

Speaker; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mrs Michelle Roberts; Mr Sean L'Estrange; Ms Mia Davies; Mr Peter Katsambanis;
Mr Roger Cook; Hon Fran Logan

METHAMPHETAMINE

Matter of Public Interest

The SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Leader of the Opposition) [3.12 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the McGowan government for failing to protect the families and communities of Western Australia from the scourge of methamphetamines.

The opposition raises this today because, notwithstanding the Minister for Police's attempt to hose down what has happened, we smell a rat. As a former Minister for Police, this is what I suspect happened. I suspect that Western Australia Police Force has had budget cuts and they have gone out and thought, "Where can we achieve savings as a result of the budget cuts? Where can we find savings that we can put to the minister?" They have put that together to the minister in a briefing note and either the minister has not read the briefing note or she has not perceived the political ramifications of shutting down something as important as the methamphetamine task force. Whatever the case, the next step in the game is that the media team within the Premier's office and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet saw the headlines that caused them severe consternation—"Meth detectives re-assigned after closure of specialised taskforce". I can only imagine the meltdown in the offices of the Premier and the Minister for Police last night. I reckon their phones would have run out of battery power because the Premier's office would have been screeching at the minister's office and the minister would have been on to her chief of staff saying, "Get out there and fix this". The chief of staff would be ringing the acting Commissioner of Police saying, "Get out there and fix this. It's your decision. You need to back-pedal. Get on the radio tomorrow morning and make sure that everyone in Western Australia knows that the minister had nothing to do with closing down the methamphetamine enforcement task force."

Mrs M.H. Roberts interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Police, I call you to order.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The chief of staff would be saying, "You make sure every single person on talkback radio hears that this was not the minister's decision. You protect your minister from this dumb decision to close down the methamphetamine enforcement task force. That was our election commitment."

Mr D.J. Kelly interjected.

The SPEAKER: Minister for Water, I call you to order for the second time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: "Get out there, acting commissioner, and fix this mess". I guarantee members that that is what happened.

If members were to speak to every single police officer and every single person in the emergency departments across Western Australia—the nurses and police officers and the families of those nurses and police officers—they would tell them that their biggest concern is dealing with people who are out of control with violent behaviour that is caused by methamphetamine. Every single nurse in an ED or on a ward would tell members that. They are afraid of methamphetamine addicts who come to emergency departments. Every single police officer will tell members that they are most at risk when they are dealing with out-of-control methamphetamine addicts. What do they need from a government? They need backup, support and additional resources. We know from the budget that the police did not get additional resources. There are no extra police officers despite what the Minister for Police has said in here time and again. They did not get extra police officers and a record number of positions are vacant because the government refuses to give the go ahead to fill those positions. Police are under-resourced. Police are looking for ways to save money and have said, "We'll get rid of this specialised methamphetamine task force. We'll get rid of the government's election commitment and merge it into something else. Nobody will know the difference. Nobody will pick it up; we'll keep it all in-house". Except people have noticed. Police officers have noticed. They do not like it when a specialised task force that was put together to protect them and help them put the crooks who traffic drugs behind bars is closed. They do not like it when the resources they had to help them do their job are taken away and they are sent to desk jobs or wherever else it may be. The article was clear; they are being sent back to their original positions. Between last night's publication on WAtoday and 8.30 this morning, the acting Commissioner of Police has had to back-pedal, change his conversation and try to reassure the community that the police are still focused on methamphetamine trafficking and he has had to do that to protect the minister's backside and to protect the government from a hideous headline that I am sure sent shivers into the spines of every single person in the government's media team.

I will not take up too much time because I know the shadow Ministers for Health and Police and the Nationals WA also have a contribution to make. Shame on you, Minister for Police! The Minister for Police has not been doing

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her job and she has been caught out with this one. She has been caught out with the police abolishing a government election commitment because she has not been on her game.

MRS M.H. ROBERTS (Midland — Minister for Police) [3.17 pm]: Well! What we learnt just then is how and why the Barnett government lost office because we got a little window into how it operated. When the Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Police, she was obviously used to getting harangued by the Premier's office—"What's your mess-up now? What have you messed up? What have you done? Why wasn't your eye on the ball?" We have learnt about the former government's panicked management style whereby people screamed and screeched at each other and got all worked up about things. That is a little window into how the former government operated and how the Leader of the Opposition performed as a minister. None of what the Leader of the Opposition said is true. She started with a fantasy, a fantasy beyond compare that can be based only in her own vile experience.

There has only been a budget increase. The former government's budget for its meth task force was about \$3.9 million. It was popped in at the midyear review and ran out in June 2017. Compare that with an additional commitment of more than \$125 million to fight the methamphetamine scourge in Western Australia. It is interesting, is it not? There is no other content other than a falsehood —

Mr P.A. Katsambanis interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Hillarys, I call you to order for the second time.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: Mr Speaker, you may have noticed that I am suffering a bit from the effects of flu. I am here partly thanks to Codral Cold and Flu, so I would appreciate it if I could put some facts on the record without interruption from the opposition.

The SPEAKER: No interjections, members.

Mrs M.H. ROBERTS: The fact of the matter is that there is no basis to the claim made by the opposition—no basis whatsoever. I have said in this place that Deputy Commissioner of Police, Col Blanch, has said, through the media, that not only is there no cut, there is actually additional money and resources and an expansion of our effort against methamphetamine and drug use. Members need only look at the Western Australia Police Force's results in recent times and compare them with its former results. I often say that actions speak louder than words. Look at those results and how significant they are and look at the effort our government, our police force, our commissioner and our deputy commissioner are putting in. They are experts in this area and they are committed to this effort. They understand more than anyone that methamphetamine is a driver of other crimes. Methamphetamine is a scourge.

There was no content to the Leader of the Opposition's speech. She brought out the same lines again about nurses and police and the impact that methamphetamine has on them. It certainly does have a significant impact on them, on a daily basis, but she did not care about that when she was in government; she let it get out of control. Members opposite did not put in additional officers, they did not put in extra money and they did not properly equip the police to deal with this scourge.

This is sad, because a government needs a strong opposition. I used to think it was a bit strange when Geoff Gallop would say that the Westminster system needs a strong opposition. I would think, "Why do we want a strong opposition?" But I understand it now, because we do need a strong opposition to hold the government to account. That is the strength of the Westminster system. Sadly, this opposition has new leadership, but it is the same old opposition. In fact, I did not think it would be possible, but it has actually got worse. Today it has come in here with a single concept, a single idea; it has not checked its facts and it got its single fact wrong. It has based nearly every question and the matter of public interest around it. It has botched question time, and now it has botched this MPI—an MPI based on a complete falsehood.

It is not just that it is wrong and that the cut has not occurred; we have actually expanded and increased our effort, and the police are doing better than ever before. I am proud of the efforts of our Western Australia Police Force, I am proud of the leadership of Commissioner Dawson and I am proud of the role that Deputy Commissioner Blanch has taken in taking on organised crime. Organised crime is largely about people dealing in drugs and running criminal enterprises—in this state, nationally and around the world.

The other amazing thing about this appalling opposition is that it clearly has no comprehension of its record in government—an abysmal record when it came to methamphetamine. One would think that with new leadership it would come in here refreshed and ready to go. There was so much expectation. I thought it might come up with something good today and that we would see something; there was so much expectation, but what we saw in question time and are seeing now in this MPI is, plainly, embarrassing. There was practically no content to the Leader of the Opposition's speech—just a lot of motherhood statements. The opposition has come in here and got its facts wrong. That is pretty typical of the member for Scarborough; she does not deal in facts. She deals in a lot of generalisations, slurs and innuendo, but she never backs them up with facts.

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Let us look at the facts. Let us look at what Acting Commissioner Blanch said today in an interview with Gareth Parker just after nine this morning. He said, quite plainly, when asked about the meth task force —

We're not changing its focus, we're actually increasing the amount of effort against methamphetamine, and particularly those who import and traffic those drugs in the Western Australian community. We are moving where the Meth Enforcement Taskforce currently is. We're going to create three of those teams, back in one of the Western Australia Police facilities, and we're also creating a new team up where the Meth Enforcement Taskforce was, that includes the Australian Federal Police, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, and we're in the process of bringing in someone from the Drug Enforcement Administration, —

This is a first—seconding someone from the US Drug Enforcement Administration —

to really work on the target development around what those networks are that do import and traffic meth, but also as important, the ones who facilitate the methamphetamine coming to WA using, you know, encrypted telecommunications, moving the money for the meth traffickers, so it's really an all-out attack that is based on what the Drug Enforcement Administration do, and what is being replicated nationally.

So we are not disbanding anything; we are increasing the effort. Acting Commissioner Blanch has described it as “an all-out attack” on drug dealers. This is pretty incredible—an all-out attack on drug dealers, a bigger effort than ever before, a real focus on dealing with organised crime and its national and international links, and a new and fresh approach by the Western Australia Police Force. This is something to be lauded; this is great work.

Only last week I highlighted the results of Operation Signal—amazing results, and it is not just taking drugs out of the community. This is a differentiation I made previously. Occasionally we will see drugs, but not make an impact on organised crime syndicates. Last week, Operation Signal made a huge impact on an organised crime syndicate. More than 50 search warrants were issued and many people were charged. This was a massive interruption to an organised crime syndicate. We have not previously seen these kinds of results in Western Australia.

The acting commissioner went on to say, in the same interview with Gareth Parker —

So the Meth Enforcement Taskforce was one team. There's also a Meth Transport Team that looks at the... the sort of transport routes within WA, up and down the roads. There's also a Meth Money Team that looks at the... the money that is profited from methamphetamine. At the moment the Meth Enforcement Taskforce purely look at the commodity itself of meth...

The opposition has singled out one small part of it, which has been effectively expanded, moved and increased in number, and has come to a crazy conclusion. The acting commissioner goes on to say, as part of the strategy—I will just highlight this, because it is a direct quote from Acting Commissioner Blanch in answer to a question from Gareth Parker about the old principle of following the money —

It... it's one hundred per cent follow the money, it... it's a tried and tested method that's been used by the Drug Enforcement Administration since the '80s, it's been used nationally in Australia and now it's definitely a strong focus of WA.

This has zero to do with non-existent budget cuts. This is about how the increased resource that our government is giving the Western Australia Police Force is being used. Maybe the member for Scarborough was used to trying to cover up cuts; I do not know. But we do not operate in that way.

I commented before that another striking part of this limp attack today is that opposition members have targeted an issue on which they were so weak when they were in government and when the member for Scarborough was the Minister for Police. I highlighted briefly during question time some figures related to the drug use monitoring in Australia testing. An article in *From The Line*, which goes out to police officers, from earlier this year states —

DRUG Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) is a unique program with a big impact on policing in WA, so its 20th year of operations is one to celebrate.

Established in 1999, with the East Perth Lockup one of the first two sites in Australia to participate, it is the nation's largest and longest-running ongoing survey of police detainees.

These are the people police deal with every day —

The national program is funded by the Commonwealth Government and operated by the Australian Institute of Criminology, with the WA site managed by Edith Cowan University (ECU) researchers. The program seeks to measure drug usage amongst people who are recently apprehended by police.

This is a bone fide program with good credentials. The article goes on to say —

Marking the 20th anniversary, Assistant Commissioner (Judicial Services) Kylie Whiteley visited the PWH last Wednesday to meet DUMA researchers and see how it all works.

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AC Whiteley thanked PWH staff and stressed the importance of the program. "Staff at the Watch House have a special opportunity to contribute to a program that has a far-reaching impact on our fight against meth and other drug use," she said.

DUMA data documented the rise of the meth problem in WA from 2009, when 15% of detainees tested positive, to 2018 where 65% tested positive.

That rise is unprecedented. Never before have we seen that kind of rise in the use of a drug—from 15 per cent of detainees in the Perth lock-up in 2009 to 65 per cent in 2018, when the twentieth anniversary of the program occurred. This was on the previous government's watch. Either members opposite are ignorant of their own record in government or they are just plain stupid.

Let us have a look at what happened because of that massive increase in methamphetamine use during opposition members' time in government. Between 2009 and 2016, under the watch of the member for Scarborough, crime increased by 37 per cent. There was a 50 per cent increase in assaults, a 70 per cent increase in threatening behaviour, a 31 per cent increase in burglary, a 39 per cent increase in motor vehicle theft, and a 42 per cent increase in stealing. Under the previous government, meth use peaked in Perth in December 2016 and it peaked in regional areas in August 2016.

I will conclude by highlighting some of the good things that we are doing as part of the strategy. It is not a strategy to cut funds or resources. The fact of the matter is that we have provided \$125.9 million for extra officers, specialists and support and police staff. We have provided vital equipment, including meth-enforcement vans. We have provided TruNarc hand-held narcotics analysers and the UFED mobile phone downloading devices. The WA Police Force has initiated a new project to target drug syndicates. Mr Blanch said to me just today that it was a quadrupled effort. That does not necessarily mean that there are quadruple the number of officers specifically allocated, but more officers have been allocated to dealing with and targeting meth. Mr Blanch highlighted that today he met with more than 100 detectives from the organised crime unit and explained to them their strategy moving forward, because organised crime is principally about drug dealing. They are following the money. They will follow anyone associated with these organised criminal syndicates who deals drugs. They will follow the people who provide them with phones. They will follow the people who help launder their money. They will follow any real estate agents who help them to invest that money. They will follow anyone anywhere. This is about disabling organised crime drug syndicates. If we can do that, we can significantly reduce the amount of methamphetamine coming into our state.

I have to say this to the opposition: I thought it could only get better, but it seems that today it is a fail. It failed at question time and it failed at its matter of public interest. It is simply embarrassing.

MR S.K. L'ESTRANGE (Churchlands) [3.36 pm]: It is great to see that the Minister for Health and the Minister for Police are being so ably supported by their cabinet colleagues and backbenchers, who have all clearly decided that this is an appalling state of affairs for the people of Western Australia and that they are siding with the opposition on this one and saying that their government is simply not doing enough to deal with the methamphetamine problem in Western Australia. Mr Speaker, you would have to agree that their lacklustre performance at question time was almost like we were going to have a remake of the movie *The Castle* and they were all auditioning for the role of Darryl Kerrigan. The Minister for Water said that he had sent a letter, the Minister for Housing said that he had bowled over a house and the Minister for Health said that he had created a statistic. They do not know what they are doing.

What is of real concern to the people of Western Australia today is what they are hearing about methamphetamine. In the health sector, it is serious. The upper house Select Committee into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community conducted one of its sessions on 15 April, when it brought forward Dr Soderstrom, an emergency consultant and clinical toxicologist at Royal Perth Hospital. She told the committee at that hearing that 10 per cent of all patients who appear at hospital now are presenting with illicit drugs in their system and 17 per cent of triage category 1 patients have drug issues. They are occupying one-third of all the cubicles in our emergency departments. This is a serious issue. It is a serious drain on our hospital sector. Of course, the impact on patients who have to witness this in our emergency departments is serious. People in emergency departments need care, but they are also witnessing the violence and aggression of people who are having some sort of drug-induced psychosis. Dr Soderstrom said during that hearing —

It is not uncommon for doctors and nurses to be kicked and punched, spat on, and held in a headlock ...

It is not uncommon for that to happen at our hospitals. Some Department of Health statistics that came out recently indicate that in the first half of last year, there was a 55 per cent increase in the number of assaults on nurses compared with the number at the same time the year before and that in the second half of last year, there was

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a 38 per cent increase in the number of assaults on nurses compared with the number at the same time the year before. They were brought on much because of meth.

The one thing that all parents in the community, particularly parents of teenagers, fear the most, whether they live in the bush or in the city, is that their children will take up meth. That is the number one concern of any parent of a teenager. This is not an issue for the minister to treat lightly. The minister should not say that we are crying crocodile tears, because they are not crocodile tears. They are serious concerns that represent the serious concerns of every Western Australian. The member for Kalamunda is shaking his head. Is the member telling me that nobody in his electorate has a concern about methamphetamine use?

Mr M. Hughes interjected.

Mr S.K. L'ESTRANGE: Then he should not shake his head. It is a serious issue.

Premier McGowan went to the 2017 election with a pledge to fix the problem. He made it a key part of his election platform. He said, "We're going to do something about meth, because the former government didn't do enough about it."

Today in question time, the Minister for Police, with her rationale and argument, was not on the casting couch for *The Castle*. She was on the casting couch for *Xanadu*. She said that between 2009 and 2018, the number of criminals with meth in their system increased from 15 per cent to 65 per cent, and that is somehow a success for her government. That is unbelievable! The Labor Party took government in March 2017. If 65 per cent of people have meth in their system when they go to prison, that is on her watch, and she needs to do something about it.

The Premier said at the 2017 election that Labor would come up with a methamphetamine action plan that would reduce demand, reduce harm and reduce supply. In June 2017, he put out a big all singing, all dancing press release headed "More support to help WAs methamphetamine battle". The press release referred to the terms of reference for the Methamphetamine Action Plan Taskforce. Guess what? Term of reference 4 was to "Advise the development of measurable performance indicators". That is all we are asking for. We have asked the government to give us the key performance indicators for its meth action plan. The government cannot assess whether it has been successful if it cannot set a baseline and a target. The government has not given us any KPIs for its meth action plan. In question time today, the Minister for Police was full of hyperbole. She said that the government has a 15 per cent target for illicit drugs. Good on you, minister! What is the minister's plan for reducing meth use in the regions and in the city? What is the minister's target or KPI for reducing meth use? We still do not have an answer to that question. The minister should not hide behind her 15 per cent general illicit drug figure. The minister should tell us what her meth plan is. I can tell members that meth is the number one drug that every parent of young teenagers or young adults is worried about. We want to know the government's plan for tackling meth use in the community.

The Minister for Health, who has ducked off to get a glass of water, indicated in a radio interview that he wants to see a reduction in meth use, but he has not set any targets. The seventh report of the National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program, dated April 2019, found that Western Australia has the highest regional meth use in Australia and the second highest capital city meth use in Australia. This is not a lightweight report. It is a serious report. It comes from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. The report found also that meth use in Western Australia is increasing. The Minister for Police can grab a statistic from 2016. However, the fact is that under her watch, meth use in Western Australia has been increasing. The response of the Minister for Health; Mental Health on the news last night was fascinating. Some members may have seen it. The minister said, "We need to take the report's findings with a pinch of salt." The Minister for Health; Mental Health said that we should ignore the report and findings of the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission. This government wants to hoodwink the people of Western Australia on every serious issue that it has to confront. The government cannot continue to do that. It needs to step up and deliver for the people of Western Australia. The Premier should be in lock step with the Minister for Health to make sure that they deliver. That is not happening. We are seeing a lot of McGowan Labor government spin, but paralysis in execution. The government puts out messages and media releases. It promises the world. However, paralysis then sets in. It sits on its hands and does nothing. It blames us from when we were in government. It is not addressing the meth problem that is confronting the mums and dads, and teenagers and young adults, of this state. That problem is getting worse, not better.

It is clear that the government needs to outline its key performance indicator targets for the regions and for metro Perth on methamphetamine use reduction. It is clear that the government must better support people who are on meth to get off meth as quickly as possible. It is clear that the government must provide better support to innocent bystanders, be they family members or neighbours, or frontline medical staff. It is clear that the government must properly fund support programs—not scrap funding, as it did last year when it scrapped \$154 000 from the Meth Helpline. It is clear that the government needs to invest appropriately in ensuring that the meth problem is

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tackled. The government needs to communicate as soon as possible a meth action plan that has clear targets. The government should stop hiding behind its spin and rhetoric and start delivering for the people of Western Australia.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Nationals WA) [3.45 pm]: I rise to support the motion. This motion is very important from a regional perspective, because the latest information that has come to hand highlights that the problem of methamphetamine use is hitting the regions the hardest. That is not something that we revel in as regional members, and nor should any member of this Parliament. The focus of whichever side is on the government benches should be to address meth use. Methamphetamine use is impacting many families and communities. Every member of this place would have had individuals come into their office to talk about their experience with a family member or friend whose life has been affected by this drug. We know how insidious this drug is. Therefore, the government's response needs to be more than just spin. Today in question time, the Minister for Police and the Minister for Health; Mental Health discounted hard evidence that the use of methamphetamine is increasing from both a regional and state perspective. I certainly do not want Western Australia to be known as the state that has the highest use of this awful drug. The government has said for the last two years that it has a plan. At some point, government members have to own their policy and concede that what they are doing is failing to have an impact. The Labor Party said when it came to government that it would address the meth issue. The report that was released today shows that meth use in regional Western Australia is increasing more than anywhere else in Australia.

I congratulate the opposition for bringing this motion to this house for discussion. It is absolutely the right thing to do. We all bring our personal view to this debate and argue it vehemently. Opposition members should be able to walk out of this place and say to every constituent and every organisation that offers support services that we are absolutely holding this government to account for the claims that it makes and the policies it puts in place to try to reduce meth use across the state. Regional consumption of meth is skyrocketing. I refer in particular to an article in WAtoday of 17 June 2019 titled "Meth still WA's drug of choice, as last year's gains go up in smoke". The article was issued at 5.27 pm. The member for Churchlands mentioned that the Minister for Health said that we should take these results with a pinch of salt. That is interesting. When it looked as though the results were trending down, the Minister for Health was very keen to claim those results. The minister cannot have it both ways. The minister needs to accept that the science is real and that the particular policy that the government has put in place needs some adjustment.

We are clearly seeing the impact of the reduction in funding across the board. During the estimates committee process, members of the National Party asked some questions about this issue. We were obviously interested from a regional perspective. I ask for clarification from members opposite. During estimates, we were told that none of the 100 full-time equivalents allocated to the meth border force are based permanently in regional Western Australia. They are all based in Perth through specialist services. From the estimates hearing, we know that only 71 of those are projected to be new FTEs. Minister Roberts acknowledged during the estimates hearing that Western Australia's very large coastline exposes multiple regional towns to the smuggling of methamphetamine. We all agree with that. It was also revealed through questioning in estimates that there would be no marine branch associated with the methamphetamine action plan. There is a reliance on our federal colleagues. We would expect the state to be working in concert with our federal organisations, but there is no interaction or evidence of that in the methamphetamine plan. We have an enormous coastline. I also note from the Legislative Council estimates process that there has been a reduction in the road trauma trust account projects funding for breath and drug testing. It went from \$5.9 million in 2018–19 to \$5.2 million in 2019–20. That goes against the grain of Labor's 2017 methamphetamine plan commitment to increase roadside alcohol and drug testing. These are all little things that get lost in the wash of the grand statements that we hear from members opposite. It is not good enough. We know that where the rubber hits the road, the government is failing, because we see it in our offices every day and in our communities. It is not good enough; that is why we support the motion that has been brought to the house by the opposition.

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [3.51 pm]: This is another one of those motions on which I would rather not stand up and speak. In fact, as a Western Australian, I would rather be congratulating the government of the day for doing as much as it can to fix what is clearly one of the biggest problems facing our society. Sadly, I cannot do that; instead, I have to get up and condemn this government for its duplicity. Never has the government's duplicity and untrustworthiness been highlighted more than in the farce we have seen from it in this place today. The ministers and the Premier came in here and said, "There's nothing to see here at all. We have not disbanded the meth enforcement task force—not at all. We have beefed it up." Well, the facts are plain to see and read. The article that appeared early this morning on WAtoday was very clear. It was headed "Meth detectives re-assigned after closure of specialised taskforce" and reads —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 18 June 2019]

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Acting WA Police Commissioner Col Blanch has confirmed the force's specialised meth enforcement taskforce is in the process of winding up, just days after dedicated detectives busted a sophisticated drug-dealing syndicate allegedly run by a WA-based trafficker known as 'the Kid'.

About 15 detectives assigned to WA Police's Meth Enforcement Taskforce were reportedly notified they would be re-assigned from their roles in coming weeks as a part of a decision to refocus the agency's drug enforcement strategy.

Acting commissioner Blanch said the taskforce's closure was part of a new, bigger plan to target syndicates and offenders rather than a specific type of drug.

He went on to say —

"What we're actually doing is yes, it is true, we are moving the Meth Enforcement Taskforce out of where it currently is," ...

The acting commissioner came out and said that the government was shutting down this unit and moving it to something else. If this government was serious and being sensible about what is happening in our society, it would say, "Yes, we are doing that, and here is our new plan." Instead, government members come in here and twist, obfuscate, lie and prove their untrustworthiness. They say, "No, not at all; we're beefing it up." What they are actually doing, and what Mr Blanch said in the radio interview the minister quoted from in her response, is moving these people into another broader unit that does not have one focus but a series of focuses, and, as part of that focus, there will be some focus on meth, too. That is exactly what the commissioner said. That is exactly what the minister has said today. That is the point. The point is that, yes, there are other drugs and, yes, the police should be focusing on all drugs, but they should not be doing it at the expense of the most dangerous and prolific drug on the streets of Perth and every regional town in Western Australia, which is methamphetamine. We should not be diverting resources from attacking meth to fighting other drugs. In fact, we should be doubling-down on our resources.

The report from the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission said that meth use is going up again. In October last year, the Minister for Police was happy to issue a press release on 9 October headed "Perth no longer 'Meth Capital' as new report reveals decline in use". The statistics were good enough to use then, but when yesterday's report came out, the Minister for Police went into hiding. The Minister for Health came out and said that we should take all that with a grain of salt, or a pinch of salt—different schools might use different terminology. This government loves statistics when they work for it, but it knocks them when they work against it. I heard the interview this morning that the minister referred to. The acting commissioner, Mr Blanch, is, along with the rest of our WA police, doing a great job in difficult circumstances. He said that there is great value in this sort of report from the ACIC. He talked about the fact that the statistics might perhaps vary a bit every month, but that we need to look at the trends over time. The trends are obvious. Despite all the good work of the police, we are unfortunately still the meth capital of Australia. Our regional towns and areas are suffering. Perth is suffering. Families are crying out for help and assistance. All this government offers them in return is spin.

Last month, the government brought out a meth action plan. Part of its meth action plan was the meth enforcement task force. This month, the task force has gone away—it has disappeared; it does not exist anymore. What credibility does that meth action plan have? About as much credibility as the ministers going out and shooting the messenger whenever they are told some bad news. The Minister for Health shot the ACIC messenger. The Minister for Police today shot the messengers from WA today, the opposition and the National Party for calling her out for failing our state—for not getting on top of this meth problem and for forcing our police to do more work with less resources. We are talking about facts. It is a fact that the government's first budget cut \$250 million out of the police budget, despite this Minister for Police talking up more police for this and more police for that. She talked up the number of police for the meth border force and the regional enforcement unit, despite the fact that it was revealed in estimates in this place last month that police numbers have not gone up in the past 12 months but have gone down. We have seen what the police numbers are like in regional WA. No region outside of Perth can actually fill its full quota because of what this government has done to police pay and regional officers, who have to pay extra for their housing. They have to pay \$1 500 a year more for their housing, but they get only a \$1 000 pay increase and have to pay the \$850 a year that every other household in Western Australia has to pay. If a police officer takes their family to regional Western Australia, they are going backwards financially to protect our community. That is not good enough.

This is a massive problem. It is not this government's crisis or the former government's crisis; it is a crisis in Western Australia that the government of the day has to fix. The public do not expect the Labor government to fix it or the Liberal–National government to fix it; they expect the government of the day to fix it. A government

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cannot fix it by abolishing the only specialist unit in the Western Australia Police Force dedicated to cracking down on meth dealers. That is not going to fix the meth crisis. Yes, our police are doing as well as they can in difficult circumstances, with little or no support from this government. Yes, our police should be focusing across the board on all drugs and on all illegal activity, such as gun running, people smuggling and all of that. There should be specialist units for that but it should not be done at the expense of focusing on the meth crisis that is crippling Western Australian families. It is also crippling the police. If we ask any police officer what is their number one fear, it is walking into an incident with someone on meth who is uncontrollable. We see the impact that has, and we will be talking about it later today when we debate legislation that is coming before us. We see the impact that has on police officers. It is exactly the same in our emergency departments. Doctors, nurses, hospital staff, patients and families of patients are absolutely exposed to the craziness that comes with meth addiction in our emergency departments. It is right across the board. Families are saying to us: fix this. It will not be fixed by only police enforcement. We need all the other pieces of the puzzle. We cannot dismantle the meth action plan one month after it was introduced and expect positive results. We cannot dismantle the meth enforcement task force that has been so successful. The minister champions Operation Signal on the one hand, yet on the other hand abolishes the task force that conducted this successful operation. The government cannot have it both ways. If we are going to make a really significant impact on this crisis, the government has to properly resource our police.

Mr J.R. Quigley interjected.

The SPEAKER: Attorney General, nice to see you back. I call you to order for the first time.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [4.01 pm]: Methamphetamine is an insidious drug. It is having a significant impact on our community and on our services, in particular, from my perspective, on paramedics, frontline staff in emergency departments and beds in hospital services. In particular, the violence that is associated with meth addiction is disturbing. It is something that this government is resolute in its effort to reduce and address. I get it that on some days oppositions have good days and on some days they have bad days. Today just happens to be a pathetic day. We have seen a case made by the opposition over four different questions in question time and now a matter of public interest based solely on falsehoods.

We have already heard the Minister for Police dismantle the false allegations of the number of police resources going into methamphetamine policing. We have had a significant increase around these things. The WA Police Force and the Minister for Police are having tremendous success around seizures of drugs and reducing the amount of supply in our community. It is true, as the member for Central Wheatbelt said, that we have an enormous coastline to which the federal government has failed to put one asset to protect it from the importation of illegal goods. As the member for Central Wheatbelt said, it is not surprising that we have a methamphetamine problem because we have such an exposed coastline and we are getting very little support from the federal government.

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Moore, no interjections.

Mr R.H. COOK: The fact is that we are doing more to reduce the impact of methamphetamine on our community than the former government ever managed to do. The member for Churchlands is saying that it has reached a crisis point. If there was a crisis point, it was in December 2016 when we were the meth capital of Australia. Today we have the second highest rate. That is not good enough. We will continue to do more. We had a crisis in our regions when the former government was in office. Since then, we have seen a 25 per cent drop in the incidence of methamphetamine in our regions and a 15 per cent drop since August 2018. What is the opposition's point? The opposition must be making the point that it was pathetic in government and we have improved and there is more work to be done. There is more work to be done. Why do members opposite want to come into this place and demonstrate that they have no grip on the facts and that they were so bad and so pathetic in government? The Leader of the Opposition was the Minister for Police when this situation was at its very worst. Why is the member for Churchlands here? Does he support the Leader of the Opposition? Was it really his idea to bring on this debate? It must have been his idea because he is the one who has come up with the line that there should be a target. There is a target. The Premier and the minister have committed this government to reducing illicit drug use by 15 per cent, based on 2016 figures, and we are well on the way. The member for Churchlands is saying, "That's not the sort of target I want." Well, tough! We are the first government that has committed to that. If the member reads the Premier's priorities, he will see that we have committed ourselves to that. If he wants a KPI, he has got it. So far the opposition has demonstrated, firstly, that it was pathetic in government and, secondly, that it is now pathetic in opposition. What is the opposition's give? It is supposed to be representing the government.

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The member for Central Wheatbelt said that there have been funding cuts across the board. Regardless of what members opposite say, since coming into office, the McGowan government has spent a record \$244 million on tackling meth. There was over \$40 million of extra commitments in this budget alone. Do members opposite remember the budget from just last month? There was an extra \$42.5 million. Let me go through that. It includes \$4.83 million to establish a 10-bed crisis centre in Midland. As the member for Hillarys was saying, we need lots of different things in place to help people when they need it. That is precisely what is going on. In addition, we have allocated \$200 000 towards planning for short-term safe places for compulsory critical intervention, \$9.2 million towards developing a comprehensive alcohol and other drug youth service in the Kimberley, and \$20.1 million towards the north west drug and alcohol support program. We are introducing over 30 alcohol and other drugs-related beds in the south west alone.

Members of the opposition come into this place and have the temerity to say that we are not doing enough. The member for Hillarys is saying that we are failing our state. Are we failing our state because we are doing better than the former government? Are we failing our state because the number of people using meth is reducing, not increasing as it was under the former government? Are we failing our state because we are spending a record amount on methamphetamine measures? Are we failing our state because we now have a record number of police working on methamphetamine and we are having record drug seizures? I do not know why members opposite come into this place with such ridiculous, baseless falsehoods. We are the best thing that the state has got going for it because under us, meth use has reduced. We have done more to combat meth in our two years in government than the former government did during its entire time in government. Members opposite should not forget that methamphetamine use doubled under the former government and Perth had the highest meth use of any capital city in Australia. At least we have come off that. Front and centre, that is better than what the former government could even aspire to.

I do not know what the opposition's game is. Today it has highlighted the fact that we are not reducing funding for policing of methamphetamine. It has highlighted the fact that we have committed record expenditure to reducing methamphetamine use. It has highlighted the fact that we are doing more to protect our frontline workers from the impact of methamphetamine than any government before. Today it has demonstrated again that we have a KPI that front and centre demonstrates our success, and against that KPI we are continuing to succeed. Even though they have a new Leader of the Opposition and a recycled Deputy Leader of the Opposition, members of the opposition have come into this place today and demonstrated that they are as pathetic as ever.

MR F.M. LOGAN (Cockburn — Minister for Emergency Services) [4.08 pm]: The member for Hillarys —
Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Dawesville, I have a cricket score on the order sheet in front of me and a number of you are about to be out. Can you please not interject. Thank you. Go ahead, minister.

Mr F.M. LOGAN: He just loves me too much!

The member for Hillarys highlighted what the general public wants from us, or from any government, in terms of attacking drugs and the approach to dealing with the scourge of methylamphetamine, but what the general public does not like is hypocrisy. Members of the public do not like hypocrisy from politicians. To come in here and start criticising this government's approach to dealing with methylamphetamine after the disaster on the former government's watch over an eight-year period is nothing but absolute hypocrisy. That is what members of the general public hate—they hate that.

The use of methylamphetamine peaked in this state in 2016. It was a disgrace. No wonder there were so many newspaper headlines highlighting exactly how bad it was in this state. Looking at the responses from the government of the day, where were the programs that parents were calling for? Member for Hillarys, where were the rehabilitation clinics that parents were calling for virtually every other day in the newspaper? They did not occur under the former government's watch. That is the reason we went to the last election promising to provide a comprehensive methylamphetamine action plan that involved both the legal side, in terms of police enforcement, as well as Health, Communities, and prisons. That is exactly what we are doing. We are spending a record amount to attempt to deal with the scourge of methylamphetamine across our state, in both regional Western Australia and the urban areas of Perth. The member for Hillarys knows that, but he has walked in here and criticised the government simply because of one set of figures. He has argued the case that methylamphetamine usage is going up again in Western Australia. That is not true. The volume of methylamphetamine is going up, but the actual usage is declining. If members look at what happened under the former government and the arguments put forward by the member for Hillarys about the methylamphetamine enforcement unit being gotten rid of, they will see that the game has changed.

Extract from Hansard
[ASSEMBLY — Tuesday, 18 June 2019]
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Is the member for Hillarys seriously suggesting that the Commissioner of Police should not change his approach to dealing with the scourge of addictions to methylamphetamine? Under the former government's watch, police intercepted 168 clan labs in one year. Now what is happening? Are those clan labs still on the street? No, they are not. Why not? Because it is being imported. What does the Commissioner of Police do? He responds to that change in the supply of drugs; and he has done what he has done. As members have heard from the Minister for Police, we have significantly increased the number of police officers dealing with the supply of drugs. That is real. If the member for Hillarys is suggesting that the police commissioner should carry on doing business the way it was done under the previous government, he is a fool! If he looks at what we are doing across the entire methylamphetamine action plan, we are dealing with supply and we are dealing with demand.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Deputy Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker) casting her vote with the noes, with the following result —

Ayes (17)

Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr P.A. Katsambanis	Mr W.R. Marmion	Mr P.J. Rundle
Mr V.A. Catania	Mr Z.R.F. Kirkup	Mr J.E. McGrath	Ms L. Mettam (<i>Teller</i>)
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr A. Krsticevic	Dr M.D. Nahan	
Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr S.K. L'Estrange	Mr K. O'Donnell	
Dr D.J. Honey	Mr R.S. Love	Mr D.T. Redman	

Noes (32)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr M. Hughes	Mr M.P. Murray	Ms J.J. Shaw
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr W.J. Johnston	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mrs R.M.J. Clarke	Mr F.M. Logan	Mr S.J. Price	Mr D.A. Templeman
Mr R.H. Cook	Mr M. McGowan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr P.C. Tinley
Mr M.J. Folkard	Ms S.F. McGurk	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr S.A. Millman	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Ms S.E. Winton
Mr T.J. Healy	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms A. Sanderson	Mr D.R. Michael (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

Mr D.C. Nalder	Mr B.S. Wyatt
Mrs A.K. Hayden	Ms R. Saffioti

Question thus negatived.