

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
ESTIMATES AND FINANCIAL OPERATIONS**

**MISCELLANEOUS PROCEEDINGS**



**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN AT PERTH  
WEDNESDAY, 11 AUGUST 2021**

**SESSION ONE  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA POLICE FORCE**

**Members  
Hon Peter Collier (Chair)  
Hon Samantha Rowe (Deputy Chair)  
Hon Jackie Jarvis  
Hon Nick Goiran  
Hon Dr Brad Pettitt**

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**Hearing commenced at 10.15 am**

**Mr CHRISTOPHER DAWSON**

**Commissioner of Police, sworn and examined:**

**Mr GARY DREIBERGS**

**Deputy Commissioner, sworn and examined:**

**Mr COLIN BLANCH**

**Deputy Commissioner, sworn and examined:**

**Mr FRANK PASQUALE**

**Executive Director, sworn and examined:**

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much for coming, to start with. I really appreciate it. I appreciate just how busy you are. Before I go through the spiel with regard to the introductions et cetera, we are— dare I say it—the new estimates committee, and we had a fairly truncated system of appraisal last year with estimates and reports, so we are going through a number of the key agencies to start with, and this is pre—the budget estimates, of course. This is just for the benefit of the committee, so thank you very much. I appreciate just how busy you are.

In case you have not already met: Hon Jackie Jarvis, Hon Samantha Rowe, Hon Peter Collier, Hon Nick Goiran and Hon Dr Brad Pettitt.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to welcome you to the hearing. Today's hearing will be broadcast. Before we go live, I would like to remind everyone that if you have any private documents with you, please keep them flat on the desk to avoid the cameras. Please begin the broadcast.

As we are videoconferencing today I would like to introduce you—I have done that. We also have recording staff and the committee's advisers here with us today, off camera. The committee acknowledges and honours the traditional owners and ancestral lands upon which we meet today, the Wadjuk Noongar people, and pays its respect to their elders, both past and present.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I now require you to take either the oath or the affirmation.

[Witnesses took the oath or affirmation.]

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. You have signed the document entitled "Information for Witnesses". Did you read and understand that document?

**The WITNESSES:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** These proceedings are being recorded by *Hansard*. A transcript of your evidence will be provided to you after the hearing. Please note that this broadcast will also be available for viewing online after this hearing. Please advise the committee if you object to the broadcast being made available in this way. Good.

Commissioner, do you have any opening statement or any comments you would like—? No?

**Mr DAWSON:** No. Thank you, chair.

**The CHAIR:** Good. You will find us all very accommodating. I have just got a few questions, first of all, from my perspective.

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Thank you very much for the briefing I had with you recently, commissioner—it was very helpful—and also for the welcome I received when I was recently in Geraldton. Your officers up there are doing an outstanding job, and I know that they have got a difficult month coming up.

**Mr DAWSON:** They do. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Having said that, with regard to the crime figures that you provided to me and that are readily available publicly. The most recent—I was pleased to see, I would say in a very generic sense, that crime figures have pretty much been in decline, particularly in regard to robbery and car theft et cetera, and you can understand that given the situation with COVID. The issue, though, that concerns me is with regard to crimes against the person. The crimes against the person, which are readily available again on the website at the moment, show a completely contrary position. Just these most recent figures, can you tell me when they were put up on the website?

**Mr DAWSON:** The figures that we have most recently released, I think, chair, were at the end of the financial year, so it would be 30 June.

**The CHAIR:** So 30 June. They are, in fact, quite startling, I have got to say. Those figures show—are you familiar with the figures I am talking about?

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes, I am.

**The CHAIR:** That is sexual offences, assault, family assault, non-family threatening behaviour. On every account, there has been quite a sizeable increase in the crime rates. In fact, it is the highest rate on record, from my reckoning. Have you got any response to that, as to why that might be occurring?

[10.20 am]

**Mr DAWSON:** The tables I have in front of me—and as you have mentioned, chair, they are already available publicly on our website—do reflect, I think, two clear trends: one is the overall total of crime statistical recording. Reported offences are actually at a historic low as a global total, and that is something that is remarkable, particularly about property offences. In offences against the person, while the current table reflects a small decrease on a quarter-to-quarter basis, based on the previous 12 months, of only 1.2 per cent, on a five-year average, the offences against the person are pitching and trending at around about 12.3 per cent, compared with the five-year average. We generally, as a broader trend, take more stock of the five-year trend, noting that since the emergency situation was declared in March of last year, there has been a most remarkable change in the reported crime. That change is largely attributed to—and we are doing further analysis on this—a large decrease in methylamphetamine that has been able to be trafficked into Western Australia. That is most pronounced when you look at the selected offences against property, and that has, on a five-year average, decreased by some 30 per cent. When you drill further into that, it has consistently been for the last 18 months about a 40 per cent drop in burglaries. The sorts of offending patterns by people who are addicted to substances such as methylamphetamine often—and we know this through our wastewater testing, through our detainee urine analysis at the Perth watch house over a 20-year period—are directly related to addicts who try to source income by stealing from people, robberies and, in particular, home burglaries and commercial burglaries.

What is more difficult for us to prevent is crimes that occur, particularly violence, inside a home. It is the case that we work very closely, clearly, with communities right across Western Australia, in support with the Department of Communities, the Department of Justice and a whole lot of not-for-profit agencies. We work very closely with, for example, women's refuge centres and others in a whole range of efforts to try to lessen the harm, particularly against women. It is also disproportionate against Aboriginal women, where they are subject to a proportionately higher

level of violence, particularly in homes or in and around the community. That is probably the area that I have the most concern about, but it is also one of the most problematic for police to prevent because we, obviously, cannot be inside everyone's home when that violence is occurring.

We often are there after the event, so the preventive efforts that we are trying to do across government are ongoing work. I have got to say that the current government has now—as members would be aware—a dedicated portfolio; Minister McGurk has a specific role there. I briefed her with my colleagues here on a number of occasions. In fact, we are briefing her and the Minister for Police, I think, within the next week on further strategies as to how we do that.

How are we trying to do that? Principally, by ensuring that each of the state government representatives collaborate with each other because often the common denominators in victims of family crime are also clients of other government agencies, whether it be in child protection, housing, some other welfare services or seeking refuge. We have co-located. Certainly, my colleague to the right, Deputy Commissioner Blanch, could expand on some of those strategies that we are doing because police, I openly say, cannot do this by ourselves. It has got to be a whole-of-community effort. From a state government perspective, we have got very strengthening arrangements for data-sharing, and it is not just data but actually having co-located offices.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. The biggest increase of all is assaults within the family, which has gone, extraordinarily, from 18 923 to 23 792. Without a doubt, I would imagine COVID, lockdowns and one thing or another have not assisted. I will talk about response times in a moment, but just with regard to that, I appreciate the increase in officers. I have been to a number of graduations, which I thoroughly enjoy. I had a couple of cancelled just recently for one reason for another. I think we have got one coming up next week. With the increasing numbers of officers, how many officers have we got at the moment in the force and how does that compare with the last five years?

**Mr DAWSON:** In terms of the authorised strength, we have 6 801 sworn officers at authorised strength, and they are supported by our cohort of public servants. Then we have police auxiliary officers as well as an adjunct to the sworn cohort.

**The CHAIR:** How does that compare to, say, five years ago?

**Mr DAWSON:** I would have to get better information than what I have got here, but we have had a large increase. Gary Dreibergs, the deputy commissioner, may expand on this. Obviously, with the most recent budget announcements by the last government, and continuing through to the present one, a total of 950 additional sworn officers over a four-year period, which equates to about 200 officers per year for the next four years that will be in addition. There was a previous program, which we called the 500 program, but Deputy Commissioner Dreibergs may give a better overview of the previous five years.

**The CHAIR:** We can take that on notice, if you like. That will be question A1. Just for the last five years, in terms of the numbers of officers in each of the areas —  
[*Supplementary Information No A1.*]

**Mr DAWSON:** That are in addition or the authorised strength, and those have increased —

**The CHAIR:** The strength at a point in time. Whatever is the easiest or most convenient for you. I do not want you to be spending an inordinate amount of time on it. I would imagine it is fairly easy to access.

**Mr DAWSON:** Mr Pasquale might have it right here, actually.

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**Mr PASQUALE:** I do have some data. Just bear with me. If I go back five years to 2015–16, the police officer authorised strength was 6 103. I guess, at the end of 2020–21, it is 6 741, but at the end of the July, it is 6 801.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you for that. You have about 450 officers in Operation Tide at this stage.

**Mr DREIBERGS:** We have 406 police officers in there and we have a number of public sector employees bringing the total number up to about 445.

**The CHAIR:** That would be taken off the total of 6 800 then. That would not be their own normal operational duties.

**Mr DREIBERGS:** There are a number of there that have been increased as part of the additional program, and there are officers who have been seconded in there from normal districts and divisions, correct.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. It is a compelling issue and I agree with you, commissioner, it has to be an all of government approach with regard to particularly domestic violence. It cannot be “Nigel no friends” in that space.

Just with regard to response times for the police, I would imagine that you would have that fairly accessible. If I could just get some response times—you may need to take this on notice— on the response grade of service and also the average response times for priority 1, 2, 3 and 4 calls for community assistance for the greater Perth metropolitan area and for the eight metropolitan policing districts for, say, the last five years.

**Mr DAWSON:** They are available, chair. When you describe community assistance, are you saying for all jobs that are classified priorities 1, 2, 3 and 4?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr DAWSON:** We can provide those. What I would advise though is that the grades of service and the KPIs that are published are only particularised to the Perth metropolitan area because of our geographical challenges. We have 2.6 million square kilometres to police and because of the time it takes and, indeed, the weather—it is the largest land jurisdiction by volume in the world. If an officer is tasked from Halls Creek to go to Balgo, for instance, if the road is flooded, it may take hours and hours, and if the airport is flooded, we simply cannot get there. I am not making excuses; that is the reality of the policing that we do. Similarly, with a lot of remote areas we simply have never measured KPIs and response times outside of Perth metropolitan region.

[10.30 am]

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that, commissioner—whatever you can provide. I appreciate that. Please, I do not want to take officers away for hours on this.

**Mr DAWSON:** They are readily available.

[*Supplementary Information No A2.*]

**The CHAIR:** Yes, that is right. I will move on to other members. I have a lot on the meth action plan actually, but we might have to wait on that one. One area that is of interest to me, and I am sure it is of interest to you, commissioner, is mental health, not just within the community, but within your own officers and with all other first responders. I understand that there are four mental health co-response teams that that are under a bit of pressure at the moment. I understand that a number of their officers have been taken away from the teams. Is that correct?

**Mr DAWSON:** I will invite Deputy Commissioner Blanch, who has that under his area.

**Mr BLANCH:** Initially some of the officers from particular districts were relocated into Operation Tide, the COVID response. However, the clinicians were then given other officers from other districts to partner up with them. The number of clinicians still responding on jobs remain the same, it was just that the particular officers that were originally put in the mental health co-response team went into Operation Tide during one of their high-volume periods, but they are in the process of returning back to them. We are talking about the police officers but not the reduction in clinician attendance of the co-response.

**The CHAIR:** Can we get some figures on the numbers in those units for the last two years?

**Mr BLANCH:** Sure.

[*Supplementary Information No A3.*]

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. With that in mind, commissioner, this is an issue that I have been following for the last couple of months on Soldiers and Sirens, which I am sure you are familiar with. It is a private organisation which has been funded by the federal government and unfortunately has lost its funding. I have to be honest, I have spoken with a number of former police officers and current police officers, which find it very beneficial. That is now basically redundant because of a lack of funding. Do you see a place for Soldiers and Sirens in supporting officers who have PTSD or depression et cetera?

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes, I do, but they are amongst a whole cohort of providers; they are not the exclusive provider. They do have a good reputation, but our attention has been galvanised with the death of two officers in the last month. In fact, we have a police funeral for one officer on Friday. I conducted a suicide prevention forum on Monday in which we had doctors and clinicians from UWA, Hollywood Private, the Mental Health Commission and a whole suite of other agencies—advocacy groups including the CPSU, the Western Australian Police Union of workers, Police Legacy. Together it was about 250 people. We workshopped this all day and I opened that forum with Minister Papalia. As I said, this is not ticking a box and simply saying that we will hold a forum because we have lost two officers recently. This is an ongoing piece of work because law enforcement and first responders, in fact, are, on a global scale, presented as a higher risk vocation that, indeed, even goes above the military. I have read the data and the reports, which actually exceed military attrition in terms of officers suffering PTSD and self-harm. With that, it is a very important matter which we are progressing through. I have increased the resources in our health, welfare and safety branch. They have 10 clinical psychologists, which is a 30 per cent increase from what they had six months ago. We have also increased the chaplaincy from two to four full-time plus 11 networked volunteer chaplains in the regions particularly. They are an important adjunct. We have counsellors and a large peer-support program in which we train officers. Officers, at times—I will speak from experience with some of my colleagues—have sadly self-harmed. Some people are simply reluctant to see a clinician or someone. There may be a stigma attached, which is not confined just to policing. They also have some concerns, and this was certainly explored and discussed quite openly at Monday's forum, where they may feel their career is going to be jeopardised or they may lose entitlements. There are elements of shame and a whole lot of other factors there. We are doing it in a very diverse and multilayered approach. There is also the employee assistance program, which involves external providers that people can go to—clinicians, psychiatrists and psychologists—and they do not have to disclose. It is not disclosed to me unless it is literally a life or death situation where a person needs medical intervention. Officers do have that opportunity to go there. Your opening remarks about a private provider, they are also sponsored and open to them as well. I could expand further.

**The CHAIR:** I appreciate that, I really do, commissioner. I understand it is very, very complex and it is very sensitive. Can I just say, education is very similar. We live in a very complex society and police

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officers in contemporary society deal with an enormous amount of trauma, as you are well aware. You know much better than me, but the officers I have spoken to just speak volumes to this program. I think it is just a shame that, number one, the feds bailed. I have been working on trying to get my guys to come onboard with that, but at the same time, a program which is operated by former serving uniformed personnel, either police or first responders or veterans, and has enormous support from serving officers has had to close its doors for the sake of, quite frankly, pocket money.

I have spoken on a number of occasions with, and had communication with, the wife of one of your officers that took his life a month ago. She speaks in glowing terms of Soldiers and Sirens.

**Mr DAWSON:** She has spoken to me personally about that as well.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, and I would really, really like to think that somewhere logic can prevail and we can allow this wonderful program to continue. So, I will continue to advocate on behalf of Soldiers and Sirens. I just ask you, commissioner, next time you are in communication with the police minister—and I will continue to do so—if you can please advocate on behalf of that program. Having said that, thank you for those comments.

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Just following up on the numbers for sworn officers since 2015, we have got a 700 increase since 2015. I am just wondering has the number of public sector employees, admin support, increased during that time. I am just interested in the percentage of those officers from 2015 who are now on frontline duties. Has there been a shift to sort of move admin off police officers?

**Mr PASQUALE:** Yes, I believe there has. I do not have those details with me in terms of that detailed level, and I could not tell you to what extent or what percentage. In my time with the agency, which has been three years, there has been a small shift, but I could not tell you to what extent.

**The CHAIR:** Can we get that information? Can you provide that?

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** I would just be interested.

[*Supplementary Information No A4.*]

**Hon JACKIE JARVIS:** Just in that same period, 2015, just the increase in the number of public sector employees and whether there has been—I know you have got a KPI about the percentage of police officers available for frontline policing duties, I am just interested to know if there has been an increase in the public sector.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** Just following on from the chair's comments around family and domestic violence and, obviously, it is a significant issue here in WA, have you had to implement training around how police officers respond to family and domestic violence; and, if so, what does that training look like?

**Mr DAWSON:** I am happy to answer and ask my deputies to expand. The situation in WA—I might just open my response by saying—is paralleled with all the other Australian jurisdictions. They have seen a commensurate increase themselves in family and domestic violence and, indeed, the same case in North America and the United Kingdom.

[10.40 am]

We commissioned the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency to do a case study on this particular matter and that did reflect both a global and an Australasian increase in family and domestic violence. Without me diving too deep into the causality of that, certainly many communities and cities have in fact required mandatory lockdowns because of, clearly, the pandemic. Whether and how much of that is a factor when you are requiring people to go home, or the breadwinners could not go to work, and so people are, because of that, closer together; I think

the fact is that some homes are not safe and if people are in the home longer, then of course ipso facto there is a greater propensity for more time and, sadly, some more harm.

In terms of training, we have put a number of our staff through family violence training, certainly since 2019 and 2020. That has included those not only at constable level at the police academy, but right up through to senior sergeant level as well, and those are reflected in recording practice as well. The change in both policy and legislation over the years has in fact trended the reported crime up. There is quite a body of knowledge that has emerged as to whether in fact the incidence of family violence has materially increased as much as police recording. I can openly say that as a young constable, as my colleagues would attest to, attending numerous domestics, as they were called, they were not recorded as crime. They were not treated as a crime, as they now are and should be.

It has also been the practice that we are continuing to work hard at further reform. I might expand on that in terms of my discussions with the Attorney General and police ministers, both the former and the current, in terms of some further opportunities to get the best possible evidence before the court. I refer to the body-worn cameras, which every officer now has. It is the case that in many instances where police attend the scene of a family violence matter, the victim is visibly injured, there is a whole lot of conflict there and then, and the court does not necessarily see the best evidence because the first-person evidence, which can be adduced through real-time camera recording, has not yet been through a process where that can be adduced as first-person evidence. What happens is that police then reduce that down to a written statement in the conventional way, then, when it is presented to court, and sometimes as early as the next day when things somewhat abate or the victim may feel indeed threatened or concerned that—it is often “she”; it is not exclusively—but if the victim of the crime feels that, look, it is going to cause me more problems, and for my children and access to home, financial support et cetera, that they often will seek to withdraw the charge. That is still a very common thing. What we are attempting to do is capture the best possible evidence and put that in front of the court so that the court can then receive that as its primary first evidence. That is another reform, in addition to the training.

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** I think you may have touched on it when the chair was asking questions in relation to this, but we know that Indigenous women are way more over-represented in this space as victims of family and domestic violence. In terms of how you respond to mainly in the regions, how does that change to what you might do in the metros?

**Mr DAWSON:** I might invite Deputy Commissioner Blanch to —

**Hon SAMANTHA ROWE:** And is there a difference?

**Mr BLANCH:** That is a very good question; thank you. The family and domestic violence response by police is probably the greatest oversight by multiple areas within WA police to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the way we respond to family and domestic violence. I will give you a couple of examples. We have a family and domestic violence response team. As the commissioner said, all officers have training to attend and respond to family and domestic violence; however, with the introduction of body-worn cameras, they are actually looked at. So, in some districts there is 100 per cent assessment of each and every attendance of family and domestic violence by a triage team. They assess how we responded. Sometimes young officers cannot pick up on nuances of the way victims are responding at the time of police attendance, so they look at more complicated cases and refer them to the family and domestic violence response team, which deals with recidivist family and domestic violence offenders and more complicated cases. The response team is a joint group of both Department of Communities and police. They can make sure that there is good victim care and support, guidance through the justice system, but also perpetrator accountability. As the commissioner described, there is a franchised approach at responding to domestic violence.

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Whether you are in Karratha, Kununurra, down south, or in metro, the police response should be identical; you should not be able to distinguish a response that is different. The purpose of the triage team is to weed out where that response has not been satisfactory and that will be followed up by those family and domestic violence response teams to ensure that that victim is well cared for.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** My first question is also in the mental health space, but looking at it more in terms of community mental health. Certainly, experience in my former role as the Mayor of Fremantle was that a lot of police resources are sucked up by people with mental health issues who are often street present and that obviously not being the most effective use of skills. I guess what I am trying to get your reflections on would be: is any work being done on actually how? What are the impacts of that? Secondly, is any work being done on a coordinated plan that can see that better resolved?

**Mr DAWSON:** Thank you, Mr Pettitt. The approach is complex in both the wideranging elements that impact on persons suffering from mental illness and indeed the impact that has on the broader community as well. Homelessness clearly is a matter that everyone is well aware of. There is a very high correlation between homeless people and those that actually suffer from mental illness—not exclusively, but there is a high correlation. The more that we can accommodate people as a community and have a safe place for them to sleep is one way, but that is a very visible thing. When the police get called to disturbances, it may not be necessarily criminal offending but a social disturbance where the person is very unwell and they cause some concern amongst the community. Sometimes it is about the individual's welfare themselves and sometimes it is to the amenity of the area. We are working very closely, as you would be aware from your time in Fremantle, with the local government authorities, with the Mental Health Commission, with a whole range of different providers, such as Ruah and other areas, to try to get people good accommodation.

In terms of the broader issues of mental health, the de-institutionalisation of what was once the case where police would apprehend someone under the powers under the Mental Health Act or be referred by a GP or some other clinician, has in fact—again, this is a global trend in First World countries where police are often the first responders to a person at risk, as we classify them under our calls and our computerised despatch system. Persons at risk can range from a person who is acutely unwell and psychotic, it may be drug induced or substance abuse or it might be a long-term psychosis. Then, we also have an increased number of people suffering from dementia who, again, we get called to in large numbers. Before the COVID pandemic, persons at risk were presenting as the highest proportionate increase of police attendance at any job. It far exceeds other crimes that we are required to attend, such as burglaries—when I say “other crimes”, I am not saying mental health is a crime—in terms of the types of jobs that we go to.

We have done a recent analysis. I might invite Gary. Are you across Brett Baddock's work that you could expand on?

**Mr BLANCH:** I could talk about that.

**Mr DAWSON:** Okay.

The analysis that we have most recently done, we have got an ongoing project, is to try to work again across with other government and non-government agencies, because a lot of them are the same clients; the same people. There is a large cohort of children also who abscond out of care, whether it be government and/or private, and then there are people who, in police jargon, we call hospital absconders. It is a very broad cross-section of the community, but it is an increasing trend. I might say, before I ask Deputy Commissioner Blanch to add to it.

[10.50 am]

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There has also been a community expectation, which may not necessarily be, I guess, fairly apportioned to police to have to respond, with the prevalence of communication through smart devices and social media. If someone does not respond to a Facebook post, we will get a call that says, "Aunty has not answered her post. I'm worried about her health. Would you please go and check?" That is phenomena that we have not encountered previously prior to the widespread use of that, so the expectation has been: well, rather than family going around or neighbours going to do it, ring the police as a first responder and say, "Can you please check to make sure they are okay." These welfare checks are, in many cases, not, in fact, a matter that, when you actually break it all down, necessarily require a police response. But we have got to do it on a risk-based approach, and if we do not accept the call and someone has fallen over and they are either injured, dying or whatever—that does happen—that is a real difficulty for us in prioritising and triaging. So the addition of the mental health co-response gives us clinical information, the medication they are on, all those sorts of things, which better arm and equip our officers. I know Mr Blanch has some further work there that he could expand on.

**Mr BLANCH:** To echo the commissioner's comments, it is our dominant response, particularly in the evenings and early mornings when people are very much in distress. Overnight, we will see in the morning, it can dominate an entire nightshift of mental health response. What the mental health co-response has taught us—because police when they attend without any mental health experience as clinicians or practitioners is that they will take a very low-risk tolerance approach and take them to hospital, because they do not want to take the risk of leaving that person there. That obviously adds to the burden of hospital attendances, but it also ties up police at the hospital for some time. The mental health co-response has alleviated that. Every time they attend, they make an assessment. If there really does need to be a hospital presentation, then, of course, we are going with the clinician. However, in most cases, they can treat them at the scene, in their house, which is a far better environment for that mentally ill person.

The challenge with mental health co-response is obviously the volume versus the number of clinicians or practitioners that we have available to us. That is why we are big supporters of using technology and having virtual guidance and having people in the state operations command centre. We are working closely with the Mental Health Commission and the Department of Health to try to have that first advice to attending officers: "You know, consider this; I might be able to talk to that person." We can use virtual communication methods. I think that that is how we need to industrialise the volumed response to mental health, because we cannot do it by humans otherwise we would need as many practitioners as we would police to respond to the amount that we are currently doing.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** Can I follow on from that. I do not know whether you will be able to share this or not, what is the size of that mental health co-response team? Is that something you are able to share?

**The CHAIR:** Is that the one they asked for?

**Mr BLANCH:** The four teams; yes.

**The CHAIR:** I have already asked —

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** Four teams with how many people?

**The CHAIR:** We are getting that information.

**Hon Dr BRAD PETTITT:** That is information we are getting—okay. Thank you. I think that is really encouraging to see. It is fascinating to hear that is now one of your biggest workloads.

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**Mr DAWSON:** With consent, Dr Pettitt, there are other initiatives that our officers have come up with. In fact, probably to giving you a scoop, we are about to launch a safe and found initiative, which will be on the MedicAlert bracelets that people are very familiar with. We have, in fact, joined up the databases and worked with residential aged-care facilities and other providers, where someone suffering maybe early onset or age dementia often go wandering. Police are often called to do an extensive resourcing of land and air search. They happen, I would now estimate, one or two, at least, searches per day happening every day. They are very, very time and resource demanding. When you apply a lens over that and say, “How can we actually get ahead of this?” with so many happening per day—we are sadly looking for a prospector who is 83 years of age. He is a very unwell man and we have put in a lot of resources to try to find him, and he has got a lot of medical conditions. But, equally so, people who wander away from a residential aged-care facility, this initiative gives police ready access to not only identities, but also often—we take medical advice on this as well, and experience—they may return to their former home that they were in as a child, or there may be patterns of their movement that we can then short-circuit a broad grid search and go, “Look, Mr Dawson has wandered away. He is probably going to head back to his childhood home in Highgate.” We can then task vehicles to go there to try to actually interrupt and, hopefully, recover them well. There are good things that are happening that we are trying to improve, but it is a really challenging demand for us.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Commissioner, how frequently are you meeting with the Minister for Police?

**Mr DAWSON:** I see him, probably, once or twice a week. In terms of formal meetings, they are diarised generally every fortnight; but I would see him, you know, ordinarily two or three times a week, probably.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Would that have been the same with the previous minister?

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes. I was meeting with her about the same.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Is that frequency typical at any time? I appreciate that since March last year with the pandemic your workload in particular has sky-rocketed, but that type of frequency in terms of the minister that you are meeting with; that is pretty typical?

**Mr DAWSON:** That has been maintained; in fact, I did not add on the two or three times a week, because minister Papalia is one of the cabinet members who attends the State Disaster Council as well. I have attended about 50 of those in the last 18 months.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** What about the Premier? I guess, one of the changes that the pandemic has brought is, I imagine, you would have had to meet with the Premier far more frequently than you would have otherwise had. What would be the regularity of your meetings with him?

**Mr DAWSON:** Ordinarily, I would say a minimum of three times a week. At times, it has been three times a day if we have had a number of critical incidents. We had a small outbreak out of the current New South Wales cluster, localised in Mindarie, as you would be aware. I would have met with him perhaps three or four times a day at times—if not virtually, certainly physically.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** What about the Chief Health Officer?

**Mr DAWSON:** Equally so, the Chief Health Officer and I, sadly, see each other more than we do our spouses, probably. Look, he is a good fellow. I would meet with the Chief Health Officer a minimum of three times a week, and often multiple times; certainly phone calls in addition to those physical meetings.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** On 25 November last year it was announced that contact registers were going to be made mandatory. Were you involved in that decision?

**Mr DAWSON:** It was discussed at meetings of what we call the Premier's emergency management team; so, yes, I was involved in discussions, but it was one that primarily was being driven by the Department of Health. But I was certainly party and privy to discussions about that.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** That announcement was accompanied with an assurance from the Premier that the SafeWA app data would be used for only contact tracing purposes; yet, of course, we now know that Western Australian police were acting contrary to that. In fact, as I understand it, within nine days of the direction that you issued—so the direction that you issued on 5 December 2020—WA police were already seeking access on 14 December. When did you first become aware of this situation?

**Mr DAWSON:** With respect, I would contest the notion that we acted contrary. We have never acted contrary to the law that the Parliament has passed. The Parliament passed the law in terms of police lawfully seeking access to information, which we do every day, multiple times. Any access was always predicated on the Criminal Investigation Act legislation that you are referring to when we did make application.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** You have made that position clear in your public comments in recent times, but when I say "acting contrary", contrary to the assurance given by the Premier of Western Australia that this data would not be accessed, a decision that you were part of—indeed, you issued the direction on 5 December—I am keen to know when you first knew that WA police were seeking access to this.

**Mr DAWSON:** When I was first made aware of whether police were actually lawfully seeking access was on or around late February, when I became aware that on several instances, for very serious crimes, my investigators had lawfully gone and made application. It is not that police can direct to access information; we have to make application to a justice of a peace. I was made aware at the end of February that that had occurred for a very high-profile homicide of a man at Kwinana Motorplex. I was also made aware that it also occurred for a grievous bodily harm of a stabbing in Victoria Park. Once I became aware of that, we actually issued a broadcast on 26 February. It was on or around 26 February that I became first aware that officers had sought orders to produce the records.

[11.00 am]

I was made aware at the end of February that that had occurred for a very high profile homicide of a man at Kwinana motor complex and I was also made aware that it also occurred for a grievous bodily harm for stabbing in Victoria Park. Once I became aware of that, we actually issued a broadcast on 26 February, so it was on or around 26 February that I became first aware that officers had sought orders to produce the records.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Due to the work of this committee, we know that the Chief Health Officer alerted the acting director general of Health about this breach of trust as early as 8 January this year. You have indicated that you meet with the Chief Health Officer very frequently—three times a week. When did the Chief Health Officer first raise this issue with you?

**Mr DAWSON:** I do not recall the Chief Health Officer raising it first with me. The director general of Health, Dr Russell-Weisz, raised it with me on or around 12 March; in fact, he rang me on 11 March.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Right, so you first found out about it in terms of somebody within WA police on or around 26 February, but no-one in Health, be it the Chief Health Officer, the director general or anyone else in Health, raised it with you until the middle of March?

**Mr DAWSON:** The first I recall having a discussion is that I recorded a phone call at 2.15 pm on 11 March when the director general telephoned me. He then followed it up with a letter the

following day, and I consequently caused some records to be examined as to how many times had police sought that. But, again, on my recollection, it was not a matter that I was privy to prior to the matter being raised with me in late February.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** This committee also has information that an email was sent by the acting director general of Health to the director general of Health on 22 February saying that he has repeatedly called this out. It is difficult to comprehend, with so many meetings happening—your meeting with the Chief Health Officer three times a week, meeting with the Premier three times a week, there are 50 of these special meetings that have been occurring. You have got somebody so senior in Health, the acting director general of Health, who says that he is repeatedly calling this out, yet it seems that the Premier seems nothing about it, the Minister for Health knows nothing about and the Commissioner of Police knows nothing about that. I mean, at the very least, it strikes me that there are some serious dysfunctional communication lines that have occurred in the month of January, February and possibly as far as March.

**Mr DAWSON:** With respect, I am happy to answer a question, but I have heard a statement from you about an acting director general sending an email to someone in Health. I do not receive his emails; I do not have access to their email. So I am happy to answer your question, I am being respectful, but I think it is a far stretch for me to be able to know what the internal Health communications are about when they have not shared it with me.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** All right, are you satisfied with the communications within your agency in light of the fact that you were a part of the decision that included the Premier of Western Australia providing an assurance that COVID app data would not be provided and accessed for any reason other than for contact tracing purposes. You were there. You decided with the Premier that that assurance would be provided. Subsequently, your agency did the opposite, and I am simply asking whether you are satisfied with the communication protocols. I accept, commissioner, that you did not know about this until 26 February. I think that that demonstrates a communication breakdown in WA police.

**Mr DAWSON:** I disagree, with respect. The mandatory contact registers were lawfully accessed, as I have already made my statement. Indeed, I have said this in my public responses, people do not read, for instance, fine print in insurance policies, but anyone, me included, who has registered for the SafeWA app has to acknowledge the terms and conditions. The terms and conditions that everyone has had to comply with expressly state that WA Health must by law disclose your information to a court, tribunal or other government body. In no instance am I aware that police have done anything unlawful, and I have the full confidence in a detective or a police officer who is investigating homicide or a grievous bodily harm. At the time when this matter was first raised there had been over 240 million transactions, but on those two very serious crimes, I fully support a police officer accessing any information, irrespective of the political issues, to do the best they can to bring a person to justice. In one case—it is now alleged, because we have arrested someone subsequently—at the time when the officers made application, we had a gunman at large; we did not know who that person was. We also had a person who had stabbed a person multiple times in Victoria Park. I have an expectation as Commissioner of Police that my officers will do everything lawfully, and the lawfulness of it is clear. That was made very clear. I followed the legislation when it was introduced to Parliament. The Attorney General and others have scrutinised this, and they have accepted it was lawful. It may not, in view of some, be something that they felt acceptable, but I fully back officers to do as much as they can to bring violent, dangerous murderers to justice.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Commissioner, my question is not about the lawfulness. That is not in dispute. I think we are all in violent agreement that it was lawful what WA police did. Whether it was the

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right thing to do is a matter for debate. My question is about the communication within WA police. Are you satisfied with communication, given that the first you were told of this was 26 February?

**Mr DAWSON:** I have obviously spoken to my officers that have direct dialogue between police and Health. They do it on a functional, operational basis, on a daily basis. When it was brought to my attention by one of my senior staff who said police have had these discussions and were serving notices on Health, the matter had been raised, and said, "Look, this is something which Health are concerned about." Then, when I received the phone call from the director general, we made steps to ensure that there was a very clear oversight of the internal police procedures.

One of the matters that subsequently I became aware of, and this is a matter of public interest—I am certain no-one would want someone in quarantine being given methylamphetamine. That is in fact exactly what happened in a hotel quarantine. I am certain that members of Parliament would be equally concerned as I am if the hotel quarantine system was penetrated by a drug trafficker, and I can tell you it was. A package of methylamphetamine was delivered to a room. My officers wanted to investigate that. Now this is when it became a public debate. They had no way of identifying the person, but they wanted to access the QR codes to see who this person was that came in. I use it rarely, but I used my discretion as commissioner to say, "Look, this matter is now going to be progressing to legislative reform. There's a big debate over this." The fact is that the drugs did not reach the individual. In fact, they delivered it to the wrong room and the person in that room was a former police officer who was in quarantine who recognised it as methylamphetamine. I exercised discretion to say, "Don't proceed on the order to produce any further, because on discussions with the government, it was now going to be subject of legislative reform." But on the face of it, I am certain that people would not want drugs to be imported into a quarantine system, but that is in fact what happened. It would have been a very lawful and proper access to identify who in fact scanned their phone in, and we could have actually apprehended, but we did not.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** There were seven warrants that were issued. What was the rank of the most senior Western Australian police officer who authorised the application of those warrants?

**Mr DAWSON:** They were not warrants; they were orders to produce under the Criminal Investigation Act.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** But the orders to produce were applied for. What was the rank of the Western Australian police officer?

**Mr DAWSON:** They ranged from constables through to non-commissioned officers. Every officer acting under the law can exercise their own application. They were not orders; they were applications before a justice of the peace, who must be satisfied. The legislation was passed by Parliament and they exercised that.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** So the applications were made, including by ranks of constable.

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Under normal WA police procedures, does the constable need to seek any authorisation from a more senior officer before applying for one of those orders?

**Mr DAWSON:** No, they do not, but we put in place procedures because of this particular matter, when it came to light. In two instances, although they were not given access, there were two very junior constables that, in fact, made application, but those were not processed.

[11.10 am]

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** One final question, Mr Chairman. Commissioner, you have made quite a point this morning about how lawful your officers were acting, and you defend the actions that they were taking, notwithstanding the assurances that were given by the Premier. I accept that is indeed your response this morning. What happened in the Chen case? Just in the last fortnight, we have had the Supreme Court issue an order saying that your officers issued invalid warrants.

**Mr DAWSON:** That matter is an investigation that is still on foot. It is a serious matter which is subject of the court having records in custody. I will ask Deputy Commissioner Blanch, who I know is aware of this matter, having been briefed on it, but they are serious matters that are under investigation. The court has made a particular point in terms of the nature of the warrant, but Mr Blanch could certainly give assistance.

**Mr BLANCH:** Thank you. To add some more detail, the warrants were at the conclusion of quite a lengthy investigation that did commence in 2019 that was for money laundering at the time. It was, in early 2020, joined with other information to have a more complex investigation by the financial crimes division into the offences of money laundering already; fraud; inducing a person to act as a prostitute; procuring a person to be a prostitute; procuring a person to have unlawful carnal knowledge by threat, fraud or administering a drug; and to arrange a marriage to obtain permanent residence. Now, when the warrant was drafted by the police, there was an administrative error made by the police officer who drafted it. He included that last offence, the arrange a marriage to obtain permanent residence, on the face of the state-issued warrant by the JP. That is a commonwealth offence, which cannot be on there, so the reason for it being ruled invalid was that it had a commonwealth offence on the face, so we did not challenge that. There is a legal professional privilege challenge afoot by Ms Chen and the police which are going to be litigated later on this month. Depending on the court's outcome of the LPP matter, we will have to reissue the warrants in the correct format, so the substance of the warrants, the content of the affidavit, by the JP at the time, was satisfied there was enough for a warrant; it was just the administrative error on the face of it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Something just occurred to me. Just with regard to Crime Stoppers, commissioner, where you ring up and the police then obviously have mobile numbers, has that ever, to your knowledge, been used for anything other than extracting information—the use of that number? I mean, can people have confidence when they ring Crime Stoppers —

**Mr DAWSON:** I see what you mean.

**The CHAIR** — that it is anonymous?

**Mr DAWSON:** The 1800 number?

**The CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr DAWSON:** No, that is a number that is both marketed and operated in a confidential manner.

**The CHAIR:** So it has never been accessed?

**Mr DAWSON:** I am personally unaware of any direct access. Unless one of my colleagues —

**Mr BLANCH:** I can answer. I have regular conversations with Vince Hughes, the CEO of Crime Stoppers, about this. That is something we would prefer not to have access to because we actually want the community —

**The CHAIR:** To feel safe. That is my point.

**Mr BLANCH:** — to not have that burden. Absolutely. That is a very, very clear rule of Crime Stoppers, that we cannot penetrate that wall.

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**The CHAIR:** Thank you. As a matter of interest—I think you will probably need to take this one on notice—with regard to the G2G passes, are you able to provide that, say from the beginning of the year on a state-by-state basis, for coming into Western Australia? Have you got that information?

**Mr DAWSON:** We could provide a global picture of how many G2G passes are processed from a state-by-state basis. The challenge with this, and not to obfuscate it, is that since November last year, we have processed some 930 000 people across land, sea and air, and many of those, without overcomplicating it, are multiple entries—for instance, air crew. A pilot and air crew may have entered 46 times in a month, and that will skew the number of entries and applications, and they also have multiple stops as they go back and forth. So, while we could give you a global picture of how many have come from each jurisdiction, it will not be with any precision.

**The CHAIR:** No. I understand, because it will be people who have come in, you are quite correct, several times. Anyway, even if you could just provide that on a state by state —

**Mr DREIBERGS:** I can provide you a very, very high level number, which is 1.475 million applications of G2G PASS have been processed over that period of time. Having said that, again, as the commissioner pointed out, there has only been 900 000-plus travellers arrive. What happens as well with that application and why that number can be very much distorted is, for instance, if we go from a jurisdiction where they have been at very low status and they go to a medium status and there may be 20 000 applications in the system at that point in time for that state, all those applications are cancelled because all those people have to reapply under the medium criteria or the low criteria. So, all those 20 000 are considered rejected applicants and every single one of those people has to reapply. We have that quite regularly. Similarly, how the system works is if I apply to arrive in Western Australia next week and my application is rejected, then I have to resubmit the exact same application, so that is considered a second application. If it is continually rejected until I provide all the suitable information required, it could be six, seven, eight times rejected. So, one person arriving on one occasion could have created eight applications for our PASS process. The system was never developed in a context that collects finite data either. It is really just a process that allows us to have very good optics about people wishing to apply. It does not have a really well defined—because of these nuances and complexities—ability to collect data that people wish to see.

**The CHAIR:** So, in essence, what you are telling me is that if you were to provide that information, it would not mean very much?

**Mr DREIBERGS:** It would not mean very much to anyone, no.

**The CHAIR:** That is fine. Okay, just a quick one to finish on then, unless anyone else has one.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Yes, I have one.

**The CHAIR:** With regard to the AFL, commissioner, have you or has anyone in WA police had any discussions with the AFL about the prospect of holding the grand final in Perth, where it should be?

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes, we have. Deputy Commissioner Dreibergs chairs an industry committee dealing with sporting codes, so he is better placed than I am, but, yes, I can confirm there have been discussions.

**Mr DREIBERGS:** As well as that, because you would understand we have ongoing AFL matters and other sports and events matters, we have a specific industry events team within Operation Tide who deal with those matters. Then I personally am involved in not only AFL, but all various industry groups that wish to come that want to bring a significant benefit to the state. So, I am involved with the AFL but in the context of talking very specifically about if you were to apply, these are the types of directions that would apply to your situation or these may be the types of directions that need to

be created for your situation, and also this is the Chief Health Officer advice around your circumstances under which you would travel to Western Australia.

**The CHAIR:** And there would be no compromises on the standards that are already established to come into Western Australia, say, for players or coaches?

**Mr DREIBERGS:** Everything that is approved for anyone arriving into Western Australia would require Chief Health Officer approval.

**The CHAIR:** What about the dignitaries et cetera who come over from the AFL? Do they have the same standards?

**Mr DREIBERGS:** It would all require Chief Health Officer approval and it would all require decisions around what is expected.

**The CHAIR:** So what do you think the chances are?

**Mr DREIBERGS:** I could not answer that, sorry. Looking at other jurisdictions and their sets of circumstances around running an event, I think that WA is well placed because we do currently run AFL games here with crowds, whereas very few jurisdictions do that.

**The CHAIR:** Just to confirm that the negotiations, or dare I say it, the conversations, with the AFL are continuing at this stage?

**Mr DREIBERGS:** Correct.

**The CHAIR:** Good luck.

**Mr DREIBERGS:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Last one.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Just to follow up on some things here. Commissioner, the committee has been told by the Chief Health Officer that his diary indicates that he first discussed this matter with WA police staff—unspecified staff—on 13 January. This is this issue with regard to the breach of the SafeWA app data. Do you know who the WA police staff were; and, if not, could that be taken on notice?

**Mr DAWSON:** One, I am not aware of a breach. Secondly, I am not aware of who the Chief Health Officer may have been speaking to. He does speak and participate in daily meetings with a number of my staff, so I would have to ask the Chief Health Officer.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** In which case, do not take it on notice; leave that with me to follow up. Can I ask you: when did you first raise this issue with the Minister for Police?

**Mr DAWSON:** On or around—I would have to have a quick look. I am not sure whether it was on or around early March or early April. Certainly, I have provided a briefing note and briefed the minister on the—I am not sure whether it is the —

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Could you take that on notice?

**Mr DAWSON:** Yes, I certainly can. I have got a briefing note. I think, recall, it was 10 May that I provided a briefing note per se, but as to whether I have it recorded in my diary about expressly with the Minister for Police, I would have to take on notice.

**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** You are meeting with him three times a week and you knew about it from 26 February, so it would have happened sometime —

**Mr DAWSON:** I am spinning a few plates, with respect, so I do not know whether I have diarised a conversation with him about that. I diarise a lot of things and I am up to book 10 at the moment since the pandemic started.

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**Hon NICK GOIRAN:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Just one final parting one, commissioner. I really want to follow up on that meth thing because I am fascinated with this issue. We had that big bust in Geraldton in 2017, I think, which was quite a bit, but have you got—I am sure you would have—the impounded meth rates since that period from 2017?

**Mr DAWSON:** We can provide those to you. It is in the order of over two tonnes of meth and it is approaching three tonnes, I think, but we can provide that to you on notice.

**The CHAIR:** So from 2017 up to the present. I will pursue that a little bit more. I am just interested in it more than anything. Thank you very much for that.

*[Supplementary Information No A5.]*

Thank you very much for that, commissioner and gentlemen. I really appreciate you taking the time and your forthright, honest responses. It has been very much appreciated in what is a very, very difficult time for everyone, particularly yourselves. Thank you for attending today. Please end the broadcast. A transcript of this hearing will be sent to you for correction. If you believe there are typographic or transcription errors in your transcript of evidence, please indicate your suggested corrections on the transcript. Errors of fact or substance must be corrected in a letter to the committee. When you receive your transcript of evidence, the document will also indicate the questions that you have taken on notice and when the responses are due back to the committee. If you want to provide additional information or elaborate on particular points, you may provide supplementary evidence for the committee's consideration when you return your corrected transcript of evidence. Please speak to the committee staff if you have any further queries. Thank you once again. We very much appreciate it.

**Hearing concluded at 11.22 am**

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