

**EDUCATION AND HEALTH  
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE ADEQUACY AND APPROPRIATENESS OF  
PREVENTION AND TREATMENT SERVICES FOR ALCOHOL AND  
ILLCIT DRUG PROBLEMS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT BALGO  
TUESDAY, 27 JULY 2010**

**SESSION ONE**

**Members**

**Dr J.M. Woollard (Chairman)  
Mr P. Abetz (Deputy Chairman)  
Ms L.L. Baker  
Mr P.B. Watson  
Mr I.C. Blayney**

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**Hearing commenced at 10.47 am****RISDALE, SGT DAVID MARK****Police Sergeant, Western Australia Police, examined:**

**The CHAIRMAN:** On behalf of the Education and Health Standing Committee, I would like to thank you for your interest and your appearance before us today. I would like to acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners, past, present and future, of the land on which we are meeting today. The purpose of this hearing is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy and appropriateness of prevention and treatment services for alcohol and illicit drug problems in Western Australia.

At this stage I would like to introduce myself, Janet Woollard; Mr Ian Blayney, a committee member; Dr David Worth, our principal research officer; and we have Keith and Judith with us from Hansard.

This committee is a committee of the Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. This hearing is a formal procedure and therefore commands the same respect given to proceedings in the house. This is a public hearing, and Hansard will be making a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document or documents during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you would provide the full title for the record.

Before we proceed to the questions we have for you today, I need to ask you a series of questions. Have you completed the "Details of Witness" form?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, madam, I have.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you understand the notice at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee.

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, madam.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Did you receive and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, madam, I did.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness at today's hearing?

**Sgt Risdale:** No, I do not.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you please state the capacity in which you appear before the committee today?

**Sgt Risdale:** I am a police sergeant based at the Balgo multifunctional police facility in Western Australia.

**The CHAIRMAN:** David, I would like to start by thanking you very much for the submission, which we have had an opportunity to read through before we came here, and also for the brief talk that you have just given us. Hopefully we may have time later in the day to extend that talk; it was very interesting to look around.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** I think it would be worth just pointing out to you that what you say goes up on the net.

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, I understand that, sir; yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The police facilities, I believe, have been in Balgo now for six years; is it six years?

**Sgt Risdale:** About five years. I believe it was September 2005 when they were opened. I can confirm that date if you need to.

**The CHAIRMAN:** As you know, this inquiry then is focusing on problems with alcohol and illicit drugs. We are particularly interested in the inquiry, I guess, in children; and for children what education they are having, positive and negative, in relation to alcohol and illicit drugs. Then which health professionals there are in the area who may be assisting to educate the community about the harms of alcohol and drugs. And then we are interested in the social cost to the community resulting from the use and abuse of alcohol and drugs.

Again thank you for your presentation. Shall we look at the children's issue first, or have you prepared something you would like to give to us first with strengths in the area, those three areas, weaknesses and what could be done?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes. Most of what I was going to say is in that submission. I am happy to take any questions you have got and answer them as best I can. If you would like me to make a statement about the general state of the community, I am happy to do that as well.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Maybe if you would like to discuss the general state of the community, and then from there we will then come back and target again some of the particular areas that we would like some information on.

**Sgt Risdale:** Okay. I have been in Balgo for approximately 18 months; actually just coming up to 18 months. Pulled from a police point view, the place has changed dramatically in that time; okay. And I put down the single biggest change to that as the liquor restrictions that have been implemented in Halls Creek and the subsequent restrictions that we managed to get in place on Rabbit Flat Roadhouse in the Northern Territory.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And the liquor restrictions in both of those, which sections were they for both or could you describe which restrictions for both of those areas?

**Sgt Risdale:** Okay. Halls Creek liquor restrictions were implemented, I think, they do not sell anything over light beer. You can buy full-strength alcohol in the pub there but you cannot take away anything other than light beer. I cannot remember the exact alcohol content restriction. I believe it may be 1.5 per cent. I can determine that if you need me to. Rabbit Flat liquor restrictions: when Halls Creek restrictions came in, initially there was a spike in alcohol-related offences out here. The closest full-strength alcohol was Rabbit Flat in the Northern Territory, which is a 250-kilometre round trip from Balgo. Of course they fall under the Northern Territory; we had no power over them. We worked closely with agencies within Western Australia, interested agencies, and talked to the relevant authorities in the Northern Territory about our problem, and we ended up coming to an agreement with the owner of Rabbit Flat to a 12-can per person limit with photo ID per day.

**The CHAIRMAN:** With that 12 cans, again is it low-strength beer or is it—?

**Sgt Risdale:** No, that is full-strength beer. He sells mostly Victoria Bitter beer. He sells a little bit of Emu Export, but most of the community here would drink Victoria Bitter and buy their alcohol from Rabbit Flat. With that restriction put in place, that initial surge in offences and working hours and other associated problems with alcohol dropped off. And now we are in a position where the place is better than it has been at any time in the past 18 months. With the alcohol-related offences, that is pretty much most of what we do. Primarily we are here as an MFPP to reduce the incidence of domestic violence and child abuse. That is our primary reason for being here. A lot of those instances were alcohol related. I believe we have been very successful in achieving that since the inception of the Balgo multifunctional police facility within the three communities in the Kutjunga area. A lot of that has got a lot to do with the liquor restrictions. There is also a better culture of reporting. Women in the communities are more readily coming forward when they have been assaulted because I believe they are happy that they know now and are aware that they can come

forward and police will deal with the issues and they can be protected as best we can; using bail conditions, restraining orders, removing people from the community in extreme cases. But you will notice with domestic violence issues, there seems to be very little drop-off. When you are looking statistically there is very little drop-off in the issues of domestic violence. That is not that it is not being reduced; there is more reporting. People like the clinic staff and the nurses will tell you that there is a lot of domestic violence still that happens that does not come back to the police, but those incidents are a lot less. Usually when it has happened now, it comes to our attention very quickly and we deal with it quickly.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And that domestic violence, is it predominantly women who are the subject of the abuse, or does it work both ways?

**Sgt Risdale:** It does work both ways but, yes, it is predominantly women.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So predominantly being 70 per cent, 80 per cent, 90 per cent?

**Sgt Risdale:** Eighty per cent or higher would be women. Most people charged with domestic-related violence offences are male.

**The CHAIRMAN:** And the domestic violence, is it women and children or just —?

**Sgt Risdale:** Just in my experience within the community, mostly women. Children are involved insofar as they are sometimes present when it happens, and I would say DCP help us with that, but it is mostly the women being attacked.

**The CHAIRMAN:** At the hearing that we had in Broome, one of the things that the police had was problems, because of alcohol and abuse, with picking up children as young as six during the evening and early morning, late hours. Do you have a similar problem here?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, we do. The community itself—this is not a town, okay? I believe we have got a traditional view of the town and you keep your kids safe, you keep them at home and off the streets. This is more like one big house with a lot of rooms. The people in this community do not have an issue with their children wandering the streets in the community. It is just something they do not have an issue with. That being said, you start seeing things like school attendance rates. When there is a lot of alcohol coming into the community, there are a lot of children around at night. There is a lot of noise from alcohol parties, drunk people fighting, the kids are awake. It was nothing unusual to go to a house to attend an incident at three, four o'clock in the morning and see five or six young children standing around. When the liquor restrictions came in place, we have noticed a very significant change in that. When we drive around late at night you will see the kids playing basketball on basketball courts, but once you get to about 10, 11 o'clock at night they will all move back into their houses. We are seeing less people around at night and more people during the day. There was a time at the height of the restrictions that you would not see anybody in this community before 10 o'clock in the morning at all; it was a ghost town. Now you can drive around at six, seven o'clock in the morning and you see them up with their fires, cooking their breakfast and you will see the kids walking to school. That is one change we have noticed there.

[11.00 am]

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is there someone from DCP up here 24 hours?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, we have Wendy Burns, who is in the community. She works out of our station. One of the benefits of a multifunction police facility is that we have that direct contact with DCP. We also hold regular “kids at risk” meetings, where we involve the clinic, DCP, the school principal and us, and what we do is we all sit around and discuss the children within the community. There are many eyes; there are a lot more eyes in the community, watching all the children. Any issues identified by any one of those agencies are brought up at those meetings, and then we can work out the most appropriate agency response, sort of like early intervention; we sort of catch something quickly and we can deal with it quickly.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I believe that because of the restrictions, you are now able to identify when a truckload of alcohol comes into Balgo. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

**Sgt Risdale:** There are a few in the community that are against the alcohol restrictions. Generally, those few are responsible for most of the alcohol coming into the community. Though they will not say it directly to outside people, they will talk to the police. Most of the women in this community support the alcohol restrictions; people will make us aware when people have gone to Rabbit Flat, and people make us aware when they are coming back and who is involved. We get a lot of good information and intelligence from the community about alcohol coming in now, so we are able to intercept it as best we can. That said, it does sometimes come in in bulk. This weekend was a good example, where we have not had alcohol for a long period of time, and the place has been very good; I think we had two arrests for this month, and neither of them were alcohol related. Over a three-day period, we had alcohol coming to the community and we had eight arrests in that three-day period, and dealt with a lot of other alcohol-related incidents. We intercepted most of the alcohol that came in, but there was still a small amount of alcohol that got past us, which caused those issues.

**The CHAIRMAN:** When you say a few members of the community, how many is a few members? I think you said the population of the community around here is 300.

**Sgt Risdale:** It is. We work on a figure of about 400 people in this community. It can almost be split down gender lines. A lot of the men in the community do not want liquor restrictions, and the women do, but there are certain families that give us more problems than others. It is only a small number; there would probably be 20 males in this community, if I had to pick a number, that I could identify as being what I would call problem people, with respect to alcohol and bringing in alcohol.

**The CHAIRMAN:** One of the Aboriginal corporations that we met with in Broome, when we were discussing problems with alcohol and particularly with children, suggested that they did not feel that there was such a close link between the police and the CDP. They suggested that there should be a halfway house for children who are subject to, I guess, either being found on the streets, or being found in places where alcohol is being abused. Do you think there is a need up here for a similar halfway house, or somewhere where children can be cared for if the occasion arises?

**Sgt Risdale:** Family links are massive in the communities; there is nearly always a family member or relative that the children can be taken to. Even if it is not within Balgo, it is within the Mulan or Billiluna communities. In that sense, the children very rarely have nowhere to go; we do not have that issue here.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Because it is a close-knit community.

**Sgt Risdale:** Exactly, and because there are so many family members spread across the communities, there is always somewhere to take the child. There is a women's cultural centre here, the Kapululangu Women's Law and Culture Centre. That is sort of being used as a safe house for women; when women have been feeling threatened, they have been going down to that area. I believe that that area is covered by women's law, which is fantastic; it will keep the men away straightaway. Wendy Burns —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is there someone at that at that place 24 hours?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, there is. Zohl dé Ishtar—I do not know whether the Chair has heard that name—runs it; she is the CEO of that organisation. There is also Maggie Gleeson and Peter Gleeson who work down there. There are people down there all the time. They assist with various cultural activities within the community and mostly deal with the older ladies. That being said, Wendy from DCP was trying to organise another safe house within the community, closer to the police station. I do not know how far that has advanced. They had a house identified, and she was speaking with the corporation and other agencies. I do not know how it has progressed from there, though.

**The CHAIRMAN:** When you said earlier about some people needing to be removed from the community, where would these people be taken to?

**Sgt Risdale:** When I said “remove people from the community”, generally it is refusing bail conditions, so they would go to the lock-up in Halls Creek.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So it is if they are not reporting when they have bail conditions to report to the police station and then, because they are not reporting, when you come across them, they would be taken to Halls Creek.

**Sgt Risdale:** That is right. When we have an incident like domestic violence and we charge an offender, we have the option of being able to release that offender on protective bail conditions not to approach the victim and not to contact the victim. If we do not believe that protective bail conditions are appropriate and it is not appropriate to release that person into the community because we believe that the victim will not be safe, we can refuse the bail conditions and we will take that person to Halls Creek to basically stay in custody until their court appearance, which is usually the next day.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What programs are there in the community for people? We were made aware in Broome that alcohol and also cannabis are very big problems. You mentioned in your report petrol or solvent sniffing. What programs are there available when you come across someone? I know you have mentioned the Northern Territory program. There is a bill on the table in Parliament at the moment, which I was asked to support. I told the member for Rockingham that I could not support it because I think the model in the Northern Territory is much better, so I hoped to table a bill similar to the one in the Northern Territory. I am aware of that one and I think that is a very good model, because it is treatment focused. What in this area do you have at the moment? It is not available to you to see whether community members will go along with it. What is there available for you currently?

**Sgt Risdale:** Within the community we have Palyalatju. Palyalatju provide alcohol counselling, I believe.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Palyalatju is a non-government organisation, is it?

**Sgt Risdale:** I believe Christopher Cresp heads up Palyalatju Maparnpa, and will be talking to the committee. I believe they run alcohol counselling, drug counselling and other counselling. We have a lot of external agencies; most of the other agencies are external to the community. There is the Kimberley Mental Health and Drug Service, which I think is based out of Derby and Kununurra. There is the StandBy Response Service, which deals with suicide. One of the biggest problems we have here is service delivery in relation to those services. External agencies claim to provide that service to the Balgo community. Generally they will come in and they will spend no more than three days here. A lot of the time when they attend, the people they need to talk to, who are on their list to talk to, are not here; they will then fly away. They come in monthly, at best. Also, when we come to the wet season, we will get phone calls at the station saying, “We’re not coming because the road’s closed”, or “We’re not coming because there’s sorry time”, or other cultural sensitivities. One of the things I want to make clear is that sorry time does not affect the service delivery of agencies to this community. The agencies that work within this community, their service delivery generally is not affected by sorry time, and I do not believe that it would affect the service delivery of those external agencies either, but it is constantly being used as a reason not to come to the communities.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This may be something that maybe we can get from Christopher later, but with respect to what you are saying about these other agencies, maybe it might be worthwhile us getting a list of those agencies and who they are funded by, and looking at whether the funding can be centrally located rather than outside. Do you believe that a model like that would be more appropriate for this type of area?

**Sgt Risdale:** I would definitely support that. One of the biggest problems we have with that, I believe, is accountability, where if you do have agencies with varied sources of funding, they do not answer to any single person. If we set up a model where people were answering to one central agency and were accountable to that agency, they would have to say, “This is what we have done, this is what we have achieved; we are effective because we have achieved this,” rather than just going down a line where they are doing the same thing over and over again, and not seeing any results.

[11.10 am]

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** In that situation, if they did not turn up for those reasons, could they basically put that into their reports and they could then say they had met their KPIs?

**Sgt Risdale:** I could not answer that; I do not know, sorry.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Do you suspect that might be the case?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, I suspect it is a case where they are ticking the Balgo box but have not actually delivered the service.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** So long as they have got a valid excuse, probably that would be fine.

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, look, another issue is our distance too. A lot of people drive in; that takes two days. It takes one day virtually to drive in and drive out and it reduces their time in the community. I do not know the details of this but I know there was talk with the previous OIC where they were trying to organise a car, which we were going to keep at the police station. We were organising this, I believe, with Wirrimanu. The point of the car was going to be that we could get the external agencies to fly in, then they would have the use of this vehicle while they were in the community and then they would fly out, which would effectively give them more time in the community itself to deliver the service.

**The CHAIRMAN:** This group that you said, you meet with child development and who else is it that you meet with on a regular —

**Sgt Risdale:** The kids at risk meetings are held with all the agencies we have memorandums of understanding with. With the school principal we have CAMS, it is usually the doctor or the children’s nurse, DCP and ourselves.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is focusing on children. I am just thinking is there a group that you are involved in that if we were looking at something like this with the funding, rather than one agency, that it could go to a community group so that everyone is involved in the community. Is there a group that involves police, elders, child development?

**Sgt Risdale:** Respected elders within the community and this perceived power they have over the community, I do not see any evidence of it. One of the biggest issues I think we can identify within this community as police is a lack of leadership—a lack of good leadership. A lot of the problems we have in the community, especially with alcohol, can be traced back to these people who are supposed to be in positions of responsibility, so lack of good leadership is a problem. I do not believe there is the respect there for that leadership by the community that you need and there should be to make them effective. I do not know how to solve that problem and I do not have any ideas on how to solve that problem; that is something that has to be dealt with at a community level. The community is divided down family lines. When you do have a leader that is attached to one particular family, though he may be a leader in the community, he will not deal with an issue outside of his family group. So we have a board of directors and I believe that they are taken from various family groups across the community, but still getting them to deal with issues is difficult because every time an issue is brought up with a particular family, they take it as a personal attack.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What have been the positive benefits to the community from the drop in the number of police charges over the past 18 months?

**Sgt Risdale:** When the liquor restrictions first came in and the place settled down, we did notice that a lot of Halls Creek residents who still identified as being from Balgo came back to the community. We noticed an initial surge in that. Basically, these were families that were separated for no other reason than the availability of full-strength alcohol, so when they return to the community that is a positive. Without the alcohol, we have people working. I believe that in the past 18 months I have noticed a change, particularly the people who are working who were some of our biggest issues who were involved in most of the offences of pre-liquor restrictions. Now with the liquor restrictions, I have noticed that there are a few key persons in this community who we have not had any problem with for a long period of time are working in steady jobs—working with agencies like BoysTown, Palyalatju, the clinic, Wirrimanu Aboriginal Corporation, Outback Stores. They are holding their jobs longer; that is a positive. We are getting comments from the community that they feel like it is a safer place to live. We also get positive comments from a lot of the women saying that it is good that the noise from drunks has gone; they can sleep at night; they are not worried about people coming into their houses in the middle of the night looking for food or a fight. So the community itself is telling us as police that they believe that this is a safer place since the inception of the liquor restrictions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** So if you are still having problems because of the full-strength coming in from Rabbit Flat, have you approached them in terms of just selling low-strength alcohol there as well?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, we have. The compromise we came to with Rabbit Flat was that 12 can per person per day limit, which he did not have to impose on himself. He did at the end of the day; we spent a lot of time talking with Bruce Farrands who runs Rabbit Flat and eventually came to that agreement. He voluntarily went to the Northern Territory's liquor licensing authority and I believe he had that written into his licence. Bruce Farrands is closing Rabbit Flat down; 31 December this year will be his last working day. He lives out there, he sells fuel and alcohol. He has been out there 41 and a half years; he is not going to make a transition to light-strength alcohol or mid-strength alcohol when he has less than six months left in his business. That being said, that 12 can per person limit has made a huge difference within the community.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** You said also in your report that they had to have a photo ID, is that the story?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, they do have to have a photo ID to buy alcohol.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** So how many people have got a photo ID?

**Sgt Risdale:** A lot of them do have old drivers' licences; people who have had drivers' licences before, some still have drivers' licences. I believe Palyalatju does a community ID card for them, so they can get photo ID that way. There are various ways they get photo ID cards—proof of age cards.

One of the other things we hear all the time is a lot of agencies come to us talking about the community being trapped here in Balgo; Halls Creek, Broome and Kununurra are so far away. The people in this community travel very regularly. The fact that they are always in and out of Halls Creek, Broome, Kununurra, Kiwirrkurra, Lajamanu, Yuendumu; travelling is not an issue for them, they do manage to get around. They do not sit in Balgo.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Yesterday, though, we were talking a bit about schooling and the difficulty of, if you like, trying to keep up with kids' education when they move from place to place. I know in the Mid West they are looking at a system where they can track kids electronically so that their records, if you like, instantly follow them as they move from, say, Mullewa to Mt Magnet or Carnarvon or wherever. I was curious, is there a pattern to their movement? Do they move to particular places at particular times of the year or is it —

**Sgt Risdale:** When the wet season comes in, generally there will be less people in the community; they will move to Broome and Kununurra, generally.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Why is that? Is that because the food truck cannot get in here?

[11.20 am]

**Sgt Risdale:** No, it is not; there is always food at the store. I worked in Broome for three years before I came out here, and you would talk to them when they are in Broome and they would tell you they are on holidays.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Okay.

**Sgt Risdale:** I cannot explain it other than that.

With respect to them moving around, they would regularly leave the community to go to funerals. Do you remember that I mentioned that they have large extended families? People die regularly, and these people have families right across the desert areas of Western Australia, some further south, and in the Northern Territory. People are dying regularly and they will leave for funerals. When they go for funerals, they will generally take the kids with them. They will go to these funerals and they may stay weeks or months longer than they need to before they come back, and then those kids will get the chance to attend the school again. They will travel for royalties meetings. Football carnivals are big; most of the communities within the Northern Territory and Western Australia hold football carnivals, and they will all disappear and travel for football carnivals. There are various reasons why they leave, and they do it very regularly.

**The CHAIRMAN:** How easy or hard is it to recruit police, DCP staff or clinic staff, and what are the difficulties?

**Sgt Risdale:** I cannot speak for other agencies. With police, I do not believe it is too difficult. Generally, with our process a position will become available and people will apply for that position, and then there is a selection process. With the police it is not difficult; they generally find somebody to fill the position.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Education?

**Sgt Risdale:** I cannot speak for the other agencies. I am not aware of how difficult it is to get teachers or nurses here.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** How many teachers are here?

**Sgt Risdale:** I do not know off the top of my head, sorry.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** We should have had a quick visit to the school, should we not?

**The Principal Research Officer:** There are many things we could do.

**Sgt Risdale:** Balgo is a difficult place: it is very isolated; it is a harsh environment; and it is not an attractive town. I imagine that if somebody had a choice between going somewhere with a beach, decent living conditions and shopping, and coming to Balgo, generally they would choose to go to the better place. The people who are attracted to Balgo are generally here for other reasons, such as probably—I do not know—they may see it as an adventure or they may be here for cultural awareness or experience; all sorts of reasons.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You said that there are 400 people in the town, and we saw the store, which I believe is managed by Outback Stores. I believe that it has quite a big turnover, considering the town has a population of 400, because of the added cost in bringing foods to this area. Someone mentioned that its turnover is \$100 000 a week.

**Sgt Risdale:** The figure I have been given is about \$100 000 a week—you would obviously have to ask the store to confirm that. That is roughly its takings.

**The CHAIRMAN:** If the government says to us that there is money available to look at the problems with alcohol and drugs in this area, what do you think would be the three priorities?

**Sgt Risdale:** The three problems we have with substance abuse are alcohol and marijuana, which is the drug of choice out here.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is it grown locally or is it imported?

**Sgt Risdale:** We have intelligence on where that is coming from; it is imported from outside of this area. Marijuana, basically, is their drug of choice, and we have the volatile substance abuse—the sniffers. The sniffers primarily target unleaded fuel, and when they cannot get unleaded fuel, the opportunistic sniffers will get hold of unleaded fuel when the hardcore sniffers are in the community. Without those hardcore sniffers in the community, we do not really have a sniffing issue as such. Like I said in my submission, sniffing is generally seen as a social activity amongst most of the kids and they will do it opportunistically. We have a core group of problem sniffers and when they are in the community we have a sniffing issue; when they seem to be out of the community we do not have a sniffing issue. They are the people we have to deal with at a base level. You mentioned before the Northern Territory volatile substance abuse legislation, and we had a situation here whereby we had a particular person who was brain damaged from the sniffing and refused treatment, and after all associated agencies—including mental health in Perth—had dealt with this particular person it got to a stage where nothing could be done. We all became observers and had to sit back and just watch this person slowly die. In the Northern Territory they can give the courts the power to force someone into treatment. If we had that, if we have someone who will not, with all the other help available, be assisted, before we get to the stage where we just sit back and watch them die we can intervene and at least force them into a treatment program to try to get them some real help.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I believe that people are not so keen on sniffing Opal.

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is Opal available in all local communities?

**Sgt Risdale:** Opal is available in Balgo, Mulan, and Billiluna.

**The CHAIRMAN:** But is it Opal and other unleaded fuel?

**Sgt Risdale:** No; you cannot buy unleaded fuel in those three communities. Our unleaded fuel comes in externally.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is it imported for the sniffing; is it another importation?

**Sgt Risdale:** It is. Unleaded fuel is available at Rabbit Flat, but very little unleaded fuel comes from Rabbit Flat. Most of our unleaded fuel comes in from Halls Creek and Kununurra. People coming from those towns will drive down to Tanami with unleaded fuel in their vehicles. Again, only usually when the core group of sniffers are in the community and unleaded fuel is available at the same time will we have the problems with them sniffing unleaded fuel. That core group of sniffers will sniff pretty much anything. Like I said, there have been instances where they have sprayed cockroach bombs directly into their mouths. They will sniff paint, they will sniff deodorant, and they will sniff fly sprays. The particular person I was talking about before was put into a mental health facility in Perth, and whilst he was in that facility he stole fly spray and toilet deodorant and sniffed it, and he was diagnosed as being brain damaged. So despite being brain damaged and sniffing in a secure mental health facility, he was discharged from there as a substance abuser, not a mental health issue, and sent straight back into exactly the same circumstances that he came from.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we sum up, your three things would be legislation, maybe, so that we can have programs similar to those in the Northern Territory.

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes.

**The CHAIRMAN:** What is the second?

**Sgt Risdale:** Legislation would be the most important thing with respect to the sniffing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Sgt Risdale:** Second is, obviously, the continuation of the alcohol restrictions. They have assisted us and it has been the biggest single change in the community in the last 18 months. Third is the effective service delivery of external and internal agencies, basically, that are supplying —

**The CHAIRMAN:** Accountability?

**Sgt Risdale:** Accountability, yes, for that service delivery, and it has to be results based so that we are not going down the same path all the time and to show that it is working. Also, programs should be implemented once it has been shown that they are working. From the police point of view, they would be the three things that would assist us.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Have you got a swimming pool here?

**Sgt Risdale:** Yes, we have, at the school.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** Has the school got one?

**Sgt Risdale:** The school has a swimming pool.

**Mr I.C. BLAYNEY:** But is it a no school, no pool sort of thing?

**Sgt Risdale:** I do not know that they actually run a program as such, but I do know that the school has a swimming pool and I have seen it used regularly. It has a hard cover on it that the kids cannot access without the teachers anyway, so it is not something the kids can use after hours.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I would like to thank you for your evidence before the committee today. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such errors must be made and the transcript returned within 28 days from the date of the letter attached to it. If the transcript is not returned within this period it will be deemed to be correct. New material cannot be added via these corrections and the sense of your evidence cannot be altered. Should you wish to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, please include a supplementary submission for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Thank you once again for coming today.

**Hearing concluded at 11.30 am**