

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND JUSTICE
STANDING COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE RECOGNITION AND ADEQUACY
OF THE RESPONSES BY STATE GOVERNMENT AGENCIES
TO EXPERIENCE OF TRAUMA BY WORKERS AND VOLUNTEERS
ARISING FROM DISASTERS**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE
TAKEN AT PERTH
WEDNESDAY, 28 MARCH 2012**

SESSION TWO

Members

**Mr A.P. O’Gorman (Chairman)
Mr A.P. Jacob (Deputy Chairman)
Ms M.M. Quirk
Mr I.M. Britza
Mr T.G. Stephens**

Hearing commenced at 10.58 am

MCNAMARA, MR KEIRAN

Director General, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

DANS, MR PETER

Director, Regional Services, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

WALKER, MR ALAN

Director, Regional Policy and Projects, Department of Environment and Conservation, examined:

The ACTING CHAIR: Good morning, gentlemen. On behalf of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, I would like to thank for your interest and for your appearance before the committee today. The purpose of this committee is gathering evidence for its inquiry into the adequacy of responses by state government agencies to the experience of trauma by workers and volunteers arising from disasters. You have been provided with a copy of the committee's terms of reference.

Mr McNamara: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: At this stage I introduce myself: I am Margaret Quirk. I am acting as Chair today because the Chair, Tony O'Gorman, is unwell. On my left is Ian Britza, the member for Morley, and on his left is Tom Stephens, the member for Pilbara. Our committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly. The hearing is a formal procedure of the Parliament and therefore commands the same respect given to the proceedings of the house itself. Even though the committee is not asking witnesses to provide evidence on oath or affirmation, it is important that you understand that any deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of Parliament. This is a public hearing, and Hansard will make a transcript of the proceedings for the public record. If you refer to any document during your evidence, it would assist Hansard if you could provide the full title for the record.

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

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: That is a yes by all of you. Do you understand the notes at the bottom of the form about giving evidence to a parliamentary committee?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Have you received and read the information for witnesses briefing sheet provided with the "Details of Witness" form today?

The Witnesses: Yes.

The ACTING CHAIR: Do you have any questions in relation to being a witness today?

The Witnesses: No.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have provided a submission to the inquiry, which has been very useful; thank you. Together with the information you provide today, your submission will form part of the evidence to the inquiry and may be made public. Are there any amendments you would like to make to the submission?

Mr McNamara: No.

The ACTING CHAIR: We are obviously going to ask you a series of questions today, but before we do so, do you wish to provide the committee with any additional information, make an opening statement or provide us with an overview?

[11.00 am]

Mr McNamara: Thank you, Chair. I will make some brief introductory remarks, if I can, and thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before it today. As you have noted, we made a submission on 27 October 2011, and we provided a range of departmental documents governing our policies, guidelines and programs for staff in the area that is of interest to the committee today. The relevant functions of the department to this committee's inquiry are spelt out in that correspondence. In particular, I will just highlight the nature of emergency incidents in which our departmental staff find themselves. Clearly, there are bushfires, but also dealing with things such as pollution incidents; fatalities and injuries on DEC-managed lands, such as the state's national parks, state forest, marine parks and the like; search and rescue operations; flood and cyclone impacts; incidents such as whale strandings when there is the potential for injury; and, infrequently, things such as crocodile attacks when there is the potential for fatalities.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have not come across that before!

Mr McNamara: We have a wide range of things that we do.

We have staff who encounter people who are hurt and injured and who are distressed by what has happened to them and to their communities. We certainly have situations whereby staff encounter some quite gruesome things, such as suicides and so on, on some of the lands that we manage. We have paid attention in recent times to the areas of interest to this committee today, and that is what we have documented in our submission. I think it is fair to say that given the pressure that has been on the department over the most recent bushfire season, and given the media scrutiny and the public and political scrutiny that has attached itself to not only the department as a whole following the Margaret River fire in particular and previously the Boorabbin coronial inquiry, but also individuals who are singled out for attention in those circumstances, we have become very conscious of the need for appropriate services and support for staff in the space that is of interest to the committee today. It is also fair to say that, off the back of that, we are in the process currently of having some conversations with FESA and their chaplaincy service, and we will be embarking on some equivalent discussions, I hope, with the police in the near future just to understand some of the support services they provide to their staff so that we can learn from those and further develop the support services we provide for our own staff.

The terms of reference also deal with volunteers. We have an extensive volunteer network supporting the department's activities, including people working in our national parks and so on, but they are not really exposed to the sorts of things that we are predominantly talking about here today. We do work alongside volunteers in search and rescue, in natural disasters such as fires and the like. We obviously work alongside the SES, bushfire brigades and so on. But I think it is fair to say that the support for the volunteers in those sorts of groupings is established through those organisations, and their linkage is back to FESA rather than to us. They sort of stand alone in terms of their ability and the way they go about supporting their volunteer members. That is all I need to say by way of introductory remarks.

The ACTING CHAIR: Just in terms of the staff profile, you have mentioned the submission. I am also aware that you have seasonal workers, and they may well be front-line responders, though.

Mr McNamara: Yes, but they are staff. In terms of our conservation employee workforce, which is predominantly but not entirely in the south west, we seek to operate to a number of around 290 to 300 during the summer season; and, of those, about 70 are seasonal for the bushfire season, but they are employees.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have a series of questions, but there was one that I think will help cover our inquiries. You do mention in your submission Boorabbin and the impact that that had on the department and reassessing your attention to employee welfare. I am certainly aware of the level of stress that officers within your department felt during that incident and the subsequent inquiries, but maybe for the purpose of the record and for other committee members, you could talk about some of the personal impacts that had on some of the staff within your agency.

Mr McNamara: I do not want to name individuals, but the incident controller for the Boorabbin incident suffered significantly in both his personal and professional life and took the decision to leave the department as a consequence of that event and the coronial inquiry. A couple of other individuals were named by the coroner. The language used by the coroner was quite direct; it labelled them as extremely incompetent, if I remember correctly. I think that was the terminology used. I then had to do my duties under the disciplinary provisions of the Public Sector Management Act and further inquire into those matters. I dealt with the outcomes of those publicly, and the two officers were able to resume their roles and duties in the fire structure of the department. Nevertheless, the public naming in that way stands on the record. It was clearly brought to the fore in the Margaret River fire when one of those individuals had a role in the chain of decision-making in that operation and was immediately singled out again by the media and others. It caused great stress to him and to his colleagues. That is something that still carries through to now, and it is still a concern to us. Indeed, I will just make a broader comment. There are a large number of people who carry out those sorts of roles in our agency and other agencies and across this nation, and when a lot of them think about the hundreds and thousands of decisions they make in relation to incidents, they say, "There but for the grace of God go I." There is a strong bond between the people; nevertheless, these individuals have been singled out and it caused them great distress. Given the carriage of that through to the Margaret River fire, it is not over. Either of my colleagues might like to add to that.

[11.10 am]

Mr Dans: It has sent shockwaves through the organisation to the extent that a number of staff have questioned their continued involvement in fire suppression activities, thinking, "If I'm going to potentially be exposed to this level of media treatment and I suppose public opinion, it is not worth it for what I get paid." It would be worth noting that in the case of bushfire suppression the DEC has about 65 to 70 dedicated fire management staff throughout the state. It has about another 800 staff who undertake roles in a fire suppression structure, but fire is not a designated or documented part of their duties. They do it more or less voluntarily and a lot of those people have been quite affected by Boorabbin and the subsequent media treatment of their co-workers following the Margaret River fire.

The ACTING CHAIR: One of the things they say about critical incident stress or post-traumatic stress disorder is that it very much sensitises you to the issues, so for a period between when that incident happened and the years it took to get a coronial inquest finalised, every time it was mentioned, it, of course, has a compounding impact on your staff members. So it is not the media treatment per se, but it is that compounded with the stress that they felt about the actual incident. Would you agree with that proposition or not?

Mr McNamara: I am a biologist by training and not an expert in that area, but that makes sense to me and accords with my general understanding of things. One thing I will add is that there is a strong camaraderie amongst people who do this sort of work and there is a lot of peer support and peer understanding that people draw a lot of strength from. I think what we are also understanding is that we need more than that.

The ACTING CHAIR: We are going down to Margaret River shortly and we are certainly aware of some of the really hostile public reaction to some of your officers, with them, for example, not wanting to go into town wearing their uniform or what have you because of the abuse that they are

copping. We would really like to talk to some of those officers, not necessarily with a transcript even, but just to get a bit of a feeling of what they have been exposed to. I understand there are some sensitivities about that in terms of ongoing inquiries, but we would certainly like to have the opportunity to have some informal chats with them in terms of how those officers are feeling. I do not know whether you want to consider a situation in which that could be possible given ongoing issues. We will not be talking about the management of the fire; it is not really the business of this committee, we just really want to talk about the emotion.

Mr McNamara: As is always the case, we are very happy to be helpful to the committee and happy for the committee secretariat, perhaps, to go through **Mr Dans'** office and arrange suitable access. We are happy to facilitate that.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I just want to come back to the program to deal with the stress that the workers go through. I got the impression that until these incidents happened, the peer support was what was holding the trauma or whatever issues the workers were dealing with. It was peer support that held them together, where now you are beginning to talk to FESA and the police about the chaplaincy and something else there. Can you correct me on that or tell me if I am on the right track?

Mr McNamara: There is a little bit more than that. The peer support is important; always has been and always will be. These people have common experiences and common understandings of what the challenges are and so on. We have had for a long time an employee assistance program that is available to staff for a wide range of purposes, and indeed available to them to help with family situations, but that type of service is largely voluntary in terms of whether the staff member wants to take advantage of it. Once again, I do not want to particularise this, but we have had staff who have been exposed to some of the types of difficult situations that we have already referred to who have availed themselves of that sort of externally provided service and felt that they benefited from it greatly. I have other staff who think it is not for them and they do not think that they need that sort of support and assistance. I guess what we have increasingly found under the particular stress we were under this summer about that externally provided service, which was mobilised and made available very quickly at Margaret River, is that it is a service really provided by people who are no doubt very professional and competent in their fields, but they do not necessarily get it in terms of the pressure and the experience that people actually go through in the field or in the decision-making that they do in incident management situations under extremely high pressure. That is what has taken us to exploring further with FESA, and we have started the conversation with the police, but we have not gone as far yet. I think, apart from Boorabbin, we have not really had a level of operation before in which we are the guilty party. We lit the prescribed burns and the prescribed burns got away, therefore, we have not really been in that —

The ACTING CHAIR: I think you have been an alleged guilty party, have you not, director general?

Mr McNamara: We owned up straight away and said, “We lit the prescribed burn, the prescribed burn escaped and caused the damage that it caused”, and you carry that burden. We have not really been in that space this intensely or extensively before, so we have not really experienced the staff reaction before, to my knowledge, to that external employee assistance program for staff, that it is not really sufficiently understanding of the business and what people are going through to be as helpful as it might be.

Mr Dans: And bear in mind that the suppression of the incident, and particularly the Nannup or the Milyeannup fire, was ongoing through to the third or fourth week of December. So whilst our staff were being offered services by the external assistance provider, many of them were still involved in shifts in the fire suppression efforts that went on for some weeks. As the director general said, the lack of understanding of the business of DEC and the business of fire suppression was highlighted in the feedback that a lot of our staff provided.

The ACTING CHAIR: That is interesting. Who provides that external support, what company?

Mr Dans: It is PPC Worldwide.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: It was a very sensitive and tender paragraph in which you dealt with the deaths within the department. I did not know about those. I read the paragraph that dealt with the known occurrence of CIS and associated trauma, and throughout you spoke about the death of an employee and a contracted pilot, then the injury to a DEC employee who is now paraplegic and then you talked about the entrapment in 2010 of several people. In my opinion it is sad that these incidents have not been picked up by the public in order for them to realise just exactly what your employees are doing, where they are and how dangerous and critical this situation is. Through these critical comments that have come that looked badly on the DEC, the price has been paid, and I would imagine that the internal fortitude to come together and be stronger because of that would be very hard to get through from outside, if you understand what I am trying to say.

[11.20 am]

Mr Walker: I think one of the challenges we face with equipping our staff to deal with these situations is to tell them that it is okay to acknowledge that post-traumatic stress disorder or critical incident stress are very real conditions and that it is okay for them to accept that it could happen to them. It is almost a case where we have had to break down an actual resistance to say, “I’m tough enough to deal with this; I’m okay and I can get through it. I don’t really need any assistance to do that.” So, part of our education program has been to say that when those circumstances arise, you may not recognise it immediately, your managers and supervisors might not recognise it, but we need to have a layered approach so that the first thing is that you put your hand up if you think that there’s something happening that you need treatment or support for. Also, we have got to condition our supervisors and managers to recognise it in their staff so that they can then develop an appropriate program, whatever that might be—individual assistance or group assistance for a group of people who have been affected by incidents. So, that education program, and we are still working on that because a lot of our people have got quite a strong resistance to that being something that they admit might affect them in the future.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have heard elsewhere that this is a bit of a generational thing and the older operational staff are more resistant. Is that your experience?

Mr Walker: That would be fair to say. It is quite a strong cultural condition that people who have been with the organisation for a long time and have been to a lot of difficult incidents probably feel as if they have the resilience to cope. But, some of those people do not have that and especially where there have been more than one or a cumulative effect, which you described earlier, and that can sometimes have a response that is quite profound and not recognised initially for what it is. That education and awareness program is part of the way that we are trying to deal with this issue.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: The person who had the paraplegic issue, just as a side issue, is there compensation or planning around your workers and your employees?

Mr McNamara: I will make some remarks about that, but on the —

Mr Dans: It is under consideration as we speak. I do not think that a final settlement has been reached with that particular employee, but he is still in our employment. We have modified the workplace and a job role for him so that he can continue to be employed in the same workplace that he was in, in a different role, but still contribute very, very meaningfully to the day-to-day work.

Mr McNamara: He lives in a small town in the Perth hills south of Perth. I visited him in Shenton Park and there are extra things that we do for people in that circumstance. It is not a regular circumstance, but he was injured in a prescribed burning operation. I am well aware that the work crew based at Dwellingup went round and worked on his home to make various modifications to assist him in his house in terms of being wheelchair bound. But, as **Mr Dans** has said, we redesigned a job and redesigned part of the office to accommodate him. My understanding is that he still plays a role in incident response from that base, because he wants to be part of that.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: But there is nothing officially in place for insurance or anything like that, which is what I think I am driving at, really.

Mr McNamara: I probably need to be a bit careful because I do not have the details at my fingertips, but clearly we are covered by RiskCover. There has been a claim for, or request for, ex gratia payment support, I think, and dealing with that is not finalised.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I understand.

The ACTING CHAIR: I presume there are no compulsory medical checks for your front-line responders. Do they have compulsory medical checks?

Mr Dans: Yes, there is a requirement, particularly in fire management, to undertake a medical, for all front-line fire staff and it is encouraged for all incident management team personnel as well, at the start of each fire season. It involves a pack test undertaking a walk of just under four kilometres length with about an 11 kilogram pack weight on, and then there is a requirement for every two years for a medical by a general practitioner to a particular standard that has been established over a number of years. The cost of that particular one is met by the department as well.

The ACTING CHAIR: Is there any capacity within that medical, for example, to just have a few sort of general questions which might pick up if there were ongoing critical incident stress issues?

Mr Dans: It is testing my memory. I cannot recall exactly, but it is fairly detailed and of a fair duration that the pro forma —

The ACTING CHAIR: Maybe if you could perhaps get back to us —

Mr Dans: Yes we can—sure.

The ACTING CHAIR: That would be great, thank you.

Mr McNamara: Clearly, it is quite a dispersed workforce. I do not know much about the capacity of medical practitioners to address some of the mental preparedness issues and so on.

The ACTING CHAIR: It was just stuff like whether you were sleeping well and those little triggers, if you like, that might suggest further investigation. On that point, director general, you said that a number of staff are dispersed. What strategies do you take in terms of giving them some psychological first aid or whatever, bearing in mind that they are fairly dispersed?

Mr McNamara: I might ask the director of regional services to start with an answer on that.

Mr Dans: We have a service delivery arrangement in DEC of nine regions with regional offices from Kununurra right down to Albany and Kalgoorlie and other centres within. We have some district offices or work centres away from those main regional offices as well. Every workplace has a functioning occupational safety and health committee and every workplace has at least one designated peer supporter. There is a peer support network within the department, which is administered and coached and nurtured, if you like, by our central risk management section. They meet and get together for a peer supporters' conference once a year just to refresh their knowledge and understanding of the issues, the critical signs to look for in people in the workplace, and not just emergency responding staff, but the entire workforce in each of those locations. That is the first level that exists in the workplace. Peer supporters have on occasion recommended and encouraged staff to take the next step and to make contact with EAP, the employee assistance provider, which is external to the department. So, that is where it sort of begins in the day-to-day business of the department, if you like.

Mr Walker: Just to add briefly to that, in the guidelines, a copy of which you have been provided with, there is a role designated as the critical incident stress coordinator. It is that person's role to not only respond to reports received from the field, but also be aware of incidents that have been occurring to initiate a possible response to check on individuals or groups of staff who might have been involved in an incident, just to then make a decision about the type of critical incident stress

response that might be needed depending on that situation. So, that could be well away from the city. Just to give one example, in Karijini National Park, one of our national park rangers—this is going back seven or eight years—was involved in an incident where an SES volunteer died. It was a rainfall event that sent a lot of water down the gorge. You possibly remember that incident. The national park ranger actually saved a tourist but was present when the SES volunteer died. Because we did not have great familiarity with critical incident stress at that time, it probably was not recognised and that condition may have even developed into post-traumatic stress disorder, even though there was no blame whatsoever attached to the actions of the individual concerned. But being able to recognise that, for managers or supervisors being able to recognise it and, indeed, for the support base in our people services branch here in Perth to be able to recognise the potential for it and then to put in whatever approach is appropriate, is something that we are rather rapidly becoming more familiar with.

[11.30 am]

The ACTING CHAIR: Did you get the idea for that critical incident stress manager from another jurisdiction? How did you develop that?

Mr Walker: The guidelines that we developed were largely borrowed from our counterpart agency in Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and also the Department of Human Services in Victoria. It was clearly evident that their documentation was of a very high standard. Some of our staff also interacted directly with them. Some of our staff also went to the United States to participate in incident management work with wildfires there. They brought back not only personal experiences but also documentation that we have utilised in developing the guidelines, and we have adapted those to our own circumstances.

Mr McNamara: It is typical of the business that we are in, particularly with respect to fire, that there is a high degree of that sort of collaboration and sharing and, I happily say, plagiarism of what is best in other jurisdictions through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council, through the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre and just through the relationships we have with our sister agencies. That spreads across to FESA and the country fire authorities as well.

The ACTING CHAIR: We have talked to other agencies about this but in terms of tracking your employees through databases, who might have these issues and who might have been exposed to a number of incidences that have the potential to be stressful, do you keep any record of who was at Margaret River and who was somewhere else so someone can come along and assess that that person might be at risk?

Mr Walker: I think we indicated in our submission that it is not easy to get 100 per cent accuracy on people who have availed themselves of services because a lot of it is done voluntarily. They have the numbers to contact the external service providers and receive assistance, and they do not have to report that through the normal method of occupational safety and health reporting. A number of those would go through without us being aware of them, although our service provider does provide a generalised report, without naming names, to indicate the number of people who have availed themselves of those services. We are not fully aware of the exact nature of those services and the actions that have been taken in all cases but in the majority we are aware when those services are being provided.

Mr McNamara: As far as I am aware, we do not have a database-type approach to tracking the people and our staff's exposure to these sorts of things. I think we operate generally on our management and personal knowledge and so on.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have a relatively small number of people.

Mr McNamara: Yes. While your terms of reference relate to natural disasters, there are clearly workforces such as the police where the exposure of an individual officer to traumatic incidences might be a very regular event whereas for our people, they might be exposed to bushfires and

various things frequently but their exposure to a traumatic experience within those is really still an irregular event.

The ACTING CHAIR: There is a bit of academic controversy going around at the moment as to whether you do a big debrief after the event or not. What protocols do you follow post an event in terms of debriefing or trying to identify stress?

Mr Walker: Our guidelines require a four-stage approach. The first is critical incident first aid, where even in the middle of a shift if something happens that people become aware of, it is possible to provide support and treatment for individuals during the shift. At the end of that shift in which a critical incident has occurred, there is a defusing, which might be only a 30 minutes to one hour get-together where people are given information that they do not necessarily have about the incident and what happened and also an opportunity to express straight off the bat any concerns that they had about how things were managed or how things went down. That is followed up within a few days by a more detailed CIS debriefing, so not a debriefing about the incident and how it was managed but about the critical incident itself and how staff have been affected by that. They are given all the support contacts and availability and they are given advice about what they might experience and how to deal with that. Once again, that is building a recovery process because it is really all about time to recover. That can be short for some people and longer for other people. The third phase is the individual or group support mechanisms. It might be counselling. That is probably not a word that goes down all that well, but one-on-one treatment or group treatment that we found to be a very satisfactory way to proceed when people share their experiences, perhaps also saying how they are dealing with circumstances and being quite open about that with their colleagues. That appears to be very therapeutic.

Mr McNamara: There is a particular challenge in that space for events that can run for at least a number of days and, if we go to the Gascoyne fires of the recent summer, can go for over five weeks straight. We will have staff assembled from as far away as Kununurra, Kalgoorlie and Esperance on a single fire and then we have shift complications of people coming and going. You cannot always easily grab all your people who were exposed to a particular event quickly and talk to them. In 24 hours they might be dispersed back across the state or they might be out continuing the same incident. We have to be flexible in achieving this.

The ACTING CHAIR: You have a method of tracking them down though?

Mr McNamara: We have to be flexible. We cannot assemble everyone the next day and have them all in the same place. They might still be working or they might be dispersed.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: We are on our way to Margaret River in June. I am unfamiliar with the way it unfolded down there. Following the fires, have your personnel been subject to community ostracism and verbal assaults in the community that has resulted in ongoing trauma for your personnel?

Mr McNamara: The short answer is yes in some circumstances. I will probably ask **Mr Dans** to elaborate on it a bit. There have been a variety of reactions. I spoke to the shire CEO again last Saturday and I went down when the Keelty inquiry was on and spent time with the shire CEO and the shire president. There are people who are quite understanding and generous in their view in the sense that they know that the department did not set out to make a mistake and that prescribed burning is challenging and difficult. There are people who are understanding. Other people are quite critical and even amongst those who lost homes, you get both reactions. Personal comments have certainly been directed at our staff. We have had staff leave and various other things, but I might ask **Mr Dans** to elaborate briefly.

Mr Dans: We did get reports from staff in the days following the Margaret River fire, particularly from some of the staff who worked out of our Margaret River work centre. They stopped in town and there was jeering, barbed comments and the like as they walked in uniform to a shop to buy

lunch and those types of things. We have a number of staff who live in the Margaret River community and work in DEC's local district. One staff member who lived and worked out of Margaret River lost a house in the fire, a rental property, and one who worked in our fire management services branch in Kensington lost a rental property in the fire as well. The staff who live in the Margaret River community, and one in particular who had done for some time, expressed embarrassment and a reluctance to be seen in public for some time after the fire.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Was it of sufficient seriousness for any assistance to be necessary?

Mr Dans: Assistance was offered within the district structure and DEC's district and regional structure but none thought it was necessary to take anything.

[11.40 am]

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: It sounds like low-level barbs and irritation.

Mr Dans: That is my understanding of it.

The ACTING CHAIR: In your submission you say there are no known barriers to staff accessing available services. How was this view formed? I have gone off on another tangent.

Mr Walker: If anything, we are encouraging our staff to access services. Even if they are doubtful about the necessity or potential benefit, our advice to them is to err on the side of accessing services or just talking to their colleagues, bearing in mind it is proven that support at the workplace, managerial and supervisor support, is very important in the recovery process.

The ACTING CHAIR: Subject to the qualification you made earlier about some cultural impediments, if you like?

Mr Walker: Yes; being on the alert following a critical incident to be able to recognise that is important, but also encouraging people to put their hand up if there is any doubt about that. The comment that was made earlier by the director general about the external service provider perhaps not fully understanding the type of work and the reaction to incidents is something that we need to work on; and having a familiar face, so it might be a more senior officer of the department, director level or regional manager level, going to speak to people or even a group of senior staff going to assist with the debriefing process, providing reassurance, encouraging people to make the necessary contact for support services if they have any doubt about the need to do that. But it is also giving people time to be able to make the connections—family connections or whatever other connections—are necessary to assist with that recovery process.

The ACTING CHAIR: Finally, from my perspective: do you have any data from RiskCover that shows how your time lost to injury and stress compares with other WA government agencies?

Mr McNamara: We have our own data on the lost time from injuries side of things. I am not sure if there is data more attuned to the stress part of your question. I am not aware of what we might or might not have in terms of comparative data or that RiskCover might have in terms of comparative data.

Mr Dans: I have in the past seen benchmarking across agencies, groupings of agencies depending on the nature of their work. I could not reliably recall where we sat in that, but I understand that RiskCover does maintain some sort of statistics along those lines.

The ACTING CHAIR: We might contact them, but if you could follow it from your agency's perspective and provide that, I think that would be useful.

Thanks everyone for your evidence today and also for the very helpful submission. A transcript of this hearing will be forwarded to you for correction of minor errors. Any such corrections must be made and the transcript returned within 10 days from the date of the letter attached to the transcript. If the transcript is not returned within this period, it will be deemed correct. New material cannot be added to 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 very much.

Hearing concluded at 11.43 am
