

Thank you for the opportunity to provide further evidence to the Standing Committee regarding my petition. I am not a S8 claimant, but I have served 15 years in WAPOL and voluntarily resigned as a Senior Constable (3 months off Sergeant) after my second stress breakdown in 1992 so I do have personal experience in these matters.

Since I provided this petition to the Hon Charles Smith for tabling, a public media announcement by the Minister for Police Michelle Roberts and ex Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan has been made confirming the Government and Police Executive accept they got it wrong and a Redress Committee has been appointed. I applaud this announcement and positive action to resolve this matter for hundreds of Police Officers unfairly impacted by S8 removal. These officers not only had to deal with their initial problems, but had to deal with further stress and emotional issues resulting from being removed from their jobs against their will and due to no fault of their own, receiving no financial or emotional support and losing contact with their colleagues and life as they knew it. This effectively meant losing their career, their income and ability to provide the necessities of life to themselves or their families. In many cases, S8 removal has also resulted in eventual loss of family, homes, reliance on Disability Pensions as their only means of income and indeed (in up to 3 cases per year) loss of lives taken by their own hand. It cannot be understated that this is an important issue and needs to be addressed fairly, equally and with compassion.

At the 2013 Police Union Annual Conference Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan announced that '*new Police reforms, called Frontline 2020 would bring with it some contentious issue's [and] 'in order to maintain current Police to Population Ratio's WA Police would have to employ 12 000 officers'* – however, here we are at the end of 2018 and the 2017/18 Police Annual Report (PAR) confirms WAPOL still only has 6 469 Police Officers trying to do the job of 12 000. Commissioner O'Callaghan further stated he wanted to '*return non-operational Officers to the frontline or remove them; '400 Police Officers in WAPOL [had] declared themselves non-operational [and] by 2015 that [would be] 600. By 2020 that will be about 11 percent of the total workforce'*.

The West Australian Police Force is in Crisis and the tragic loss of Det Sgt Scott Blanchard on 24 July 2015 and 1/C Constable Darren Igglesden on 15 October 2018 by their own hands should be evidence enough that PTSD is in epidemic proportions throughout the Force. However, the real problem is that these matters are not being dealt with properly and Police Officers live in fear that if they say anything about their stress or PTSD symptoms they will lose their job through S8. Instead they push on until total physical and mental breakdown occurs - and from my experience it occurs without warning, you are fine one minute and the next minute you are not.

The 2017/18 PAR states that 6 469 sworn Police Officers and a further 339 unsworn Auxiliary Officers, Protective Service Officers, Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers and Cadets are currently employed; together with about 2093 Public Service Staff. However, the 2016/17 PAR Regional Breakdown confirmed that only 2 805 Police Officers covered the 1 944 580 population over 7 258 square kms of the Metropolitan Area (1:693) and 1 425 Police Officers covered the 523 450 population over 2 519 388 square kms of Regional WA (1:367). With consideration to the facts that 35% of total Police Officers are performing other 'Specialist and Support' duties outside those of General or Traffic Duties; and further, that on any given day one third of the Force is on Annual or Sick Leave and another one third is (supposed to be) on Rostered Days Off (RDO) we can see that WA actually has very few serving frontline Police Officers trying to stay on top of current Incident Reports or requests for Police Assistance as they occur. The fact is there are insufficient numbers of sworn frontline Police Officers to manage a 24 hour workload over 3 shifts (leading to ~) extensive overtime and recall to duty on RDO's in an effort to maintain any semblance of Law and Order and get the job done. These staff shortages, extra workload and workplace trauma are the root cause of the ever increasing mental health and PTSD medical issues occurring over the last 30 years.

The last documented reference to the total number of Police sick days taken per year was 69 727 days (09/10 PAR) however these statistics are conveniently excluded from Police Annual Reports since 2010 and little to no attention is given to retention failures. Given that Police Regimental Numbers started in 1898 and over 90 years (until 1988) approximately 7700 Regimental Numbers were issued [and] current Regimental Numbers are now up to 16600, these figures confirm a further 9000 Recruits were trained and sworn in over the last 30 years to 2018. However, given that many of the original 7700 (pre 1988) Police are still serving in senior roles, what happened to the rest? The Government has paid good money to train and employ new Police Officers, but many are leaving the Force within the first 12 months - the question is why?

In 2018, the President of the WA Police Union confirmed that *Section 4A of the existing Occupational Safety and Health Act 1984 denies police officers the same right as every other worker (including other emergency services) to refuse dangerous work that has a reasonable risk of causing serious harm to themselves or others.* This risk, along with issues surrounding recruiting, retention, job endangerment, workload, physical and mental trauma, increased Police to Population Ratio's, increasing crime and dealing with drug fuelled violent meth addicts now vs drug fuelled docile marijuana and heroin users of the past are all to blame. Increasing KPI's and enforced daily KPI contacts required of some officers is not helping this situation, but exacerbating it for Officers currently serving. Staff shortages result in many, many thousands of hours paid and unpaid overtime and every single officer knows that even with all that effort and dedication Police are still only touching the tip of the iceberg. In fact, I would estimate that as little as 20% or less of actual crime is being reported or detected and current Police numbers can't even keep up with that. On any given day, VKI has more jobs in the Metropolitan area with '*no car to attend*' than I ever had when I served at VKI in the late 80's so the problems are increasing, not decreasing. Further, WAPOL currently has only 1 425 Police Officers serving across the 2.5 million square kms of Regional WA, which highlights that country Police are short in number, on call 24 hours a day/7 days a week and isolated in massive Police regions that often require travel of 1200+ kms and 48 -72 hours to complete just one job, all the while leaving the rest of their

region not covered. Regional patrols of some remote areas once or twice a year to check and maintain contact with outlying areas could take 2 officers 5-10 days, which is perhaps why Regional WA has the highest ongoing methamphetamine use in Australia. Herein, staff shortages and increased workload ~ increased overtime and recall to duties ~ insufficient time to recover, burnout and physical/mental related health problems. The cause and effect is that simple, but what are the solutions?

**Redress** – In 2016, the Legislative Assembly Community Development and Justice Standing Committee in their Report: *How Do they Manage?* extensively covered all issues facing WA Policing at that time, including hearing evidence of ongoing PTSD symptoms suffered by many. The Committee concluded they had ‘heard a number of accounts from medically retired police officers who laboured under the burden of post-traumatic stress disorder. Official acknowledgement of the nature and prevalence of this condition is shamefully low. Given this Committee reported on this issue in 2012 and the WA Police Union completed a substantial body of work through Project Recompense, it is highly disappointing that police management’s response can best be described as sclerotic’. As such, successive Governments and Police Executives over time have been fully aware of all work related medical problems, but have consistently failed to address any of them.

My concerns with the Redress are 1) that the \$16 million dollars being offered is insufficient to properly resolve the S8 Redress, and 2) the number of affected officers being considered under the Redress was reported by Karl O’Callaghan as 280 when other records indicate there are over 400 cases. Does the Redress only deal with S8 officers still living? Do the families still together when that officer subsequently took their own life as a direct result of S8 removal get compensated for financial and emotional stress caused by actions of previous authorities? Every single Police Officer [past and present] wants the current Redress to be fair and equal to every one of their Brothers and Sisters in Blue that have suffered through this removal process and Government should avoid creating even more problems by awarding one case more than another. If the Redress Committee were to determine the correct number of cases and recommend the maximum ex-gratia payment of \$150 000 to each one I believe the majority of those officers will feel equal, respected and vindicated to some degree - and better able to move forward in life, putting this trauma behind them as best they can. This will also reduce the chances of any further issues or legal action in my view. My advice to the Redress Committee is to be compassionate, fair and equal and never push a man who has nothing left to lose. Do it right the first time.

**Section 8 Police Act Amendment** - Using this legislative power to remove Police Officers against their will for physical and mental injuries sustained within their work environment has been devastating for many. As such, S8 *Police Act* 1892 needs to be amended to prevent it being used for Medical Retirements as a matter of urgency. In the interim, given that the Redress announcement has publicly acknowledged that the Government and Police Executive got it wrong, it makes sense for the Minister for Police to advise the Police Commissioner that her Ministerial Approval for MRU Removals is suspended until S8 is amended and Workers Compensation is established for future medical retirements.

**Workers Compensation and Future Policing in WA** – The Standing Committee Report: *How Do they Manage?* also reported their ‘final area of examination related to the treatment of those officers who were injured or psychologically impaired in the course of their work. The lack of a modern workers ‘compensation regime is not sustainable and must be remedied as a matter of priority’. However, after 30 years of debate, Workers Compensation for Police has still not been provided.

WAPOL is the only Police Force in Australia without Workers Compensation and Government must accept their employer responsibility to provide this cover as a matter of urgency. It would be pointless to request another Parliamentary Inquiry as all parties are fully aware of the problems and have been for some time, but Policing problems are now critical. Experienced Senior Police Officers are currently retiring and once they are gone you cannot have a Police Force comprised of a majority of Officers with limited experience and seniority because of poor retention rates – it will not function and chaos will be left to reign. If Police Officers had the option of being up front with their stress related symptoms and did not fear losing their careers under S8, many more would speak up and ask for a temporary transfer away from the current area or work causing those health problems, thus potentially avoiding total collapse. Currently WAPOL has 2000+ public service roles, some of which could be reverted back to non-operational roles for up to 2 years extended recovery time (off the frontline) and I believe this will result in the majority of Officers being able to fully recover and return to operational duties over the short to medium term, thus extending their careers and retaining their experience.

Workplace injury or PTSD in the future could be managed by retaining the current 168 days as a maximum period for ‘Workplace Injury Leave’ prior to return to operational or non-operational duties (if necessary) to manage extended recovery time. This would be far cheaper than paying for increasing numbers of extended sick days, paying ex gratia payments or future workers compensation claims being made too early or unnecessarily. By increasing Police FTE numbers and converting a portion of Public Servant positions into non-operational roles, more Police Officers would remain sworn, full time experienced employees: thus making them available for immediate recall to the frontline for short term management of emergency or large scale events.

Police Commissioner Dawson is doing his best, but Government directions to reduce the Police Operating Budget by a further \$250 million over 5 years is exacerbating the problem, not making it better. If Government wants the WA Community to be safe, secure and protected as far as possible into the future it needs to be increasing the number sworn Police FTE Staff and the Police Budget, not reducing them because this is just exacerbating Policing problems and thus increasing the potential for PTSD stress related issues to continue unnecessarily well into the future. Submitted for your consideration by Jessica Anne Booth 22 October 2018