was unnecessary — the additional training in other material. Some of that material is delivered in stations at readouts, and they believed that it was not necessary.

Mr SCOTT — Minister, I would like to refer you to both your presentation where you talked about a target of 30 per cent reduction in the road toll and trauma to 2017 and also to budget paper 3, pages 163 and 164 on transport and road safety matters and I ask: what are the police doing in this budget to assist in reducing death on our roads and assisting the government's Arrive Alive 2 strategy?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you, Mr Scott, for your question around the road toll and tackling the road toll. I have a couple of slides in relation to the road toll which I will get you to have a look at.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — This is a little graph where you see what has happened to the road toll in Victoria over time and the big changes that have occurred that have brought about the drops. If you go back to 1970 you can see that we had 1061 people killed on the roads; that was a terrible number. If you have a look at last year, it was 332; that is about one third. But you have got to think that during that time there are I do not know how many more cars on the road, but there it is probably three times as many cars on the road. That has been a great achievement

and a great change in the attitudes of people, and obviously the government has played a large role in helping to bring about the change in attitude. You can see that seat belts made a big difference; alcohol breath testing made a big difference; the introduction of speed cameras and random breath testing have made a difference; increased camera hours has also made a difference.

I will go to another graph that shows you road deaths per 10 000 vehicles, and you can see what has happened in more recent years. If you go back to 2001, there were 1.34 deaths per 10 000 vehicles. If you go to last year, there were 0.87, the lowest that we have ever seen. You are seeing a very large drop just over six years. That is obviously something we are all very pleased about, but of course it is not something that you can take lightly; it is something that you have to continue to work on.

Unfortunately, if we compare where we are now to this time last year, we have seen 128 deaths. That compares to 110 last year. Obviously that is of great concern to the community and of great concern to police. Dr Sykes will be interested to know, as he was last year, about deaths in the country and metropolitan areas. While these things statistically vary, this year the number of deaths in the country was 29, compared to 38 last year. But in the city there were 24 this time last year, and now it is 33 — that is when it comes to drivers; there are other numbers. If you look at overall drivers, passengers, pedestrians and motorcyclists you have got 61 in the country so far this year in 2008, compared to 50 last year. We have seen a lot more motorcycle deaths in the country this year so far. In the city there have been 67 deaths so far this year, compared to 60.

We are concerned about motorcyclists because there have been 20 deaths of motorcyclists compared with 14 this time last year. They are always way overrepresented compared to cars. Overall we have seen 20, compared to 14, and that is something that continues to be a challenge. What we do see is police out there enforcing. Obviously there is the issue of visibility, and you would have read about blitzes in more recent times. The issue of the road toll is very much a concern to us. The chief commissioner might want to add to that.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Can I just add that there are two groups of people we are most concerned about. One is motorcyclists and the other is pedestrians. The minister made the point about motorcyclists. What we are seeing is an interesting trend of primarily males over the age of 35; and this morning I have to say we had another male who was 35 years old killed on a motorcycle in Sale.

We intend to work with the motorcycle associations to understand what this problem is about, but we are seeing a significant rise in that category, and again with pedestrians. So we are funding additional operations to try to deal with pedestrians who obviously in some cases are under the influence of alcohol and others not, where they are injured on the road or killed. We have got a new plan that we released on road safety, and we are working very strongly to try to keep the road toll down. We have, I think, one of the best road tolls in the world, but we are at a point where we have to focus more on the issue to try to push it down, because we should not just settle for the 330 or so where we have been; we should not settle for anything less than zero.

Mr CAMERON — Just on pedestrians, there have been 19 killed this year compared to 12 at the same time last year.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Is there an increase in the road toll over the holiday breaks?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Do you notice a trend in that?

Chief Comm. NIXON — Sometimes when you see more traffic on the road you would expect that it might, but in fact we are not seeing that. Principally we are getting one or two every day, which comes to the 330 or so, and I guess that is the point. This year we have just been surprised to see how many, because we are 15 over, compared to 2007 but our traffic experts are actually telling us that there are previous years when this has been the case and when you really do put a heightened effort in you can bring it back down, and the community starts to see the problem. What we think about this issue is that they are often older. They may not have been riding motorcycles for some time and then decide to buy a motorcycle because they can afford one.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — A mid-life crisis, is it?

Chief Comm. NIXON — I was not going to say that.

The CHAIR — It might be the high price of petrol, because it is cheaper to ride a motorcycle.

Chief Comm. NIXON — There is some evidence of that.

Mr CAMERON — There is a serious issue of, you know, middle-aged blokes who have got a bit of coin — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — That's money, for the record.

Mr CAMERON — They have had a licence for 20 years. They had a 250 or 350 the last time they hopped on a bike, and they go out and they buy a 900. They are not young and agile and as strong and fast as they were.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — How many police motorcycle officers do you have, and do you think there should be an increase in the funding because of that increase? I just digress, but I am interested in clarity in the funding; that is all.

Chief Comm. NIXON — There is a real decision we have to make about motorcycles. I cannot tell you the exact number, but part of the decision our assistant commissioners make is about whether they can be ridden at night, because, again, it becomes far more dangerous for our own members to be riding them at night, and so we will often take them off a bike at night and put them into cars, and have two of them working in a TMU car. We have some — we use them for ceremonial purposes; we use them for traffic tasking. We are actually buying some more bikes, which will be undercover bikes so that we can actually work on this in a different way, particularly on the coast roads and up the mountains and down the Mornington Peninsula way as well.

Mr CAMERON — And specific operations around that.

Dr SYKES — Finishing off the bikes, there is a levy on motorbikes. Is that being allocated directly to improving motorcycle safety, or is it being dissipated into other use?

Mr CAMERON — That is a TAC levy, and it is administered by the TAC, but that levy is used around safety-type things for motorcyclists.

The CHAIR — All right. We will ask Minister Holding that.

Dr SYKES — My question relates to police numbers. Based on the graph that you presented earlier, there is an election commitment in November 2006 to increase police numbers by 350 by 2010. There is some pre-budget publicity about an extra 100 this year. Is that within that?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. In terms of where things were funded last year, this year there is funding for another 100 so that by the end of this year we will be at 11 100. At the moment there are just a bit over 11 000. Police are carrying a bit more above their budget. Obviously you would appreciate that in a large budget some of these things are a little bit cyclical, but that is where we are at.

Dr SYKES — Okay. The ongoing issue, which I am sure you are well aware of, is this debate about total numbers on the books versus numbers on the beat. I think it was at the budget estimates hearing last year that there was a question asked about auditing of the numbers on the beat to address the issues that we hear from stations such as Wangaratta and Wodonga where — I think it was Senior Sergeant Shane Downie who has been quite outspoken — the numbers are not stacking up where a lot of people are on stress leave and other forms of leave. Has an audit been done to address this issue that is out there in the public arena and quite damaging to the police? If so, is that information going to be available?

Mr CAMERON — I will pass to the chief commissioner in a moment. Let us just say the chief commissioner knows how many police there are because she has to pay them, so in terms of an audit that is pretty simple. Every second Thursday that is evident.

Dr SYKES — But they get paid whether they are on stress leave or on the beat.

Mr CAMERON — If you want to ask about WorkCover and stress and the like, I am happy to deal with that.

The CHAIR — Minister, we will just take one question at a time.

Mr CAMERON — Okay. You might want to ask about that, but in terms of how many there are, the chief commissioner knows how many there are because she pays them.

Dr SYKES — That is the number on the books. My question is the difference between the number on the books and the number on the beat and whether that can be answered by an audit.

Mr CAMERON — In terms of the numbers on the beat and on the books and the audit, as you say, in relation to last year, as part of the EBA there were discussions between the chief commissioner and TPA around this matter, and that matter — to my memory — was reconciled. Chief commissioner?

Chief Comm. NIXON — Just taking one step back, we have in fact added 1702 additional members to Victoria Police since 1999. What we have done with the vast majority of those members is they have gone out into operational areas on the street.

The definition is the problem, and perhaps my answer might be a little different to some others. When we look at police officers who are out there, we are talking about crime scene officers, we are talking about detectives, we are talking about traffic management unit, we are talking about people responding to calls for assistance. The vast majority of those police officers are out there dealing with the community on a daily basis, and I see those people as being what I call front line or out there directly delivering services to the community. So we do know where our officers are. We have had an audit conducted as part of the police allocation model, which requires us to know — obviously in detail — where our officers are. It was externally audited as well by an accounting company who came in and looked to see that we were being accurate about where our members are.

I think the argument, to cut to the chase, is really around people saying, ‘Yes, we have got members off sick’. We are always going to have a proportion of our members off sick, but I have to say we have far less than we used to have, so that is also adding to it. Perhaps in other ways we are now looking to be far more flexible in the way our members take leave so we have the right police at the right time in the right place. I have heard the argument, but we are not short of police in the sense of numbers. We are up to strength. We have in fact an additional 149 who are paid for by the federal government and deployed at the airport and in international deployment. We use our members well, I think, and in some places you are going to have incidents occur in local stations where they might believe they are short, but they are given the appropriate numbers of officers to operate.

Dr SYKES — But the matter in Wangaratta has been ongoing. There has not just been a blip there, and I think Senior Sergeant Downie has been quite vocal about it, so you might be comfortable, but your troops in two key stations are not comfortable.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yesterday I was in Wodonga. I also spoke to a number of the officers from Wodonga and Wangaratta yesterday and the day before, so I understand the circumstances. It would be a great shame, too, about Senior Sergeant Downie. After that particular article was published in the police news he wrote to me and said he was absolutely offended by the way the Police Association had used that material. In fact he is now determined to retire.

He wrote to me and said that he understood; he thought the way Victoria Police was heading was a fine way to go forward, but he was offended that that material was published. Yes, he is very concerned about his members. He understands that sometimes they will be under pressure, but we are trying to meet the numbers that are required at the right time and the right place, and I think we are doing that.

Mr NOONAN — Minister, I want to ask a question about assaults generally. I think there has been a focus, particularly in recent times, on alcohol-related assaults and of course concentration in the CBD area. Specifically my question is in terms of this budget what are the government and Victoria Police doing to address that trend?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much. Can we go back to the slide about assaults that we had in the presentation? I will just expand on that a little bit more than what I said earlier. You see in relation to the bottom

line, which is around family violence and the change in practice which occurred with police in the way they would treat family violence in 2004, you saw a large jump there in the way the police deal with the matter. You will see that with the non-family violence assaults the green line jumps around, but going back to during the 2006–07 period you will see that there was that increase there, and obviously that increase is of concern to us — there is no doubt about that. In particular what has been of concern is assaults around entertainment areas, around licensed premises, and people who are fuelled with too much grog. I suppose from the police’s perspective I think it is something like half the number of people that are taken into custody for assaults are alcohol fuelled.

Mr BARBER — Is that what this chart is? There is nothing on your axis there. Is this people arrested for assault? Is this assaults reported to police?

Mr CAMERON — That is reported assaults.

The CHAIR — It is the number of assaults.

Mr BARBER — There is nothing on the axis to that point.

The CHAIR — It is down the bottom — see the little box down the bottom?

Mr CAMERON — See the green line ‘Assaults not arising from family violence incidents’.

Mr BARBER — I see the assaults. I am just saying which assaults?

Mr CAMERON — Non-family violence — —

Mr BARBER — Reported to police?

Mr CAMERON — Reported. So that could either be reported by someone or it could be that police are out and they see it. The issues around licensed premises are obviously a critical issue. You will see the — —

Mr WELLS — Minister, is that per 100 000 or is that actual numbers?

Mr CAMERON — I will get some advice and I will let you know that, Mr Wells. It is numbers.

Mr WELLS — Hang on. You are saying that total assaults in Victoria — —

Mr CAMERON — No, it is numbers.

Chief Comm. NIXON — It is numbers.

Mr CAMERON — It is numbers, the number of assaults.

The CHAIR — They are monthly numbers.

Mr CAMERON — The number per month — see down the bottom.

Mr WELLS — Okay, that is all right.

Mr CAMERON — You will see that lift back in that 06–07 period, tackling the issues of assaults. The chief commissioner, for example, in the city, where we saw a large increase in assaults in the last financial years, has established a specific task force, and there is a lot of emphasis now occurring around enforcing liquor licensing far more. You will see the effect last year when banning notices were put in place with entertainment precincts where we had legislation — an entertainment precinct in Chapel Street and also in the CBD about 120 banning notices have been issued. That is another tool.

You will appreciate the announcement made by the Premier and the liquor licensing director a few weeks ago of a proposed lockout — or a three-month trial of a lockout. I know, for example, in Bendigo Inspector Paul Newman introduced that, or he got the liquor licensing director to agree to that last year. That has made a large difference in relation to assaults there. We have also seen other regional centres where that has been introduced and also on the Gold Coast a few years ago. That is something that police are very keen on, to see how that works. I think there is

some confusion about the lockout. People think that at 2 o'clock you are going to get thrown out on the street. That is not the case. It is just that you have to be in the venue by 2 o'clock.

What it will prevent is people going from club to club. It may very well be that they have been thrown out of a club and are now going around looking for somewhere else to get in. Now that will be time for them to decide to up stumps and go home. So it will bring about less people on the streets, because on Friday and Saturday nights we have got huge numbers of people coming into the city, and when they are alcohol-fuelled, large numbers of people bump into each other and what could be perfectly pleasant people 8 hours earlier — 'Sorry about that' — you end up with violence.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think that out of the 06–07 crime figures we released we particularly made the point about the Melbourne CBD, and that was a 17 per cent increase, so in fact it was higher than the average across the whole of the state, which was 6 per cent. That was the point when we obviously had discussions with the government. In our own case we put into place a safe city task force of 50 and also looked to improve the training that members themselves had within the city about how to deal with this level of violence that they were seeing, far different than they had before. So now what we have seen rolled out is a set of responses. The banning notices are a part of it — that ban about keeping people out of the CBD area as well as, obviously, now the 2.00 a.m. closing — in a sense, people being either in or out, which we think will make a difference as well. But we have also put in our own 30-person licensing area along with the new group that will come into place with the licensing commissioner as well.

We think these will have significant effects. They have in other places. But we are not the only place in the country watching this. Commissioners from across Australia have recently called research together to look at Sydney, Newcastle, up on the Gold Coast, Western Australia, South Australia — the same sorts of issues. But we will be very hard on licensees particularly because they are the ones who are providing liquor to people who are already intoxicated, and we think we can make a difference that brings the city's balance back to a much safer location than it was before.

Mr BARBER — Just some questions about the use of force register. In 2003 we had the report by Brouwer as a follow-up to Project Beacon, I suppose, eight years later, but particularly in relation to the 01–02 shootings. He made a number of recommendations particularly about improvements to the register and the way its functionality operates, how to use that information to feed back into training programs and obviously to make changes to training programs. But in his 06–07 annual report he said 15 of those recommendations had not been addressed. Can you outline which ones they are, and say why they have not been addressed?

The CHAIR — How are you relating this to the estimates, Mr Barber?

Mr BARBER — Can you tell us a bit more about better potential use of that register? And do you have any estimates on under-reporting of the use of force?

The CHAIR — Can you relate the question to the estimates. It is the estimates committee, in terms of outcomes — —

Mr BARBER — It relates to the operations of Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — We are looking at the estimates.

Mr BARBER — We are talking about guns, we are talking about tasers, we are talking about the use of force register.

The CHAIR — The estimates are going forward, and that is why we are here today: to ask about the money that has been spent and the accounting of it. If you want to just add something to make it within the estimates context?

Mr BARBER — That is my question, Chair. It is on the operations — —

The CHAIR — To the minister, insofar as it relates to the estimates.

Mr CAMERON — Very well, I might ask the chief commissioner.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I would have to come back in terms of the particular recommendations that you are referring to. It would be acceptable to in detail give a response to those. But in terms of the actual use of the register, we have been encouraging members to make sure that they do in fact advise when they have used capsicum spray or other force. We watch an increase in the reports, and of course we also watch an increase in the use. One of the lessons we have learnt from members because of the register is the move to use more capsicum foam than spray. That certainly came out of advice members gave, because not only do they tell us their use of force but they give us the circumstances in which they have. So we have in fact seen an increase since capsicum spray was first given to police officers, but I think there is some very significant success in that in the sense that it also reduces harm to the community because the capsicum spray is fairly quickly washed away and also harm to our members because they are not being exposed as they were previously. We certainly take account of the recommendations and, when we can, put them into place, but we have a great deal of focus on use of force within Victoria Police and learning from the lessons. Beacon was a particular program which still we have; in a sense the basic fundamentals of Beacon are still within the way police officers are trained and the way they escalate the use of force. So we very much pay attention to making sure we do not use excessive force.

Mr BARBER — Have you got an estimate of the under-reporting to the register?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No.

Mr PAKULA — Minister, on the EBA between force command and the Police Association, I know it was signed off last year, but the costs attended to it will form part of the budget estimates for the out years. So in that light I would like you to provide the committee with some information about what flexibilities exist within the agreement and what those flexibilities will do to allow police to increase productivity and the impact on crime figures.

Mr CAMERON — In relation to the EBA the chief commissioner was very, very keen to bring about greater flexibility within the force as part of the EBA, which was ultimately agreed to. The chief commissioner and the police union also agreed that during the four-year EBA period, within the current and committed resources for the coming period, there would be a reduction in crime by 10 per cent. So obviously flexibility is part of the tools which the chief commissioner can now use to bring about that reduction.

In terms of the flexibilities and why you would have the flexibilities, it is what the chief said at the time. It is about having the right people at the right place at the right time to make sure you have got, like on Friday and Saturday nights you have got more people at that particular time given that that is obviously a higher activity time, to make sure you have got more people out on the beat during that time. I might hand over to the chief commissioner, because she was so keen on getting these flexibilities, and she will explain the reason why she wants the flexibilities and what she wants to do.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think the first part of the enterprise bargaining was a good outcome for Victoria Police members and certainly recognises the members' skill and knowledge and ability in the way they go about their job. I think that is an important part which we should not forget in this process. But what we were able also to negotiate with the association — I would have to say it is the first time I have ever seen a commitment to the association being involved in reducing crime and agreeing that part of this enterprise bargain would do that. Any reduction in crime in this state is a productivity gain in the broad sense and a great saving in funds within our community when crime is reduced. So the association agreed to that.

Some of the flexibility was a capacity for our members to cash in part of their leave, which is in a sense accrued time off. Perhaps I can explain accrued time off. We work a 40-hour week, and people can, they are only required to work 38 hours, so that adds up to two weeks. We are at this stage asking our members who want to sell that leave back to us, and that is certainly occurring now; members are doing that. What that allows us to do is we have planned a significant number of operations, principally on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights for our busy time, but some other occasions, where we will use the additional capacity available. We also can bring back members of Victoria Police who left us. I recently hosted a dinner for retired members, and a number of them made the point — very experienced members — that they would like to come back and work in busy times for Victoria Police. So this enterprise bargain allows us to do that.

It also is a new career structure, which allows us to retain the knowledge and skill of our members and to reward them for the job they do and for the skill they apply in doing that particular job. It has salary sacrifice options,

which is an issue for the members as well. That had been denied this previously. It allows us to also build on a campaign we have had to look at our rostering structures, to be able to work with our members to make sure that we do have the right numbers of members on at the right time. I think the minister in his own hometown has an example of that, where we have certainly seen great success. It builds on continuously using the PAM model to make sure we have got police officers in the right numbers according to the demands. It then builds on having better rostering flexibilities and systems so that we make sure we have got members in the right numbers doing the work. Then this is really allowing us to buy some additional capacity, as teachers have had for years and as other occupations I think have had, to be able to be there. And we are also paying for what is called 'unsociable hours' as part of this flexibility, because we know police officers who are going to have work Thursday, Friday and Saturday need to be given appropriate rewards for that, and that is what this enterprise bargain does as well.

Mr CAMERON — Certainly the chief commissioner mentioned Bendigo. I just know locally we had quite a number of 12-hour shifts moving to 8-hour shifts. What that meant was that at peak times you could end up with having more people at the peak times without having to have additional numbers at non-peak times. Ultimately that meant there was an extra 79 shifts a fortnight, so you can help build up that peak capacity, and it has made a large difference to what Superintendent Peter Bull and Inspector Paul Newman have been able to do.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Minister, can you just bring up the chart, as you did before, on assaults?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I reference that chart against budget paper 3 on page 163.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I refer you to quantity. The government puts much spin on the reduction in crime overall. However, if you look at those — —

Mr CAMERON — Which is a good thing.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — It is not a good thing when you look at it. Now I will direct you to the particular line: 'Reduction in crimes against the person'. If you at the actual in 2006–07, there is a negative 3.7. From my old maths days, a negative on a negative is a positive, so you have actually had a 3.7 per cent increase in crimes against the person. The anticipated target for this financial year was a reduction of 2 per cent, and it has been readjusted to the expected outcome of zero, so there is no reduction in crime. You have got the wish list up for the next year in the forward estimates of 2 per cent.

I also refer you to the quality, 'Proportion of community satisfied with policing services'. The 07–08 target is 76 per cent. In fact the expected outcome is a 4 per cent reduction in satisfaction down to 72. You have been that successful that you have readjusted it to 72 for the forward estimates.

My question really relates to how you justify making the statement that there has been a reduction in crime when you look at the trend lines on those, and the argument in the footnote is that there is an increase due to the Victorian police code of practice for the investigation of family violence. If you were to do a basic trend line of that bottom line, you would see it has flatlined. The ones not involving family violence incidents, if you trend that, that is actually increasing, which corresponds with your budget paper 3 on page 163. Overall, you have failed in that area. Assaults against people of Victoria have increased, and it appears that there is no strategy whatsoever to deal with this problem. What are you doing about solving it? We have heard the spin.

Mr CAMERON — I will tell you.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I have just given you the evidence there, and I think you have been found guilty of not telling the truth in respect of the assaults.

Mr CAMERON — I will tell you what is happening. As I mentioned previously, in particular during 06–07 we saw the change. As a consequence of those changes in the community, particularly around licensing premises, there has been a response — for example, we introduced entertainment precincts and banning notices — something you voted against but ultimately voted for. We did that in response to this problem. That is why there is going to be the trial of the lockout. That is something that we wanted to see. It is not something that you wanted to see. We have recognised this problem across the nation.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Sorry, is that our problem? Are you putting it on to us? Sorry, I was lost.

Mr WELLS — It was actually our policy in 2006 about lockouts. You did not want to be part of it.

Mr CAMERON — We put it in place. I know when we put it in place in Bendigo, the only comment we had from a coalition MP was to oppose it, around the 2.00 a.m.

Mr WELLS — We supported it

Mr CAMERON — That was not the case from a coalition MP, but I was a keen supporter of it, as were police. That is why these things are being trialled. That is why the chief commissioner has responded with the safe city task force. That is why there is the emphasis around licensed premises. We have made no secret about this problem. When we put out the crime figures last year, we said, ‘This is a problem. We see this across Australia, but we have to tackle it’, and these are the ways that we are tackling it.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You are saying to the community that the crime rate has dropped, but the crime rate against assaults against the person on the street has actually increased under your watch.

Mr CAMERON — That is what we have said. Across Australia we have seen this increase.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — No, in Victoria.

Mr CAMERON — And in Victoria we have seen this increase. When we put the crime figures out last year, we said, ‘That is why we see this trend up, particularly around licensed premises, and that is why there is going to be this response’. We have not sat back and done nothing. Victoria Police has not sat back and done nothing. What Victoria Police has said is, ‘Yes, we have this change. It is a change that we have to address’. Victoria Police is doing its part. What you are also seeing — like, for example, with the lockout — is police and the liquor licensing director and the government come together to tackle it. You have got a problem, you face the problem, you dissect the problem and you address it. And that is what we are doing.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Your footnote argued that it related to the increase in family violence incidents. I put it to you, Minister, that that is not the reason for the increase in the assaults, as noted in the footnote in the budget paper.

Mr CAMERON — Which page are we on?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Page 163 and the footnote is on page 164. It said:

The overall expected decrease in crimes against the person has been offset by an increase in the number of assaults recorded attributable to the impact of the Victoria Police Code — —

Mr PAKULA — And ‘an increase in alcohol-related violence’. So what you are saying is the footnote is saying what the minister said.

Mr WELLS — No. That line — —

Mr PAKULA — The footnote says exactly what the minister said. Richard, you are trying to verbal people. The footnote says exactly what the minister said.

Mr WELLS — Martin, settle down. Look at the graph.

Mr CAMERON — Can I say, having read the footnote, it is clear about the increase. I should have had a look at your reference before addressing your question, not that it would have changed the answer, but you have tried to misrepresent things in your question. The fact of the matter is the footnote is very clear about an increase in alcohol-related violence. That is something that we have to confront as a nation. It is something we have to confront as a state. It is something that we have been prepared to do. I know that when we have had one legislation initiative around this, around banning notices and declaring entertainment precincts, and you voted against it. We had to come back and have a second crack at it.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You are pulling the wool over people’s eyes.

Mr PAKULA — You asked a dishonest question.

Mr CAMERON — We believe there is a problem. That is why we want to address it.

The CHAIR — Can all the members of the committee just calm down? We will move down to the next question.

Mr WELLS — It is unbelievable.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Deputy Chair. Minister, we have had a number of discussions about the allocation of police and where they are actually put around the state. There has been some mention of the methodology for the allocation of these police, of course, but there are more police in this particular budget, and you showed a graph on that. Can you tell us in a little bit more detail what this model is all about?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. Obviously where police are allocated are operational decisions made by the chief commissioner and by police command, but they need a methodology to determine why there should be so many here compared to here, there or somewhere else, and that is why police do have in place a methodology. Certainly what you would have to say is if politicians allocated police, you would have a whole lot of police in areas where — —

Dr SYKES — Speak for yourself.

Mr CAMERON — You would end up with a whole lot of police in marginal electorates and less in non-marginal electorates. Let us face it; that is what would happen. That is why we are very, very strong on the fact that police command allocates where police should go, and that is why the chief commissioner has in place a methodology.

Mr WELLS — Without any influence?

Mr CAMERON — Without any influence.

Mr WELLS — With not a skerrick of influence?

The CHAIR — The minister to continue, please, without any help.

Mr CAMERON — Without any influence at all. TPA and the chief commissioner agreed on the principles of the methodology during the EBA last year. The chief commissioner might want to expand on that and also on how that happens so that people can see and understand what are some of the key drivers in where police go.

Chief Comm. NIXON — What we have been looking for in policing for many, many years is a model to determine how many police you should have in particular communities, and that has been across policing across the world. What we were able to do in 2006 was work with an academic — his name was John Walker, and he comes from a private company — to look at what were the most significant drivers of crime within communities and how we would then be able to use that information to determine how many police we should have within a particular police service area.

Victoria is divided into 56 police service areas, and what we were looking for was an equitable distribution of our members. It is a model that is called the distributive model; that means you start with a particular number and you distribute that number. It is not a predictive model. It does not say, 'We could have 10 000 more police'; it uses the number you have available and then determines what is the best distribution. The factors that it takes into account are 12 in number, and you would imagine what they are. Population is a key issue, and the age of the population. We came to understand that the more males you have in the category 15 to 25 years old in a community, the more police officers you need to deal with those issues. Other factors are the number of households and the number of retail employees. One of the ways we determine, using this model, how many police there should be in the CBD is actually based on the number of retail employees who work there. Other factors are the number of licensed premises, nightclubs, black spot intersections and family violence reports; the number of police station and the hours they are open; court requirements; major events; and the custody requirements of police stations.

What John Walker did was then use all that data. It is a moving kind of model, which means that they keep running the data and moving each time around as we make a decision to determine where our members work. He did in fact determine where the locations were. We found that some locations, for various reasons, had more members than his model determined, and we worked through with the local members and the local management about where some of those might have moved to locations where more are needed.

One of those examples is Casey, which is the fastest growing police service area. It is actually also one of our best managed police service areas, and we have recently put about 20 extra police officers there, as you know, because of the growth. It is a model that finally took it out of saying, 'We think this is a good way to do things', and used an algorithm. My media people tell me I am not supposed to say that, but it is a technical term.

The CHAIR — That is all right. The budget uses modelling as well.

Chief Comm. NIXON — It does. So it uses a similar sort of modelling. They looked to see what were the most reasonable criteria to underpin it with, and that is the way we make the decisions to distribute our members. Some people say to me, 'How many members do you need?', and that is really a matter of a policy decision. It could be like New York City, where I was recently; New York City has 40 000 police officers. Or you could be in Hong Kong, where they have 28 000 police officers. That is a different question. What we do is we distribute the members we have according to a very good formula. Again, we have just done that with the additional 100 members coming on board. Yesterday in our management meetings we made the decision. We asked, 'What did the PAM tell us? Where should we put those members?', and when they are ready they will go into those locations.

The CHAIR — You anticipated my request for clarification: what is going to happen to the next 100?

Chief Comm. NIXON — The distribution of the next 100; there are two pieces to that. One is according to the PAM model, and that is because they go out into operational stations; but we also have some other investments we make with our officers as well, and that can be in preventive terms. In this case we have also made some decisions for crime scene officers. Crime scene officers we have put into place out in stations have attended somewhere in the vicinity of 60 000 offences. What we used to do when we attended a burglary was the local police would go, the local detectives would go and sometimes the scientific people would go — the forensic people. Now what happens is a very well trained, qualified crime scene officer will go; one person goes, so it is a far more effective model. Again, we have made some investments in that with this last allocation.

The CHAIR — I have seen it in our area.

Mr WELLS — Chief Commissioner, it was John Walker, was it not?

Chief Comm. NIXON — That is right.

Mr WELLS — Not Kit?

Chief Comm. NIXON — No.

Mr WELLS — I refer to the extra 1700 police. Can the minister confirm, using the current population estimates developed by Treasury, that Victoria's population will increase to 6.2 million by 2020, that Victoria's number of officers per capita will not decrease over the coming financial year or over the forward estimates? And maybe you would you like to compare our number of police per capita with other states.

Mr CAMERON — You know what our policy is about the additional 350 this term. We promised 800, we promised 600 and 350 this term to get to 11 250 by November 2010. That is what we said we were going to do, and that is what we are on the path of doing.

Mr WELLS — Minister, the question relates to the number of officers per capita — —

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — And we are just wondering whether that will continue to increase per capita, or whether it will actually decrease over the forward estimates on a per capita basis?

Mr CAMERON — What is going to happen is that it is going to increase to the raw number we said, and that is going to be 11 250. That was our promise, and that is what we will do. I will tell you what we do with our promises on police; when we say we are going to deliver police numbers we actually do it. If you go back to the 90s we saw crime going up — —

Mr WELLS — Minister, is there a chance that they will actually decrease per capita?

Mr CAMERON — We saw the promises of 1000 police by the Kennett government and we saw a decrease of 800.

Mr WELLS — Minister, you will in fact rule out that they will actually decrease per capita — per 100 000 — over the next four years?

Mr CAMERON — I have told you. I have not got the population figures or done any maths. The fact of the matter — —

Mr WELLS — I have just given you the population figures.

Mr CAMERON — The fact of the matter is that you have seen the graph of where we started when we came to government, and you have seen where we intend to be in November 2010.

Mr WELLS — They could actually fall per capita — —

Mr CAMERON — What you have seen is a very large increase in police.

Ms MUNT — I think it is good if the police force broadly represents the community they are policing. I wonder if you could advise the committee what Victoria Police is doing to attract new police from diverse backgrounds, and of course women, who make up a large and important part of the police force?

Mr CAMERON — Obviously police recruitment is very important, and I think the Auditor-General made some comments a couple of years ago about the importance of having women in particular. We have a low percentage of women in Victoria, and we still do have a low percentage compared to other states, although the chief commissioner has been addressing that. One thing I would just say about police recruitment is that the number of people wanting to join Victoria Police is very large, and obviously that is a sign that people regard Victoria Police as a good place to work. The fact that it is a good place to work is also reflected in the attrition figures. When we came to government Victoria Police had the highest attrition rate of any police force in Australia; it is now the lowest. It is around 3 per cent a year, so it is very, very low. I will get the chief commissioner now to address what she is doing with recruitment. She might also outline how many people at the present time — do you know how many people at the present time are on the — —

Chief Comm. NIXON — Recruitment list?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Sure. It is actually 1228 on the list of people who want to join Victoria Police at the moment. About 800 of those are ready to go in at the moment, so we are actually very lucky. That is not the case for the rest of Australia. Part of the reason I think we are attracting a lot of people is that people are seeing us as being more welcoming as an organisation, coming from diverse backgrounds and looking to attract people who come from different, new and emerging communities as well as older people. The average age of those people joining Victoria Police is now 30, so that means you are actually drawing on a different age range of people than perhaps previously.

Obviously we have been looking to encourage more women. We have been doing that by career days, by attendance at universities, and with a whole range of different advertising, focusing on increasing the number of women. Victoria Police has moved one position, and we are now the third lowest state in terms of the number of women police. But we have managed to stop the women leaving, which is a start, and we are now attracting far more women to join. Contrary to rumour and speculation there has been no reduction in the standards for women to enter the organisation. Originally we had what I believed to be an inappropriate physical barrier. That was in fact taken out, and that has changed everybody in that sense. There was no relevance at all why we should have had that barrier for people to climb over — —

Mr PAKULA — Was that the height barrier?

Chief Comm. NIXON — We had a height and a fence, and the fence was inappropriate. Other than that, which was taken out actually quite some time ago, no standards have been lowered to get in more women. What we have found is a lot more women applying, and they are very talented women. These women are in fact going into our merit list, as they should, and being drawn into policing. At the moment we are at 23 per cent. We had a stretch target of 25 per cent. It was about a target. In a sense it was not in a quota or anything else; it was a matter of looking to attract talented people to come to Victoria Police and to stay, and we are seeing that in a whole range of people's backgrounds. At any graduation I go to I see a broad range of people in the community who never would have thought about joining policing otherwise, and more importantly, as the minister said, they are staying. Three per cent is very low. We are talking about 350 people maybe in a year retiring and leaving us, and I think that says something about the organisation.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I am glad you got rid of the fence, because — —

Chief Comm. NIXON — Thank you.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Because years ago when I used to — what was it; the gate, the height?

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yes.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — When I used to chase crooks after a car chase or something they would jump over a fence. Now what do I do?

Mr WELLS — Go through the gate!

The CHAIR — It is probably open. Thank you for recounting your past, Detective! If we look at the forward estimates, Mr Rich-Phillips has a question.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about police integrity. The budget provides \$25 million for the police integrity output through the Office of Police Integrity. Currently the government is looking to make changes to the way in which the police integrity framework operates through the Police Integrity Bill which is before Parliament. Can you tell the committee whether it is the government's view that that legislation will have any impact on pending prosecutions such as the Noel Ashby and Paul Mullett prosecutions?

The CHAIR — Insofar as it relates to the estimates.

Mr CAMERON — These are matters before the DPP, and the DPP will make up his mind what happens.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Is it the government's view that the legislation will impact on any pending prosecutions? Is that how it is — —

Mr CAMERON — No, not that I am aware of. Essentially what you have got is legislation which puts the OPI as part of a stand-alone bill. At the moment you have the Police Regulation Act, and as you know it is our ultimate aim to have a Victoria Police piece of legislation. We want to take the OPI component out, and we propose to make some changes to the Police Regulation Act this year, but ultimately to have a new Victoria Police act, which the Premier set out in the statement of government intentions.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Is it the government's position that the comments made by the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, Mr Tee, that the Liberal Party and the other minor parties are endorsing police corruption through referring this bill to SARC are endorsed by the government?

The CHAIR — I do not think that has anything to do with our estimates. Minister, insofar as it relates to the estimates.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Let him answer it. It entirely relates to the estimates because it will be funded through the estimates.

Mr CAMERON — I do not know what he did or did not say. But certainly you voted for this legislation a couple of weeks earlier in the Legislative Assembly and something seemed to change, but I do note that you voted for it. I do note that the debate started in the Legislative Council a couple of weeks ago.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are you saying this will impact on pending prosecutions, or will it not?

Mr CAMERON — You were all for it. I do not know what happened in the fortnight between when the Legislative Council started debating it and the Legislative Council's ultimate position, but you might be able to tell...

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Does it or does it not impact upon pending prosecutions?

Will it affect prosecutions or not, Minister?

Mr CAMERON —me.

The CHAIR — I think you have made your comments, and we will move on to the estimates questions.

Mr SCOTT — In this year's budget papers there is a reference to a government initiative to provide new digital audio recording equipment within the justice area. Could you advise this committee how this will assist police?

Mr CAMERON — Audio is very important for police to be able to get good records of interview. I will just take you back. When I first started practising law, police used to do records of interview on a typewriter — they would type a question and someone would have the answer and they would type the answer. This would be a very long and involved process.

Sometimes there would be arguments that would then happen in court about what was or was not said and a whole lot of police time was taken up. What happened was that audio was introduced — tape decks were introduced. There was a great deal of apprehension from police at the time, but police now look back and say that that was a very good innovation. It is quicker and does not involve a whole lot of arguments later on. It is also very useful because you can hear the defendant on the tape and you can get an impression of him. Sometimes you can also see him, when the visual is used as well, and again you can get an impression. It has become a very important tool.

What this initiative is about is putting in place a new digital regime, and it is going to be common throughout the justice system — for the DPP, for police and for the courts. This new technology is obviously going to be a whole lot better in terms of streamlining. The old tape decks, which are at the end of their useful life, will be able to be replaced; police are reporting some difficulties with them. Police are going to have a better system and it is going to be a streamlined system throughout the justice system.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think it is a great step forward. When we first introduced the statement taking by this particular technology, it was revolutionary in policing, but it certainly overcome a whole lot of problems around corruption and a whole lot of issues and allegations that used to be made against the police. This new technology will allow us to digitally record matters. It will also in some cases allow video and audio taping. We will probably have over 600 of these machines available in stations. It actually makes our work so much more effective and easier. The system we have at the moment is starting to break down, and the new system will allow us to replace that.

Mr SCOTT — Seeking slight clarification, when you say 'taping' you mean recording, because you move to a digital process, not necessarily on to a tape.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yes, sorry, it is digital. We are moving from an analogue process that used to have tape decks that you put in. A young 25-year-old technician was looking at this the other day and he did not even know what a tape deck was — it is a bit sad, really. We had to explain to him the technology we had. It is now digital and much more advanced.

The CHAIR — There are probably no spare parts left.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Hardly any.

Dr SYKES — This is a relatively parochial question, I guess. It relates to police station upgrades, which you covered in your slide presentation and is in the overview pages at page 26. My question relates to the program for continuation of upgrades, particularly in north-east Victoria. I acknowledge that there have been a number of police station upgrades over the last number of years, but in the words of the government there is more to be done. There is disappointment in north-east Victoria in relation to the substandard arrangements that exist at Mount Buller, where many Melbourne people go and enjoy the wonderful snowfields, but equally at Benalla and Euroa — the police stations there are substandard. Are they by chance in this year's budget but not flagged? Or are they still to come? If so, when?

Mr CAMERON — If they have not been flagged for this financial year, they are obviously not going to happen this financial year.

Dr SYKES — I just have to relate it to this year's budget.

Mr CAMERON — I see, it is a technical question.

The CHAIR — Dr Sykes is putting in a plea.

Mr CAMERON — As you know, we have had a very large capital building program — 149 or 150 stations have been refurbished or upgraded, so we have had a very large program. As you say, there have been many stations in the north-east that have benefited.

The CHAIR — Obviously you want to put them on the list, Dr Sykes. Is that what you are saying?

Dr SYKES — I am looking for guidance as to when they might be on the upgrade list.

The CHAIR — Not this year.

Mr CAMERON — During the budget process police come to us with suggestions of what they see as their priorities, but there have been no announcements made on those to date.

Dr SYKES — Has the chief commissioner got any comment from an operational point of view?

Mr CAMERON — No.

Dr SYKES — 'Chief commissioner gagged by minister'.

Mr CAMERON — No, these things are done in the budget process, but good try!

Mr NOONAN — I want to ask a question about hoon driving. I think you talked about it being a challenge, particularly in the context of road safety. I can certainly indicate that, coming off the summer months, in the local Williamstown area it has been a challenge. But I must say that working with the local police, they are absolutely committed when it comes to this issue. The question is: how will this budget better provide to tackle the problem of hoon driving?

Mr CAMERON — I have got a couple of slides to show you.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — This is since we have seen the hoon driving come into place with the amendments. The number of first offences since 1 July 2006 — this is as of recent times — you see the number of second offences is under 4 per cent.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Congratulations, Kim Wells — a great policy.

The CHAIR — Okay, thank you.

Mr CAMERON — You see the number of third offences. Two or three of those have been dealt with, and the rest are pending. I have to say it has been very successful. Police have been able to use it in terms of breaking up hooning activity, and the taking away of the car has had quite a dramatic effect; and the fact that we do not see that many people come around for a second visit certainly demonstrates that.

Also, you may have seen some advertisements which the TAC has promoted with Crime Stoppers. That is for a hoon hotline, for people to ring Crime Stoppers so that police can have information, particularly if people are able to report who or a number plate around hooning activity. Obviously being able to break it up like, as you say, down in Williamstown is certainly very important; or if people do have information as to where there some hooning activity may occur in the future, that is something that is also very important.

We also have another little graph you might just be interested in. This is really on the main offences. I will let the committee take that in, but obviously you can see the people hooning by excessive speed, but also by improper use — that is, spinning the wheels, the classic-type hooning, dominate. The classic hoon comes as no surprise, he is a young male and — I do not want to say anything about Holden drivers, but — generally his modus operandi is in a Commodore.

Mr BARBER — Is there anything about voting intention there?

Mr CAMERON — No, nothing about voting intention, but obviously if you are a hoon, you might not like these laws, but I am sure they will realise it is for their good in the long run.

The CHAIR — There is a large blue slice and a large green slice on the slide — I am not too sure what that means, but, Minister, do you wish to add anything?

Mr CAMERON — No, I do not.

Mr BARBER — I have just some questions about the introduction of tasers, which I think the chief commissioner mentioned as part of that \$10 million allocation, that they may have considered spending the money in that way. Has your review of the impacts of those tasers progressed beyond the Alfred hospital review?

Mr CAMERON — Sorry, what was the Alfred hospital review?

Mr BARBER — It was the one you conducted into the safety — —

Chief Comm. NIXON — Into the use of them before we introduced them.

Mr CAMERON — This is the police review, yes.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yes.

Mr BARBER — Do you agree that tasers are less likely to leave physical marks than other forms of force? It comes back to my earlier question about under-reporting. Are you prepared to release the operational guidelines you are currently using for those groups that are allowed to use tasers; and, I suppose, is the implementation of tasers an alternative to lethal force, an alternative to capsicum spray, or is it just a less physical way of subduing somebody? The reason I ask that latter question is that your department, like all others, now needs to work within the Charter of Human Rights framework that has been implemented.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Yes, we do.

Mr BARBER — The UN Human Rights Commission is actually saying that tasers could be used where a greater or lethal force would otherwise have been justified.

Chief Comm. NIXON — All of those issues are really ones for us to take into account as we thought about first of all introducing the tasers, so after having got the information from the Alfred hospital, we had a concern about the level of force applied with tasers and in some cases harm that can be done to those people who may be tasered.

We introduced it with the Special Operations Group in a particularly highly structured way. We then moved into allowing the critical incident response people to use it, and that is where the current deployment rests. We have now been using them with those people for some time and been able evaluate its use. Part of the decision-making in the future will be about the way we may be able to use them, about the best circumstances they may be used in. Some of the tasers in terms of their use have videos in them, so that it videos the use of the taser, so we could also learn more from that particular use.

In terms of our escalation of force, it sits above the use of capsicum spray — so it is an escalation — and before the use of a firearm. That is the training model we use. But there are only limited circumstances where tasers are actually effective. They are most effective where you have two police officers, one with a firearm and one with a taser, so you can actually deal with that level of risk that is involved. At this stage we are assessing how and if we will expand and what type of taser would be most appropriate. We certainly are taking into account the human rights charter and the use of tasers, but there are significant risks to individual police officers who might use a taser on their own, and particularly if the taser does not have an effect, which in some cases it does not. But we think there might be another type of device, which might be kind of a stopping device, even better than the current tasers we are using, and that is what we are investigating.

Mr PAKULA — I want to ask you about the extraordinary success of the Purana task force. Have we got Mr Mokbel on the plane yet, or is he about to get on a plane?

The CHAIR — I think that is an operational matter, quite frankly.

Mr PAKULA — Don't answer it, then.

Mr CAMERON — I don't think police are saying anything about that at the moment.

Mr PAKULA — Putting that aside, over the forward estimates period is Purana going to continue to be the chief vehicle for dealing with organised crime; if so, what initiatives in the budget are there to assist in that endeavour?

Mr CAMERON — Just at the outset, I have just had some numbers about the population. Just to go back to the population growth, during the term of the government up to 2010, the population growth will be around 10 per cent or so, and the increase in police during that time will be getting on towards 20 per cent — just so you know, Mr Wells.

In relation to the success of Purana, obviously that is to continue the fight around organised crime. That has been extremely successful, and obviously some of the cases we have seen of recent times, like that of Carl Williams, have highlighted that. But I will ask the chief commissioner to outline that and for the future.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I think what the Purana Task Force did for us was show us a more effective way of managing organised crime, and in fact it was the lead into what was then the reform of major crime investigation. It is the management of major crime model, and that is the way forward for us. In terms of the success of Purana: 181 offenders have been charged with 549 offences, 15 offenders have been charged with 27 counts of murder, 14 offenders have been charged with incitement, conspiracy or attempted murder, there have been 231 serious drug charges and \$23 million so far of restrained assets.

The model of Purana is in fact the way we go forward, and we expect more success. Part of the success of dealing with major crime was the introduction of the chief examiner and the coercive questioning powers that allow us to bring people involved in organised crime before our chief examiner. That has turned out to be a very effective tool as well. We expect more. We are continuously managing our crime investigation assets to make sure we have them at the right place at the right time, working on these offences to make sure we never get back to the point where the underworld murders occurred. Purana has been successful. Since Purana we have seen that dramatically decline, and we hope and know that we will never get back to that point again.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Going back to budget paper 3, page 162 in relation to the amount of money that is provided, and also referencing your first slide in respect of the Justice budget of which police and emergency services has \$2 billion. Part of those funds used are for the maintenance of equipment and as we are aware the 1899 model Smith & Wesson .38 handgun is currently in operation in Victoria Police. There has been some suggestion that there is a significant amount of funds that are used for the maintenance, upgrade and ongoing maintenance of those particular firearms given that they are an ageing weapon.

There has also been a suggestion — and I just want some clarity maybe from you, Minister, or from the chief commissioner — that a lot of those parts are now obsolete. What happens in particular with those firearms where the parts are obsolete? Are those firearms taken offline? How does the police department manage? Do they have a craftsman actually carving the wood handles because they do not make them any more? What is the process involved in terms of the financial impact, moving forward?

Mr CAMERON — You do not want to know the financial but what you want to know is how the maintenance is kept up, I gather?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, and the cost and how the — —

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Chief Comm. NIXON — I know how the maintenance is kept up certainly.

Mr CAMERON — I think that is the question, isn't it?

The CHAIR — You can take the maintenance cost on notice and provide it later.

Mr CAMERON — Yes, we will take it.

Chief Comm. NIXON — One of the reasons why the .38 Smith & Wesson might have had a long history but is still an extremely solid firearm and is still in place, is that it is still being made by Smith & Wesson. The manufacturers came to see me not long ago because they were concerned at the rumours that had been spread that you could not get new .38s or that you could not get the replacement equipment. Both of those things are not true.

We do in fact buy new guns, and we are also able to buy the equipment to refurbish them, and we have a 12 month maintenance program for those firearms. They are very simple firearms, they are not complicated. They are easily fixed because they have very few moving parts. That is the point of why policing chose those back in the 1960s. Policing used to have semiautomatics — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — That was a .32, wasn't it?

Chief Comm. NIXON — They were, and they were appalling firearms.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — They were soft windows, the rumour was, back then.

Chief Comm. NIXON — You were probably better off throwing them at someone, I would have thought.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Throwing them — that's right.

Chief Comm. NIXON — What they determined was that semiautomatics were not the most appropriate firearm for policing, and then they moved to the model we currently have. We also have speed loaders, which means in some cases you can put additional shots in as well. They are maintained. We do buy new ones, and they are available. In fact there are many police organisations across the world that still use them, and we make sure they are in good condition for our members to use.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Whilst we are dispelling the rumour file and people are going to lose out on that Lexus, I am just curious about one other rumour and maybe you might want to clarify it for the record. There was a suggestion that you are philosophically opposed to the new type of firearm proposed. Is that true or not?

Chief Comm. NIXON — It is not a philosophy. It is an opinion based on evidence, and the reason is the way that these firearms behave in some instances where they can actually discharge when they are dropped, and I have seen that happen in the New South Wales police when they were introduced. During the training you have to undergo intensive training because it is an entirely new system of firearms for members, and again during the training, police officers have been shot.

Part of what I have to weigh up is the risk to the members in terms of the implementation. We would have to move from a station-based issue to an individual-based issue, and that is a very substantial change. At the end of each shift you have to come back and you have to check the gun in the station and therefore you have to have appropriate conditions in place for that.

I suppose for all of that and the fact that I have not been shown the evidence that there is a police officer who would not have been harmed if we had had that model is really what has underpinned my decision. As I said to start with, we now have a committee externally which has said from its experience and its evidence and its research, it believes this would be an appropriate way to go forward because we are advised by the manufacturers that some of

the flaws that were previously in some of the other types of firearms may well have been overcome in firearms that have been available over the last 12 months.

The CHAIR — We will now break for 5 minutes.

Minister, there is an issue which I know both you and I have a strong and abiding interest in, namely WorkCover. You are a former minister for WorkCover, and I have also done a lot of work on WorkCover. Of course WorkCover is a big issue with the police, and there are premiums to be paid, so I was wondering how the WorkCover premiums were going for Victoria Police and whether any savings are being achieved? I know we are cutting the premiums.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

The CHAIR — The government is cutting it, but where are we at in terms of savings?

Mr CAMERON — The thing you have to remember about the cut in the average premium is because of the reduction in the cost of injury as distinct from a cut in the premium because the entitlements are less — in fact the entitlements are better but nevertheless injuries are managed better. For a large organisation, for Victoria Police, its own experience will essentially ultimately drive what its premium rate is. As you know, the bigger the organisation, the bigger your own experiences factor in; and the smaller the organisation, the other way around. Victoria Police is a large organisation.

My advice from police is that WorkCover claims reduced by 3.6 per cent from 2005–06 to 2006–07, and from 2005–06 to 2007–08 — based on the 30 March data — there has been a reduction of 16 per cent in standard claims and also a reduction of 41 per cent in the number of days lost for standard claims, and that is the forecast as at 30 March. We will have to wait and see how that ultimately comes in. Obviously compensation payments, medical and like expenses and the days lost associated with standard WorkCover claims are factors in calculating the premium, and those factors will be obviously factors in the future.

The Victoria Police WorkCover premium has reduced from \$73.8 million in 2003–04 to an estimated \$45 million in 2007–08. The reason why it is estimated is, as you know, because there can be a variation at the end of the financial year. In part that has been because of government policy, as you have highlighted, but a significant proportion of that comes from internal improvements in the organisation around health and wellbeing and in organisational health.

What they tell me is that since July 2006, Victoria Police has reduced total injuries by 25 per cent, they have reduced the days lost by 30 per cent, they have improved organisational wellbeing by 3 per cent, and the number of stress-related claims has reduced by 24 per cent.

With injury, we have had a discussion today about capsicum spray, for example. If you go back to 1998, capsicum aerosol was used 164 times, whereas in 2007 it was used over 2600 times — 2623 times — so a very large increase in the use of capsicum spray. What that has meant is that, instead of having to use a baton or be involved in conflict, that has actually been avoided.

If you go back to 1998 the number of police injuries in that type of situation was 929. That reduced to 362 last year, so you can see what capsicum spray, for example, has been able to do in an occupational health and safety sense. I know some people might be a bit sensitive about this issue, but we want police to be able to have the tool — to use capsicum spray — if it can bring about their personal safety. I know there has been a lot of discussion about this over the year, but I think there is a broad consensus across the community that that is appropriate.

They are the reductions that we have seen. Chief commissioner, do you want to add anything about occupational health and safety and wellbeing?

Chief Comm. NIXON — Simply that this has been one of our major focuses. Certainly for me, it has taken much longer than it should have to be able to start to see the premium reduce as well. More importantly than the premium, though, is actually about the harm to our members, and then the recovery phase for those members as well. We have had a very substantial focus on this issue, and certainly very much a focus over the last three years particularly, and I think we are finally seeing some of the evidence that there are things changing. People are not

being left without support when they are injured. They are being brought back in and being rehabilitated much more quickly.

That has a consequence of more money, but the more important part is it does not have long-term vacancies. It means members are able and capable to get back on their job again, so the evidence the minister has given says we are finally making a difference.

There are other strategies around this. We have been able to backfill. Where there have been some vacancies we put aside 50 positions to backfill with long-term vacancies, but it has taken a while and we are just gradually now moving, I think, to far more success. Members are taking less leave — less personal sick leave; that sort of leave — as well as part of this process.

The CHAIR — Getting people back to work after injury, and doing it the right way, is very important indeed.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I refer you again to budget paper 3, page 163 — we might have referred to it a few times today, I think — where you forecast a reduction in crimes against the person. There has actually been an increase. As minister you have mentioned on a number of occasions that Victoria is the safest state. What information do you rely on to make that claim?

Mr CAMERON — If you go back to the start of the year, the Productivity Commission put out its report on government services, and the opposition got on to that a few months later and was out trying to spruik it. I have to say, 'Good on the opposition for spruiking it', because what the report on government services showed was in actual fact Victoria had the lowest victimisation rates of any of the states, and that was based on ABS figures. So that forms the basis of that commentary.

Mr WELLS — Thanks, Minister. So you are relying on ABS, and I think you are actually relying on ABS category no. 4510.0 which states categorically:

As a consequence of the lack of data comparability for assault and sexual assault, national data for these offence types are not available and the data provided in this publication for individual states and territories should not be used for cross-jurisdiction ...

So why are you using these figures?

Mr CAMERON — No, you are wrong. In fact what we are using is ABS category 4509.0, which is the victimisation survey. The victimisation survey — —

Mr WELLS — We are talking about the 'Recorded crime — Victims' report; I see.

Mr CAMERON — The victimisation survey is not done on information that police record, but it is done on a large sample. But again — —

Mr WELLS — So are you using a sample, not actual figures; can I confirm that?

Mr CAMERON — But again I thank the opposition for highlighting the report.

Mr WELLS — Minister, can I just clarify that point you just made?

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — So you are actually relying on a sample, not actual figures?

The CHAIR — I think — —

Mr WELLS — No, this is an important point.

Mr CAMERON — I will just — —

Mr WELLS — No, tell us now.

The CHAIR — We can find out the information from the ABS. Do you have the information on the ABS methodology?

Mr CAMERON — The chief commissioner will do it.

Chief Comm. NIXON — There are two major sources of data. One is the study conducted across Australia by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and it is a victimisation study. It is a sample, but it is a statistically significant sample. It is done on a range of households across Australia, and it is called the victimisation study. They actually asked people, whether or not they reported to police, what their victimisation rates were, and that is the study the minister is referring to. What you are referring to is really reported crime — —

Mr WELLS — Yes, the real crime.

Chief Comm. NIXON — And that is a different issue. But the one that we argue says Victoria is the safest state in Australia is both the overall crime rate — it is not about assaults — but the overall crime rate is one of the figures we use, and the other is victimisation. They actually reinforce each other, suggesting we are the safest state.

Mr WELLS — That is an extraordinary claim.

Mr PAKULA — Using both figures.

Mr SCOTT — You were asking questions about numeracy yesterday.

Mr CAMERON — No, let us get this right. We are relying on the ABS, and the ABS puts in place methodological arrangements. We are relying on the ABS, right? This survey was part of the report on government services at the start of the year.

Mr WELLS — It is a survey.

Mr CAMERON — This is the report that you picked up and were running with and waving about, and we thank you again for highlighting it.

Ms MUNT — Minister, you referred a little bit earlier to the marginal seats methodology of police allocation, which I personally would support.

The CHAIR — So would I, actually.

Dr SYKES — Where you approach the minister in relation to marginal seats; his door is open today.

Ms MUNT — I was wondering if you could let me know what is the actual methodology for allocating the extra police numbers.

Mr CAMERON — Before we go more broadly, in relation to the additional police numbers, that is something that the chief commissioner will do, and the chief commissioner will outline that.

Chief Comm. NIXON — Principally the major decision is done on the basis of our police allocation model. It then determines where we are looking in growth — and we are looking at all those issues — and as the additional members become available through the financial year they are allocated on the basis of that need within those communities, by the PAM model itself, but also by some organisational priorities. It is a process that has worked well for us for the last two years or so. It takes into account changes in communities and allows us to keep up with the demands of our communities. If we are seeing additional problems, sometimes we will put additional staff for a task force or the region itself might put additional capacity.

If you took Wyndham, for example, which has been a problem for us, what we did was put in some additional resources above and beyond the PAM allocation, but we also put a crime scene desk there, and now what we have been able to see is very successful reductions in crime. We looked to change the hours of work of some members in Wyndham as well. You obviously are always paying attention to where the problems are, but the underlying methodology of deployment is the PAM. But we do make decisions ourselves when we are seeing problems arise for other reasons, and then we need to deal with them quickly, and we do.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to take you back to the issue of WorkCover claims, that you addressed with the chairman a minute ago. The VWA released data earlier this year on claims by Victoria

Police in 06–07 reporting 26 000 days lost, of which two-thirds were stress-related claims and the average stress-related claim was 31 days, with about 8800 in compensation payable. Those figures noted that where the claim was under 10 days length it was not compensable by the VWA, it was compensable by Victoria Police. Can you give the committee details on the number and cost of the short claims, the under 10 days that are the responsibility of Victoria Police, for that period, please?

Mr CAMERON — My advice is that since July 2006 the number of stress-related claims has reduced by 24 per cent. I assume that the claim will pick up the under-10 and the over-10 days, but we will have to get back to you about that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Sure, no worries.

Mr CAMERON — But I assume that it will pick up both.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — If we could get that in the short term; thank you.

The CHAIR — We might complete the police and emergency services. We do have a further question on notice. We have not had much on emergency services, but we would like you to take on notice the issue of concessions and access of emergency services volunteers to Victorian national parks.

I understand there was a promise to provide them with access, and I am just wondering where that is at and indeed if it is going to be implemented and what might be the cost of such an implementation. I am not too sure whether it is yours or whether it is the minister for conservation.

Mr CAMERON — The revenue foregone will be in DSE.

Dr SYKES — We need your strong support, Minister, to have that commitment honoured.

Mr CAMERON — That is our promise, and that is what we will do.

Dr SYKES — You are a bit slow on delivering on that.

Mr CAMERON — We said we would do it this term, and we will do it this term.

Witnesses withdrew.

Transcript of Evidence

7.5 Racing portfolio

The transcript for the hearing on this portfolio will be included in a future report of the Committee.