

**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 MELBOURNE
MONDAY, 2 JULY 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**

<004> K/4

Hearing commenced at 10.00 am

McKENZIE, MR BRUCE

Assistant Secretary, The Police Association of Victoria,

PO Box 76,

Carlton South 3053, examined:

KENNEDY, MR CHRISTOPHER

Industrial Relations Manager, The Police Association of Victoria,

PO Box 76,

Carlton South 3053, examined:

The CHAIRMAN: Good morning, gentlemen. The purpose of the meeting is to assist the committee in gathering evidence for its inquiry into the recognition and adequacy of the responses by state government agencies to experience of trauma by workers or volunteers arising from disasters. The Community Development and Justice Standing Committee is a committee of the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of Western Australia. We will be recording the comments this morning and we might possibly use them and quote them in our report, if you are okay with that. Before we proceed to questions, have you completed the “Details of Witness” form?

Mr McKenzie: We have.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any questions in relation to appearing at today’s briefing?

Mr McKenzie: I do not.

Mr Kennedy: No.

The CHAIRMAN: Last week we met with the police union in WA. Can you just give us a bit of a background of your role in supporting officers, particularly post events that may happen?

Mr McKenzie: Certainly. Insofar as The Police Association of Victoria is concerned, as no doubt members of the committee would expect, the police association here in Victoria does not always agree with the policies of the Victorian police force, being the employer, and the Victorian government, but when it comes to the welfare of police members involved in a disaster, the employer and the union are as one. That was certainly the case with regard to the Black Saturday disaster back in 2009. I am happy just to touch on a couple of additional points with regard to that, if that is appropriate. The cooperation that existed at that time, as I have just mentioned, was excellent. Pretty much straightaway both Victoria Police and the police association made a \$2 000 donation to our members who had lost property as a result of the disaster. The senior commander for Victoria police force and the senior people within the police association, which includes Chris and myself, worked with Victoria Police command to provide each other with mutual support with regard to dealing with the disaster.

But with regard to the terms of reference of your committee, particularly with regard to the welfare of the emergency service workers post that disaster—but, of course, from our perspective focused on police more so—there was quite a bit of learning going on throughout that period. We are more than happy, of course, to share our learnings with this committee because it is often the case that similar mistakes are made with regard to disasters that might occur in Victoria and other parts of Australia. So, the more that we can do to prevent those similar mistakes being made by other jurisdictions around Australia, the better it is for all of us. One of the first things that Victoria Police did, to their credit, was to appoint some senior police officers with regard to looking after to what

we refer to as the base welfare needs of our members, in particular right through from, say, some of our members being involved in traffic direction for hours on end sometimes without a break, sometimes without a meal break or even a drink. They are fairly basic things; nevertheless, if our members are stuck in that situation, they are quite important. That was some initial early work that was done. Of course as is the case in all disasters, there is confusion at the start of the disaster or post-disaster work, and Black Saturday was no exception to that. But eventually things got organised properly and we were all able to get to a conclusion that we think was in the best interest of our members and in the best interest of dealing with that disaster in a general sense.

One of the initiatives, if I can just move on slightly, that Victoria Police introduced with our full support—and if I can be parochial just for a moment, we did have to urge Victoria Police to this position—was a peer support program. The peer support program is simply other police officers in the policing context providing advice, support, guidance, help, someone to talk to. They are other members of Victoria Police but not necessarily trained with regard to providing professional services as a psychologist or a psychiatrist might.

The CHAIRMAN: So is there some training for your peer supporters?

Mr McKenzie: Yes, there is.

The CHAIRMAN: What does that encompass?

Mr McKenzie: Chris probably knows a little more about that than I do.

Mr Kennedy: There is a network of just over 300 peer support officers in Victoria —

The CHAIRMAN: And how many officers in total in the police force?

Mr Kennedy: There are 12 000 police. The peer support officers all undergo five days of initial training. They do run like an annual conference of peer support officers as well, and there is a fulltime senior sergeant peer support coordination position in Victoria Police's welfare area. The training that the peer support officers are given, as Bruce has said, is not to provide a welfare service at all; it is to be a listening post, so a shoulder to lean on. The members think, in practical terms and research would say, they prefer to speak to someone who has confronted the same sorts of situations as them as someone to speak to in that process. So, there is someone for members to lean on and talk to and they are really equipped then to listen and then guide members or provide signposts for where members should go, what services are available both at the police association or through the employer should a member need help, and perhaps prompt them along the way to suggest that they should actually go and get some help.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: If I heard right, there was a bit of resistance to that; why would that be?

The CHAIRMAN: You said you urged the police, did you not?

Mr McKenzie: That is right; yes, we did need to get Victoria Police to the starting blocks with it. I think Victoria Police, without speaking for them—I understand you are speaking to Victoria Police representatives tomorrow—we do not speak for them but on that basis, we think that they had a view that they would have to pay people overtime and so on and so forth.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: It was money?

Mr Kennedy: Money.

Mr McKenzie: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is usually the case.

Mr Kennedy: In the end it has not cost them anything.

Mr McKenzie: No, it has not.

The CHAIRMAN: But this started before Black Saturday —

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

Mr McKenzie: Very much so.

Mr Kennedy: I do think in terms of Victoria Police's response, it has been a continuum of learning in policing. It is not to diminish the catastrophic nature of Black Saturday or the fires in Perth or in the ACT, but police officers are confronted with trauma on a daily basis, so the fatality they attend can be as traumatic as the bushfire, the suicide they go to, and the trauma goes through a whole range of things. It is through that process and learning from those processes that Victoria Police and the police association have developed their welfare responses to members. So, it put in place the groundwork that enabled both organisations to respond to an event of the size of Black Saturday. The peer support officer system was already in place. The force has a welfare unit that has got six police who work as welfare officers in there. The force has a clinical services area that employs trained psychologists.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Do you roughly know how many? We will ask them, but how many—do you know?

Mr Kennedy: I do know. They are giving evidence to this committee tomorrow, and I noticed in your terms of reference what is the annual budget et cetera. They are better qualified to give that answer, but there are seven police at welfare, one of those is the peer support coordinator and six are employed as welfare officers, and I am not sure how many psychologists there are currently in clinical services.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sorry, it was wrong to put the question to you; I should put it tomorrow. But is it the feedback from your members that there are enough?

[10.10 am]

Mr Kennedy: That is a very interesting question about whether there is enough. As a baseline in terms of welfare support provided by welfare officers, I think the general perception is that there is enough of those sworn members there. There have always been ongoing concerns about the provision of clinical services, and the force has changed its models a number of times over the years that I have been involved with the police association. They have now adopted a model that is more consistent with, I guess, ours in terms of direct psychological support; that is, they operate as a referral service and they contract with an employee assistance program. The focus of their people in clinical services is now more doing what is called psychological first aid or resilience training—it goes by a range of names—that is, training recruits and training members in different areas about how to identify the signs that you are suffering from stress and how to respond to those and where you can get assistance in a proactive way.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So can the members contact the EAP direct without having to go through the psychs at welfare or not?

Mr Kennedy: They can contact our EAP without going through the force, because we run one as well.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Can I just ask: what was the rationale for having to do that?

Mr Kennedy: Because there are a range of members who do not wish to approach the employer in respect of their concerns. Historical concerns about confidentiality, I guess, are at the heart of that issue.

The CHAIRMAN: So if an officer is of the opinion that he or she has got an issue and they want to go and get a psychological assessment done, they cannot automatically go to the EAP supplied by the employer?

Mr Kennedy: My understanding is that they go through the employer's clinical services to get a referral.

The CHAIRMAN: So then the employer always knows that there has been some sort of an issue. Is that a barrier to promotion and goals, or is it a perceived barrier?

Mr Kennedy: I think it is more a perception than reality.

The CHAIRMAN: But they can come through the union's EAP?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: And do not have to —

Mr Kennedy: And we will never know who came to our EAP; they just ring a phone number.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What does that cost the association a year?

Mr McKenzie: It is around the \$50 000 per year mark, so it is not inexpensive. We noted in the Western Australian Police Union's submission to your committee —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Which was excellent, I thought.

Mr McKenzie: It was very good. Yes, we agree with that, and not just because they happen to be our colleagues! It was a very good submission.

The confidentiality aspect was raised by our Western Australian colleagues as well. It was the case when I was a young police officer that if you went to the police medical officer—well, you simply did not because next time you were due for promotion, some crusty old superintendent on the other side would say, "Well, you've been to the police medical officer; you're obviously not suited for promotion and we're going to deny that to you". That is historic admittedly, but that culture seems to continue on to the present day where it is perhaps not, as Chris mentioned before, realistic in the current environment. We continually get reassured by Victoria Police welfare that there is no detail passed on with regard to who might —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: From an industrial perspective, one of the symptoms of post-traumatic stress is, if you like, a questioning of authority or a bit of an attitude test, I suppose, to use the vernacular. That tends to behaviour which of course contraindicates career advancement. Is the association aware of particular instances where that might have been the case?

Mr Kennedy: We actually deal with that issue all the time, if you are referring to the symptoms of PTSD.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Yes.

Mr Kennedy: Particularly at its intersection with the accident compensation scheme in Victoria, which I know is different to what operates in Western Australia for police. Certain psychological injuries are precluded from compensation in Victoria and those that relate to reasonable management action to discipline a person, counsel them for performance et cetera. But you are quite right in saying you see a trajectory; someone is injured at some point in time and then you will see performance deteriorate or behaviour in the workplace deteriorate and indeed their home life deteriorate. Eventually, they are called to account for that and that is the first time that they seek assistance. Of course then there is a clash between the Accident Compensation Act and that where both are actually the symptoms of an injury that they have suffered a long time earlier. That is an issue with which we deal with great regularity, unfortunately.

Mr McKenzie: With regard to the peer support program, we note that members of the committee are quite interested in it and we can say that it has been a very successful innovation here.

The CHAIRMAN: I think one of the reasons that we are particularly interested is we went to New Orleans and New York and we spoke to retired fire officers in New Orleans that were peer supporters and they promoted it and I think they sold it really well and do a pretty good job, and the same in New York. So do you use retired officers at all or are they all current serving officers?

Mr Kennedy: No.

Mr McKenzie: No, we just use current serving officers, I think on the basis that retired officers, firstly, are moving on with other parts of their lives, I suppose, to a certain extent, but also after a period of time they may lose some touch at least with contemporary policing and what the current pressures involved in our profession are. But using current serving police officers in a peer support role has been, as we say, considerably successful here, because on the basis that one of the early issues in the Black Saturday disaster was that there was no immediate list of our members who had been involved in the disaster available, so that makes it then particularly difficult to follow through, but a peer support officer, an individual that has been through something like that considering—we know that you have had your fair share of bushfire disasters in Western Australia as well, perhaps not to anywhere near the scale of Black Saturday. But it is not just to say —

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: Not recently.

<005> Q/4

Mr McKenzie: No, with regard to the work that needs to be done, it is not just immediately at the time or shortly thereafter, but the work involves, say, disaster victim identification, for example. The disaster victim identification teams, as Victoria Police representatives will probably tell you tomorrow, were briefed by a psychologist before they went out into the field to conduct that, as you can imagine, fairly traumatic work. Then there was a makeshift mortuary set up at the existing Coroner's Court facility. That, as you also can imagine, is traumatic work. Then, of course, the royal commission into fires, afterwards there is more need than for support in all of those issues.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: With respect to the fact that methods and approaches may change, officers—no matter whether it is 30 years ago—still are dealing with death in all horrific forms. So I am really surprised that someone may think that retired officers are not relevant. I would imagine that, in fact, 30 years ago it was worse in the sense that there was no support. How they even survived is miraculous. I would have thought, myself, without any professional authority to say so, that having a retiree of 60, 70 years old to say “This is, how I dealt with it when we had none of the stuff you do”—I would have thought that would be something highly sought after.

Mr McKenzie: It is not something that we have fought against. It is not something that has ever been brought up between, say, Victoria Police and the police association here. We have not put a lot of thought into it, simply because it has not been raised as an issue and also because there are sufficient current serving members who are willing to take up that role. I think if there was not that willingness to take up the role, we would be in a position where we would look at that. We certainly would not discount it. It is just that it has not been raised as an issue per se.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I wonder whether that group of people would not feel that—they do not know whether it would be worth it. They would need to be trained; I understand that. However, I would have thought that if they were aware that their service would actually be needed in a situation like this, because it is unique, and no officer would easily speak to someone who has not been through that.

Mr McKenzie: We do not disagree with that view at all.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there still a stigma attached even if you are contacting a peer support officer?

[10.20 am]

Mr McKenzie: No, not really. There is no stigma attached in that sense at all. We also note the Western Australian union submission talks about members who seek assistance being labelled as soft. Now, that can be an issue everywhere. Chris is an industrial relations practitioner and does have some misgivings about this, but that can be overcome, at least in theory, by a compulsory session with an expert, whether it be psychologist or psychiatrist, so that everybody is doing it so that removes the stigma.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: That is what has happened in Houston with the police. It is compulsory for everybody within 24 hours to have one session, or whatever word they use.

Mr Kennedy: Certainly, in the context of Black Saturday it was, in effect, compulsory, because of the peer officer network—I suppose that is one of the values of it. If you had more than 4 000 members deployed in response to the fires, six police at welfare were never going to cover that number, whereas 300 peer supports—the force identified which peer supports were actually at work and available over the period of the fire and assigned them a group of names and they had to go and speak to them. That was like a process of compulsory referral. As Bruce said, the DVI teams were spoken to at the start of every shift by someone from welfare or clinical services. So, that is a form of compulsory referral.

On an ongoing basis the police welfare section actually receives all of the incident reports and can identify from those what may or may not be traumatic incidents. Then they send an email to the person, so it is voluntary whether they make any further contact, but just lets them know that the services are available. I think that has struck the right balance, but I can see the arguments for compulsory referrals. Some parts of the force do have compulsory referrals. The major collision investigation unit every year see a psychologist. The covert areas of the force every year see a psychologist. Our special operations group—I am not sure what the equivalent is called in Western Australia off the top of my head—see them. People who work in sex offences unit have compulsory counselling.

The CHAIRMAN: Chris, do you support annual checks on the officers, medical and psych, or is that a vexed issue still?

Mr Kennedy: It is a vexed issue still. Can I run for the boundary on that one?

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Would it not take away the stigma if it was compulsory. If everyone had to do it, it would take away the stigma and possibly the —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: They just would not have the money.

Mr Kennedy: I certainly understand the argument about saying, “Make it compulsory,” but I think you are right. It is an issue about diminishing returns for the dollars you are spending.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Are your members exposed to random alcohol and drug testing?

Mr McKenzie: That is another vexed question. I can answer it by saying yes and no. Our members are the subject of compulsory drug and alcohol testing post-critical incidents. So, if they are involved in a pursuit which results in a death or they are involved in a death in custody, then our members are subjected to compulsory drug and alcohol testing, but in a general sense they are not—yet.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: But that is on the agenda.

Mr McKenzie: Certainly the past two chief commissioners in Victoria, as well as the current chief commissioner, we feel, want that ability to do that. We have looked at it with some concern.

Just getting back to the point with regard to the compulsory nature of, say, counselling, I think where our concern as a union lies is, what is going to be the upshot of the compulsory psychological counselling regime? Is a psychologist going to speak to a member and say, “Look, you are obviously affected by this and as a result you should not be at work”? That might be a very legitimate thing to occur, but it may not. So, that is where our nervousness in this issue of compulsory nature of psychological backup lies.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We have just brought in the drug testing in our [inaudible]. I do not know how widespread it has been done yet, but it seems to me that if there is some level of abuse that may well point to some critical incident stress. I do not know what the protocols are in the WA Police, but it might be a good way to tease that out.

Mr McKenzie: I think that the Victoria Police historically has not forged ahead with random drug and alcohol testing for police officers on the basis that, once again getting back to expense, it is an expensive exercise to undertake.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think the first few they did in WA they found amphetamines and the police officer said he had ADHD so it cannot be a deterrent for the use of them.

Mr Kennedy: I think that is the experience out of New South Wales as well, if you look at the inquiry into drug and alcohol testing there; the propensity for the employer to do it diminished over time because there is a dollar cost attached to it. They had relatively few positive tests in New South Wales, which tends to suggest, “Why would we test 5 000 police a year at those costs?” It would be better to be a more targeted approach so we can look at, as Bruce said, compulsory testing after critical incidents and perhaps on the basis of observed behavioural problems or effects that the supervisor identifies that senior constable X has a problem with the grog and then go through that process in a more targeted way.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you deal with members who have been medically retired—in WA it is under section 80—because of stress?

Mr Kennedy: Yes.

The CHAIRMAN: Do those members feel neglected or deserted? Are they taken care of appropriately?

Mr McKenzie: It is often the case they feel neglected and deserted.

The CHAIRMAN: When they are retired on that, are they retired—basically just cut off and have to go find another job, or are they pensioned off? What is the situation?

Mr McKenzie: It can be all of the above. Chris is probably better —

Mr Kennedy: It is my area. If they are unfit for work as a result of their injuries, then they would receive a pension through the superannuation fund. If they are fit to work in a field that they are suited to by training, experience, qualifications—there is a test to it—then they are not entitled to a pension under our superannuation fund.

Mr McKenzie: It is unfortunate that every second Wednesday we see our members who are suffering ill health as a result of their work. It is a fairly sad parade of police officers who were once fit and healthy and able to do the job very well in that state where they need to come in and seek legal advice from us with regard to their future, either continuing their police career or outside it. One of the things just getting back to, I guess, basics, with regard to what we have been trying to encourage Victoria Police to do—they have certainly agreed to listen to us—is that firstly the selection process for police officers needs to try to screen out people who are less likely, perhaps, to withstand the rigours of policing. In the context of your work that would apply to emergency services workers more broadly. But then to make sure there is sufficient support in place when they do become police officers to make sure they do not fall off the treadmill with regard to the work that they do. It is important that the union and the employer work well together to try to achieve that aim as a prevention mechanism. But then when someone does fall off, it is important that they are supported in the best way we can. Whilst we do not want to be too critical of Victoria Police in this nature, they do have a lot of work to do to try to look after their people who due to their work have fallen off the bandwagon.

The CHAIRMAN: Do they do sufficient in their training of their officers to build resilience?

Mr McKenzie: That is right. That is a good term that you use, because resilience building has just become part of the training, I think, Chris, and we encourage that and we are very happy that is occurring.

Mr Kennedy: The biggest issue they face in that regard is the back-capture of everyone. So, they run resilience training for all of the recruits and have done so for a couple of years now, but of course there is another 10 000 who have graduated from the academy before those programs were put in place. So, how do you identify the opportunities to capture those? I know they do the resilience training or psychological first aid for people who are doing the training associated with being promoted to sergeants, but again that is a small percentage then of those who are already in the workforce that you capture. I think that is still an issue out there.

[10.30 am]

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the procedure if a serving police officer commits suicide in terms of analysis of—does it automatically go to a coronial inquest or—?

Mr McKenzie: It does not automatically do so, but if there are extenuating circumstances it can. So, if that suicide was directly or indirectly related to their work, it may very well go to a coronial inquiry.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is there anything that you think needs to be done in that regard? We are not yet up to the five-year period in terms of the fires, but is there —

Mr McKenzie: No, that is an interesting point that you raise. On the basis that at this point in time Victoria Police tell us there is only around—one is too many of course—25 what we call here WorkCover claims. Now your point with regard to whether that will increase over the next five to 10 years is a relevant one because that could very well be the case; there could be suicides in the future, not just with regard to police officers but we know that the ambulance service here in Victoria has a particular problem with regards to suicide—fortunately not so much for police of late. But five to 10 years, as people recall what they went through in a disaster like Black Saturday—that is why in our view it is important that the psychological services that we and Victoria Police provide remain committed to looking after people well after a disaster.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: As an association [inaudible] officers committed suicide, is there any protocols or steps that you go through?

Mr McKenzie: Not from an association perspective. It is slightly off track from what your committee is focusing on, but we did have a recent suicide of one of our members which related to—we had an email scandal here in Victoria. To call it a scandal is probably overstating it, but a number of police officers have been brought to account for distributing inappropriate emails through the system. It seems to be that emails and Facebook—it is all very well for someone of my age to be critical of all of that, but we see our members continually getting themselves in trouble over this issue. We had one of our members commit suicide a couple of years who was a subject of an investigation into inappropriate email distribution. Obviously, we would take an interest in that. The coronial inquiry, which has not been held yet, we will be legally represented as both an entity and representative of the family.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The peer support people, are there problems getting people to put their hands up?

Mr McKenzie: No, not at all.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the level of training that they get?

Mr Kennedy: They do a five-day initial training.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is there any extra remuneration or any incentive for that?

Mr Kennedy: No.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Those people who have that role, do any of them come under pressure from their supervisors to say it is competing with their other work and they need to pull back on it? You have not heard any stories of that?

Mr Kennedy: No, we have had no reports of that. The peer support officer is widely supported through Victoria Police by us and indeed by management in the force.

Mr McKenzie: It is a very good program. We cannot speak highly enough of it.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Was it designed here or was it based on one from somewhere else?

Mr McKenzie: I do not think we can claim credit for its introduction here. But just, for example, there are hundreds of emergency services workers who were involved in the Black Saturday disaster. It is just that those people need to be spoken to more than once. “Are you okay today?” “Yes, I am okay today.” Tomorrow someone needs to ask that again. Peer support officers are the most efficient way of doing that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Do you think there are particular things? I mean, not just the bushfires but other things that are high profile—do you think there is any merit, for example, on anniversaries there being a bit of a ring around or that sort of thing?

Mr McKenzie: Absolutely. Anniversaries are one of the key triggers for issues, certainly.
<006> Q/4

The CHAIRMAN: What is the attrition rate? I think I was reading in WA it is still significantly high—our attrition rate.

Mr McKenzie: Is that still because of police officers going to the mining industry?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: A bit of that.

Mr McKenzie: It has laid off a bit?

The CHAIRMAN: It has laid off a bit, yes. We are not going overseas to bring people in anymore.

Mr McKenzie: Our attrition rate is quite low.

The CHAIRMAN: Okay. When the WA Police union gave us their submission, they said there is some merit in an integrated separate organisation providing counselling services for all emergency services. What is your view on that?

Mr McKenzie: We would have no issue with that. At the present time—are you shaking your head, Chris, in the opposite direction?

Mr Kennedy: No.

Mr McKenzie: I think that would be an appropriate thing to do. It does not really matter where it comes from. We promote our employee assistance program to our members because we want them to use it, but we certainly do not gloat to Victoria Police, “Look what we are doing and you are not” because, in fairness to them, they do have a team of psychologists. But where our program is external, the Victoria Police program is internal so it brings up that issue of trust again, which the Western Australia Police union raised—trust and confidentiality. Another point to make in regard to that is we also note in the WA Police union submission to your committee it talks about being Perth-centric. One of the advantages of us managing our own employee assistance program is, firstly, we never get to know who it is of our members who seek assistance and we do not want to know. We are not interested. It does not have any bearing on the bottom line for us. Secondly, part of the contractual arrangement is that the service provider is to provide services all around Victoria. Sometimes from an industrial sense here in Victoria we talk about remoteness and our colleagues and no doubt you will all agree that in Victoria we know nothing about remoteness. It is states like yours —

The CHAIRMAN: You have only got a little state.

Mr McKenzie: It is states like yours that are —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Ballarat not is far away, is it?

Mr McKenzie: No, Ballarat is not too far away. But we can understand our colleagues in Western Australia complaining about a service that is Perth-centric because really it should be available all around the state, within reason of course.

The CHAIRMAN: We asked this question of the department. How do you actually justify \$50 000 expenditure? How do they bring it back? How is it audited? They say they have done how many consultations?

Mr McKenzie: That is a good point. That is a very good question. It is something that we have to try to come to grips with around a couple of issues. One is the trust in the service provider that we engaged, with them knowing that the service that they have been entrusted with on our behalf is reasonably lucrative for them. But we are prepared to run the risk in the interests of the broader membership accessing the program. Nonetheless that is a very good question and I am struggling to answer it because it is a trust issue mainly.

Mr Kennedy: We get a quarterly report that says how many members, how many members' families were seen and classed as a referral —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: If there are any systemic problems you would pick them up?

Mr McKenzie: We also send that quarterly report to all of the senior people within Victoria Police. But, yes, that is an issue.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There is a bit of a crossover between post-traumatic stress, fatigue management and occupation health and safety issues generally. As an association have you got any problems with the Victoria Police about some fatigue management issues or OH&S?

Mr McKenzie: We do and Chris is well placed to answer that question. It is an interesting one.

[10.40 am]

Mr Kennedy: Fatigue management is an issue in policing and progressively through negotiations in enterprise bargaining we have sought to address those issues for our members. There is a minimum 10-hour break between shifts designed to eliminate the quick changeover—you know, the eight hours between shifts. In the last agreement the parties agreed to introduce night shift recovery shifts. So, our members traditionally have worked a block of seven nights at night. They used to do a quick changeover and then two shifts and then go on to six days off. That quick changeover is now a day off on pay to address those sorts of fatigue issues. Apart from ordinary overtime penalties, we have members in receipt of what is called commuted overtime allowance. That is rolled into their salary. They are now entitled to an additional penalty if they remain at work for longer than 12 hours or they are recalled without a 10-hour break and required to stay at work after they have completed 12 hours. They are in the EBA so they have been agreed with the employer, so I think they share some of our concerns about fatigue issues for police. Nevertheless, it remains a real issue and I am not sure sufficiently sophisticated fatigue tools nor are the resources in place to address it. So, if you have a particular instance it is more likely to affect, say, detectives than it is uniform members. So, you have worked your shift. Something happens. You pull someone in to be interviewed. You interview them for four hours. You charge them. You make some other inquiries. You get them before a magistrate the next morning for a remand hearing and miraculously you have now been at work for 22 hours when you are there doing the remand hearing. That will still happen from time to time. So, things are in place to try to provide deterrents for people just working because they can stay at work. But it is part and parcel of policing sometimes that they will end up doing those hours.

Police stations, at least all of the more modern ones, provide limited sleeping facilities for members particularly to address that issue about having to come to court the next morning. Being in a magistrate's court at 10 o'clock the next morning having finished at seven o'clock, they can at least have a nap and a shower and turn up in court presentable at 10 o'clock the next morning. So, that is an important part of managing that process as well. Most stations will have an instruction that says

if the person looks fatigued in those sorts of circumstances, they are responsible to arrange to get them home then members decline to have the lift anyway, because they want to get their car home as well. But some of those processes are in place. I think fatigue management is always going to be an issue in policing.

The CHAIRMAN: In critical incidents, particularly the Black Saturday where it went on for a long time, what systems are in place to manage that? Because that is not showing up in court, that is sort of a sustained thing over 24 hours —

Mr Kennedy: In the first day, I would say there were problems with fatigue management and with the welfare issues. We got reports of members who had been left on traffic points for 12 hours. In fact, an example we had up in Horsham was 12 hours—no-one came to check on them, no-one provided them with any water or anything. But that is the day of the initial response. After that, when the deployments were more focused on DVI work, the shifts became regulated for the members doing DVI work. So, all those chain-of-command systems were in place by then.

The CHAIRMAN: Are there systems in place—in WA the police use WebEOC. I cannot remember what the acronym is for the moment, but everyone logs in and they put their responses in and what they are doing and different issues and it all gets displayed live and someone in the operations centre —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is basically a running sheet, but it is shared amongst the agencies; that is all.

Mr Kennedy: No, there is no equivalent, but if they activate a police operations centre, whether it is done locally or statewide, someone will have responsibility for monitoring the deployments and how long people have been deployed for.

The CHAIRMAN: As you say, that takes a day or so to get up and running. What is your membership? WA, I think they are 98, 95 per cent.

Mr McKenzie: We would be very similar. It is about 98 per cent —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And you have broken in the new chief commissioner!

Mr McKenzie: We would like to think so; he is doing as he is told!

The CHAIRMAN: We will not repeat that!

Any particular lessons from Black Saturday?

Mr McKenzie: There are just a couple of notes I have here. I will be very brief. One is that our members say to us that having senior people on the ground very soon afterwards is a very important part. No doubt you have heard of the royal commission's inquiries and the then chief commissioner—suggestions that she did not do as much as she could have with regard to being at her post. Now we do not want to get into that. That is historic now. Nevertheless, lessons can still be learned from history and one of the lessons I think we have all learned here in Victoria is that you cannot underestimate the importance of senior police officers being on the ground, whether it be at the temporary mortuary, whether it be with the DVI teams, whether it be with people doing all the important work post-disaster and also involved in the follow-up for people who do fall off the bandwagon. We are not talking necessarily about, say, assistant commissioner level but inspector and superintendent level to follow up with their people. Sometimes we all have to make time to do that sort of work with the people who work for us. The second thing quite briefly again is that we are very pleased that the Western Australia Police union has appointed a welfare officer. We do not want to go bragging about this, but I think we were the first police union in Australia to appoint a welfare officer; our welfare officer has been on deck for some time and she is a particularly good one. It is terrific that the Western Australia Police union has done the same thing because our welfare officer and no doubt the welfare officer in Western Australia will work cooperatively with the police as the employer. As I pointed out at the outset of our discussion, whilst we may have all

sorts of disagreements with Victoria Police as the employer, when it comes to the welfare of our people we are generally on the same page. So, that is good to see.

The CHAIRMAN: Any role for politicians when things happen? When we were in Christchurch the local member there was quite involved.

Mr McKenzie: Yes, there is a role. What we said before about senior police applies equally to politicians because, once again, in the royal commission hearings the police minister was in Bendigo, which perhaps in the context of your geography in Western Australia is not a long way away. Nevertheless it is important that people like that need to be on the ground. So people like a police minister, for example, or a chief commissioner may not be doing much but they just need to be seen to be doing things.

The CHAIRMAN: It is just morale.

Mr McKenzie: That is right; it is a morale booster.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Bruce, in my electorate we had a little mini tornado. No-one was hurt, which was miraculous; five houses were destroyed in just 300 yards. But one of the comments that was made on the ground was they did not want to see “public figures” in the media aftermath of the thing, but a day and a half later once most of the stuff had been cleared and they were delighted to see us and the heads of whatever have you. I want to make it really clear that that is what you were intending when you said that.

Mr McKenzie: Yes, it is. Certainly there is no room for really senior people, whether they be politicians or whether they be senior police in our context, meddling at the time of a disaster or incident, but there is certainly plenty of time for that as the days follow on, particularly if there is some solutions to those issues that you have developed in your own mind that you can actually tell people about.

The CHAIRMAN: Gentlemen, is there any particular thing that we might have left out?

Mr McKenzie: No, you have been very generous with your time and listening to us.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank you very much again for coming and helping us with our information. We will send you a draft of the transcript for you to make any changes if there are any necessary. Thanks again for your time this morning.

Hearing concluded at 10.49 am
