

**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 BRISBANE
THURSDAY, 5 JULY 2012**

SESSION THREE

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 1.15 pm**HENDERSON, MR ANDREW**

**Assistant Commissioner, Queensland Police Service,
PO Box 1440,
Brisbane 4001, examined:**

ANDERSON, MR COLIN JAMES

**Director, Safety and Wellbeing, Queensland Police Service,
PO Box 1440,
Brisbane 4001, examined:**

GAVEL, MS EVE

**Manager, Employee Wellbeing, Queensland Police Service,
PO Box 4338,
St Lucia South 4067, examined:**

The CHAIRMAN: 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 the experience of trauma by workers and volunteers arising from disasters. I will introduce the committee: Albert Jacob is the deputy chair; Margaret Quirk, Tom Stephens and Ian Britza are committee members; and I am Tony O’Gorman, the chair. I think you have met David and Jovita. The committee may look to use the information it receives today as part of its deliberations for its final report. Before we start, have you any opening statements or comments you would like to make?

Mr Henderson: I might start. During the flood events and the cyclone events in Queensland I was involved in the disaster from a policing perspective, around the police operations centre from police headquarters regarding the police response. There was another headquarters set at Kedron, which was a whole-of-government response for the disaster management arrangements. That was my role in the particular floods. Mr Anderson and Eve here are obviously the practitioners of what you are examining today.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Could you just maybe tell us what the nature of your role was during the floods?

Mr Henderson: I am an assistant commissioner, and I have been an assistant commissioner since 2007. I spent four years in Cairns, where we had a lot of cyclones obviously every wet season. I was transferred back to Brisbane just before the floods in 2010. When the floods came I was, at that time, relieving at the metropolitan south region, and the commissioner directed me to assist at Kedron with Emergency Management Queensland. A set disaster coordination centre was set up there, and I was part of a senior team just to support the events throughout Queensland.

The CHAIRMAN: Eve, can you just give us a bit of a background on employee wellbeing in Queensland police?

Ms Gavel: Certainly. I manage the in-house psychology team for QPS, and there are 27 social workers and psychologists —psychologists predominantly—in the team. I am also involved in the policy development and management of the in-house psychology programs. Fairly shortly after the flooding events in Toowoomba I was out in the field with the team. I was also involved with colleagues based in central Queensland, with the flooding there, and I was working with colleagues who travelled to north Queensland for the cyclone.

The CHAIRMAN: Colin, you are the director of safety and wellbeing?

Mr Anderson: Yes. For the last 25 years I have worked in public and private sector organisations. I have always had a responsibility for oversight of either internal, external or hybrid models of employee assistance services. I have been with the Queensland police service for four years, and I have been teamed with Eve for three of those years in terms of developing our whole approach to the way we supporting and prevent mental health issues for our staff.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the total number of sworn personnel—uniformed officers, if you like?

Mr Henderson: About 11,000; sworn and unsworn, it would be 14,000 in total in the Queensland Police Service.

[1.20 pm]

Mr Anderson: It is approximately 14,600.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Goodness me—I thought we were over-policed! In terms of those who were either directly or indirectly involved in the floods, how many would have been deployed?

Mr Henderson: Well, 98% of the state was involved in the flood and the cyclones. Basically, every region's police were involved, except for south east, which is the Gold Coast area. We used a lot of those police; we rotated police in and out of the affected areas to relieve the stress on the police in the flood areas. At any given time, actually, we had about 600 police on stand-by to support whichever was the affected region at the time. There is one thing I did not tell you: just after the floods the commissioner directed me to have a small team, and it was a flood crisis review group. We did all the debriefs throughout Queensland; we also did like a suggestion box to our rank and file of any issues they thought had not been covered. Later on, if there is an opportunity, I can just give you some of the findings from that.

The CHAIRMAN: Can you tell us the role of the police during the flood?

Mr Henderson: Really it was the security and the safety of the community of Queensland. But the main role in regards to disaster is the preparation and planning; that is the most critical part prior to the event. In this case, the act had been changed and there had been a review conducted of the disaster act; in November 2010 the amendments were enacted, which gave the police a greater power in regards to the coordination of other government agencies. As a result, we were doing a lot of discussion exercises with Emergency Management Queensland as to what triggers would be occurring, from just prior to November right through up to the event. The boundaries of most police districts covered disaster areas—the local government areas—so the district executive officers, who mainly had the rank of senior sergeant, had the job of working with the local government to make sure that plans were in place in preparation for any event or disaster.

The CHAIRMAN: Our particular inquiry is concerned with the trauma that police and other emergency responders experience. Out of the floods, what were the two major issues you have learnt from? What were the two major issues that came up during and after the floods?

Mr Anderson: The single biggest learning for me, and I have managed external programs of support services and hybrids of both, was just the value of having people in place on the ground who understand the geography, understand the people, how policing organisations work, and know the personalities. These are our psychologists and social workers, who we call human services officers. They were on the ground within hours, and because they knew the environment, the people, the way the organisation works, they were able to, I suppose, just move seamlessly into the operational environment and immediately respond in effective and appropriate way. Whereas from advice from other agencies of government, they just did not have that capacity so there was no support and no information being gathered. We were very, very strong in that area for our people. By doing that, we were able to actually follow our policies, our education and our training to provide support when it was required, based on the presenting issues of individuals or groups of

individuals, and that continued then for the next 12 months. So there is value in having people who know people, know our environment and are available. I am aware of other government agencies that had external providers of services that just could not get those people, because of the nature of those people being self-employed and or committed to other employers. The environment also meant that external services would have required escorting to enable access to staff. This was additional complexities and resourcing that we didn't face. —

The CHAIRMAN: You have all your own psychologists in-house?

Mr Anderson: Yes, we do.

The CHAIRMAN: You do not use any external at all?

Mr Anderson: No, we do not. What we do have is recurrent funding that we make available to our HSO's to offer to members whom are assessed has requiring longer term counselling. Our HSO's refer people to their general practitioners and we will pay for external treatment services. Our internal people will only ever do short-term treatment; they will not ever be a primary treater for an employee. They will identify the issues and case-manage the issues, and sometimes that is referring to an external psychologist to do some intervention for whatever the particular presenting issues are. There is funding for that. Straight after the floods we engaged a company to provide free and confidential services to, particularly, our commissioned officer ranks, who, for a variety of reasons, do not want to use the internal psychologists. They could use internal psychologists, or they had the opportunity to go and access free and totally confidential counselling services externally; we set that up for them.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Eve, you said you had 27 psychologists and social workers; what is the break-up?

Ms Gavel: There are four social workers.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And the rest are all psychologists?

Ms Gavel: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: How many of those are clinical psychologists?

Ms Gavel: Two clinical psychologists and the remainder are general psychologists. There are a couple of org psyches in there as well, but they are all trained in the same approach.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Obviously we are looking more at the floods context here and the post-disaster, but given what the incidents police would deal with just day-to-day, week in, week out, and I suppose the cumulative effect of those as opposed to the disaster, did you find you had a particularly big spike in the disaster in terms of issues you were finding with your people? In some ways it may have even tracked down. What was the difference there from what you would face normally?

Ms Gavel: I would say no. We are still looking at our data from our screening, but certainly no peaks following that flooding incident.

Mr Anderson: In terms of indicators like WorkCover claims and that sort of stuff, I am aware that two members have lodged WorkCover claims for psychological conditions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Assistant Commissioner, you are obviously deploying police wherever they are needed, so again they are not working with normal colleagues sometimes or out of their comfort zone. Have you instituted any sort of tracking system so that you can identify on personnel records whether someone was involved in any of that work and maybe follow them up?

Mr Henderson: We had the rosters done up when we went to each region, so when police were returning from a region the HR managers of those regions knew their staff had been away to the floods, and we tracked it that way. As to preparation again, I believe that the culture for the Queensland Police Service has been, through our commissioner, fairly focused on welfare. As a

new assistant commissioner, when I first took up the role in 2007, the commissioner told me that there are about eight different things to keep my eye on, and one of them was the welfare of the troops. That is just the way the commissioner is. If somebody gets injured, he rings them or visits them in hospital, and that is just the way he is. If it was in my region in Cairns, if a police officer was injured and went to hospital, he would expect me to be at that hospital and make sure that the family is right and all that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Sure. But you have people who are just coming back; who is keeping an eye on them? I suppose that is what I am really asking.

Mr Henderson: The actual HR officers in those regions know which officers from their regions went and came back.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: But is that just a passive thing or are there some active phone calls or seeing them or emailing them or whatever?

Mr Henderson: We made sure that we captured who went, so that people knew and so that they would not be forgotten. That was the main idea.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Just on that, did you deploy police from other states as well?

Mr Henderson: Yes, we did; from Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What additional numbers did you deploy?

Mr Henderson: It would be about 125 in total.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Thanks.

Mr Henderson: I talked about planning before, and from a commander's point of view you plan ahead. Those people came from interstate and we worked in with the union to see what they wanted in accommodation and all those sorts of things, just to make sure, as best we could, that everything was as good as we could make it. Again, when we put people into the field, our union was making sure that we were not sort of driving them too hard and all that sort of stuff, and consultation was going on. But your remark was quite correct: in our feedback from some of the police, bringing strangers into a region presented some of the issues around having the right people for the right job. So we did try to identify the skill sets of who we were sending in.

Actually what we did discover was that a lot of people—this was discovered through HR—were volunteering to go because they really wanted to help because of the flood, but a number of people were volunteering who were actually on sick leave through stress-related incidents, and that was picked up through HR. So we were going through our list and they were going, “No, don't send those people; that is not going to be very healthy for them”, so those people were getting dropped off the list.

[1.30 pm]

Mr A.P. JACOB: Did you go the other way on that as well, and when Christchurch hit did you deploy officers from Queensland there?

Mr Henderson: I believe we did; they were specialists though. I was not involved with that, but they were most probably for disaster victim identification.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: I think some USAR people might go as well.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any stats or information about the level of stress and how many officers at particular times were off on stress?

Mr Anderson: Yes, we do. Psychological injury claims have fallen from 131 in 08/09 to 100 in 09/10 to 59 in 10/11.

The CHAIRMAN: So percentage-wise it is pretty low?

Mr Anderson: Sorry?

The CHAIRMAN: Percentage-wise it is pretty low?

Mr Anderson: Pretty low, yes at a time when our workforce has grown by at least 10% for the same time period.

The CHAIRMAN: Yes.

Mr Anderson: It is, but when you compare it with other government agencies, it is a higher rate per 100. I think it might equate to 1.6 or something or other, whereas a lot of the government agencies are less than one as a rate. It has continued to trend down; I think it might be at rate around 6 for the last year. A lot of those claims are for a whole multitude of things; certainly exposures to trauma and critical events are a feature of some of these, but there are a lot of other organisational and personal factors that contribute to those sorts of claims.

The CHAIRMAN: As well, with the tracking of people who went to the flood, you send officers out every day and they show up to vehicle accidents or suicides, murders—all those sorts of things; is there any tracking of particular officers, how many times they have shown up to, for example, children deaths?

Mr Anderson: If we could answer this question in two parts: firstly, the response for the officers who were exposed to the floods at Grantham and Toowoomba, which were very significant given the loss of life, search for bodies, finding of bodies and all the other issues—a massive of group of people in one event; and then the second part which is a new monitoring system. I will let Eve talk about our response from the flood, and then I will talk about our new system that we have just introduced that does track and monitor people who have had exposures to critical events.

Ms Gavel: Margaret, to come back to your question, we have nearly 700 peer support officers around the state. The human service officers manage the PSOs; they are checking on people who we know and we are concerned about. That happens seamlessly. After the flood we were careful not to get in the way of the work that was being done, particularly at Grantham and Murphys Creek, but we had contact with the commander and the officers there. We started providing education. Through our preparation in years before, we had trained people in psychological first aid and people knew that psychological first aid was our response. We had also started to promote the idea of having psychological health checks.

So when we went into Grantham we were able to draw on these messages. We provided general training; it might have been just in the Red Cross caravan or under an old shopfront, but we were giving people that information. We started screening at the appropriate time people we knew had been to multiple sites who, therefore, were potentially at greater risk; and those screenings happened again some months after the initial lot of screening. We also held barbecues and the like so that we could do group presentations and more screening. During that time we still had our peer support officers checking out people, and where there are concerns for a person, the PSO can elevate that to the HSO for professional intervention. That is a broad picture of what we were doing in the southern region for that particular event.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What training do the peer support officers receive?

Ms Gavel: We have had a strong association with David Forbes and his team at the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health. From 2009 onwards we started training our key support personnel—our PSOs, police chaplains—and obviously our human services officers who were trained first. That initial training was evaluated by ACPMH. It was geared to each of the specific roles, so there was training for PSOs, training for OICs and training for supervisors; and training for members came a little bit later. They have been trained in psychological first aid with material we developed with the ACPMH.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What is the length of training?

Ms Gavel: It is four hours of training in psych first aid. They also have foundation training to become PSOs, which is usually about four days, then they have to have regular supervision with the HSO. They are continually exposed to messages about how we look after our members, because of the follow up from members' exposures to critical incidents, so there is an ongoing training element.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Do PSOs get paid anything extra?

Ms Gavel: No, they do not.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Do you have any trouble getting people who are prepared to do it?

Ms Gavel: In some areas we do, particularly if we have had a vacancy for an HSO for some time, then things tend to unravel a little bit because they are not being managed assertively. You would still have people who are doing that sort of thing behind the scenes because they are that kind of person but, generally speaking, as I said, I think we have over 700 so we have a big group.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: We have talked about the impact of the floods, but quite often the inquiries that follow these things are just as traumatic for a lot of people in one way or another. Were there any people who were affected by that scrutiny?

Ms Gavel: I believe so. Our social worker in southern region, Heather Titmarsh, was working closely with people—communications room people—who were terribly stressed, not only during the incident but following with the inquiry.

Mr Anderson: We have some statistics on the first response that happened immediately after the floods—or during the floods, because they were still occurring. There were 367 members who actually received some of this psych first-aid training as the first intervention. We had follow-ups that occurred at three, six and 12-monthly intervals. We had 232 of those members line up again six months later for further sessions. Overall, 399 in total were contacted over a 12-month period, so there was that monitoring of that group of people. The assessments were done and people who were identified as needing further treatment on an individual basis got further treatment. But, overall, from my perspective now, some two years afterwards, in terms of whether we are seeing people now falling over in relation to that experience, we are not seeing it. We have seen two WorkCover claims. We are seeing people maintain themselves at work.

The response of the organisation is that they have gone through the inquiries; they have handed out awards and commendations and these sorts of things, which quite often can prompt some issues for people who feel that they may not have got the recognition they deserved. Whilst there have probably been some issues there, we are not seeing it yet. We have internal people—psychologists, social workers—who know so much more about the people who went through that event and they have strong relationships with, these people so if there are some signs in the years to come and someone is having some difficulty, it should be picked up. This is less likely to occur in an external service model.

The CHAIRMAN: Colin, you were going to answer the other part of that question.

[1.40 pm]

Mr Anderson: We did a survey of our police members two years ago, and out of that survey they identified that they would typically experience 12 critical incidents a year. These are things like child deaths, horrific homicides, fatalities in traffic accidents, child abuse—that sort of stuff. As an organisation, we have now developed an IT solution that basically alerts our HSO's of the occurrence of these events and allows the HSOs then, through the electronic case management system, to be able to inquire and to track and monitor people through what they put into the system; that is, if they want to follow-up and monitor someone. They also get access to the system in terms of someone's exposure to events that probably we would not class as a category A event, which is the most significant; it would be category B, of which there are thousands. It also gives our human

services officers access to how many of these category B-type events they are experiencing. Police can be exposed to a number of critical and disturbing events in a short space of time. This system , enables HSO's to be alerted to and inquire on and track their management of people. Psychological case management file notes are actually in the system, so that if we lose a human services officer—they get another job somewhere—someone else is able to come in and, obviously, with the right permissions of members they can access the previous psychologist's case note information. What is unique about a lot of public service front-line work, and the police are very much the case, is that our employees become our employees for life. Many of them do 40 years in our workforce and they can be exposed to a whole range of things with your typical life stressors—marriage, financial, divorce and those sorts of things—and the cumulative effect of working in our organisation, being exposed to these events, working in regional and remote locations, so it is important for us to have information relating to someone's negative experiences that they face in the job. This system, which is only just being rolled out right now for the first time, hopefully, will help us manage and support our people.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: It is unique, and I gather it is not in any other place that you are aware of.

Mr Anderson: I am not aware of anyone else having a system like it.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Are you going to be flogging it elsewhere?

Mr Anderson: It is available for any police jurisdiction.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Is it operational or are they still rolling it out?

Mr Anderson: We only just switched it on this Monday and we had 19 critical incidents pop up on one day of category A. There are going to be some bugs coming out in the system for sure, but it is operational.

Mr A.P. JACOB: What has the union's attitude been to this tracking system?

Mr Anderson: The union has concerns around confidentiality and privacy, and we are very, very conscious about that so everything we do is built around policies of privacy and confidentiality. Things only get released when the member gives permission for those—unless a member's health or safety is at risk, or other people's health and safety is at risk. There is some ongoing dialogue at the moment with the unions.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does the system have a name?

Mr Anderson: The critical incident database.

Ms Gavel: And we have a critical incident reporting system.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: CID—you have to work on that, I think.

The CHAIRMAN: So every critical incident is logged through your normal dispatch area.

Mr Anderson: It comes from a variety of places. We give members an opportunity to log a critical incident themselves. We give supervisors an opportunity. We can pick it up through the injury incident reporting system, which has WorkCover information, so an external agency can pump in and populate an incident; and we have our QPRIME, which is our Queensland Police Records and Information Management Exchange, which populates most incidents in the system.

The CHAIRMAN: Once that information is in there, can the psychologists get access to that and say that John Smith has been to 12 of these incidents?

Ms M.M. QUIRK: And, more importantly, they are alerted.

Ms Gavel: Yes. We have divided these incidents into A and B categories. The As are usually when a member is injured and the Bs are usually when it is a member of the public. We have so many that we have to organise the data somehow. The HSOs, generally speaking, would know this information anyway through emails, telephone calls, face-to-face and the like, but this is a way of

keeping a history of all this data and managing it more effectively. It is brand-new and we have to be able to shape the information over the next few weeks to make sure that we do not get too much noise, if you like, because there will be thousands and thousands of these each year.

Mr Henderson: In an operational context in a region, if an event is occurring—we had a gentleman jump off the Story Bridge with his child, which was in my region—the moment we knew that had happened, we got a list of every metro south officer who responded to that job and the HSO chaplain and peer support officers make contact; then the HSO takes over to monitor it. Every Monday we have what we call a human management meeting, I guess, with the assistant commissioner, the HR manager, the HSO and the chaplain and my operations coordinator, and we sit down and go through the list of the people we have known from the past who have issues to see how they are progressing, what we are doing with them and if there is anything else we can do. For us, from an operational point of view, it is making sure that we are not putting people who have been damaged or exposed to something, and if we are getting professional advice saying they should have just a rest and keep them doing intelligence work or something where they are not having contact with the community or the public, we do that. We monitor every week as it is going on as well, through the HSOs.

Mr Anderson: I think it is important to understand that in an organisation of 14,500 spread across regional and remote Queensland our best capacity to identify and prevent and manage the needs of our members is not through psychologists and social workers; it is through our 14,500 strong workforce, which includes 3,500 supervisors and our 700 PSOs. Our approach has been to say, “This is a leadership quality, a leadership responsibility. You have got responsibilities to help and support your members, your staff.” So, a lot of our policy systems, education and training, has been focused on those 3,500 supervisors and 700 peer support officers to get them to be able to identify and to take an interest and to refer on to a specialist if there is a need for that.

When it comes to trying to manage these critical incidents now that are going to come through, we do not have enough resources to manage those. But in terms of our specialist psychological/social worker resources, of which we have got 25 in the organisation full time—no-one will come close to us in other state policing jurisdictions with those resources—it is still nowhere near enough to manage that exposure. HSO’s will typically liaise with management and PSO’s and members in their areas, who know people and who work with them eight hours a day. They know when someone may not be functioning well. Together that is how they are able to identify and support and monitor people’s wellbeing.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you psychologically screen your recruits coming in?

Mr Anderson: Yes, we do. We have done that for quite a number of years and we have improved on that in the last two years with a more comprehensive range of testing. We also screen for higher risk areas as well. So, police who are already in the job who want to get into particular area to do with child protection, as an example, they are also screened and monitored a lot more closely than the general population of police. Recently, last year, we started to operationalise and roll out an ongoing psych monitoring program where psychologists are going and screening our police on a voluntary basis at this stage. They are focused on some of those higher risk areas. They will just take them through an annual screening using psychological instruments.

Ms Gavel: That is where that critical incident database, I hope, will come into its own, because we cannot attend to all of the incidents, but if we have got a list that the psychologists can look at, they can see a member’s history of exposure to events.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Do you have, maybe, just for our information, how you break down incidents and how you grade them through the database?

Ms Gavel: Yes, I can provide you with that.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Does Queensland Police have random alcohol drug testing?

Mr Anderson: Yes, we do.

Ms Gavel: Random alcohol.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Alcohol not drug?

Ms Gavel: Targeted drug.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Targeted drug, yes. If someone comes up on the screening as maybe being an abuser of alcohol or drugs of some description, is there any investigation or inquiry as to whether this abuse might be a symptom of post-traumatic stress; and, if so, what is done?

[1.50 pm]

Ms Gavel: Margaret, I believe what would happen, because the psychological assessment unit is quite new, but they would have their battery of tests. If an officer was honest about their substance misuse—they may underreport, but if substance misuse were to come up on a screen, then from the PAU there is a referral to the in-house HSO psychologist, who can then look at what is going on. We do have a specialist drug and alcohol adviser psychologist on the team.

Mr Henderson: I might stand corrected here, but when this was introduced with the drug and alcohol, it was pointed out to the rank and file that it was not part of the discipline process; it is more on the health side. So, if somebody was identified, it is about getting support to them as opposed to a discipline process.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Assistant Commissioner, you have presumably been a police officer for some years. Have you noticed a change in attitude for seeking assistance?

Mr Henderson: Certainly. We have a first year constable that has just been sworn in; we have an orientation day; they are all made aware—among other things—there are peer support officers. They have mentors, but in particular peer support officers, so they know who to go to if they are having any issues straight up. Over the years certainly, I think—I was just talking to Eve about it before. My first station was Mt Isa in the 1970s and it was fairly rough and ready out there, with a lot of industrial accidents and fatalities and all that. But, I think, for us it was more going to the pub and alcohol. Over the years—I am not a professional; I do not know if this is the case—a lot of police did have problems with alcohol and divorce rates and all that. All I know now is—I do not know if that has changed the levels—there is a raft of police who get support. We have police who present, not even from a critical incident scenario, but just present; they are stressed through their work environment. We have those options there where we can give them, I think, it is three —

Ms Gavel: That is the external early intervention treatment program.

Mr Henderson: It is just providing another level. The support is there. They know it is there and they use it. I know that a lot of things have happened. We have had the Fitzgerald inquiry and all those sorts of things, but the days of the old sergeant or whatever having a few beers out the back have disappeared. It is a lot more professional organisation now.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you have any idea how much this database cost you to set up?

Mr Anderson: It was all done by one person, a dot net programmer, internally. It took him about six weeks. He built our entire safety management system over the last two and a half years. I know what that costs; it is about \$160,000 a year. There are no recurrent ongoing costs.

The CHAIRMAN: What is the budget for safety and wellbeing?

Mr Anderson: The budget for safety and wellbeing is about \$4 million a year. That does not include the psychologists who work out in the regions that work to the regional budgets, but those 25 psychologists would probably be around \$2 million a year. I have got an \$80,000 a year budget for external referrals for treatment to other psychologists in the private sector. We also manage the drug and alcohol program and we have a budget there as well for hospitalisation treatments and psychology services for that as well.

The CHAIRMAN: That is not hugely expensive in comparison to your total budget.

Mr Anderson: The cost of one long-term stress claim in our premium is probably upwards of about \$120,000—one claim.

The CHAIRMAN: So have you done a cost —

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So you are saying it is a false economy not to do this?

Mr Anderson: That is right.

Ms Gavel: You have only got to stop one police officer from falling off the rails and we are close to a cost-neutral position for one of our staff.

Mr T.G. STEPHENS: You might have said this already, but in setting up this new system was it a consequence of a particular set of incidents?

Mr Anderson: No, it is just something that I have wanted to do for a long time because it is very common for police, years and years down the track, to be citing that they are having difficulties because of incidents they have been exposed to and treatment or support was not provided. There is a whole range of reasons that that could happen. I thought we have these employees for life—literally, 40 years working life. They are going to get exposed to a lot of critical incidents and other things. We have got professional people employed. They need to be aware, when people are being exposed, that they can get assistance and support where needed. What we expect to see is that a lot of police will say, “No, I have no need for your support. Thanks for checking in on me, but I have no need.”

The CHAIRMAN: You have mentioned a few times that you have got employees for life. Do you have any idea what the attrition rate is?

Mr Anderson: If you do not include people who retire because of their age—they have to go at 60 years of age; that is compulsory—the last stat I saw was about three per cent, which is very low compared to other government agencies, extremely low.

The CHAIRMAN: Do you know the comparison to other police jurisdictions?

Mr Anderson: No, I do not.

Ms Gavel: I was just going to make a small point. Margaret, I have been referring to a team of 27, culled to a team of 25. I have two relief staff in my local section who I can deploy to the South East Queensland regions when we are short staffed. So that is the discrepancy.

Mr Anderson: I think it is also important just to make the comment that hundreds and hundreds of police were affected with the floods at Toowoomba and Grantham, and only two or three of our psychologists were on the ground during that whole phase, which was adequate; that was enough to do the job. Simply, they had one or two psychologists in that area and we deployed one or two extra people in to support and assist.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Queensland Police has been praised, I think, for its efforts in terms of use of social media during the floods. Were officers allowed to participate in that? There is usually a bit of an issue if they do, but I wondered if it was relaxed a bit or what happened there.

Mr Henderson: Social media was fairly new to the organisation. It was just coming into the police service at that time. The use of it with the community just went through the roof—the number of hits on the webpage. When we looked through the debriefs, we learnt that police officers were using their own phones to find out what was happening, because in some remote areas with communications, it was helping them just to get an awareness of what was happening to their families back in Brisbane and all that. Through that situation, we have now worked out that is the way of the future in getting that message out—whatever the police message is—not only to the community but to our own people. We have a review on social media, mainly because we want to look at both sides of the coin; there are a lot of good things. From an operational point of view, we

are looking at some of the negatives, if there are any; we have just got to manage it. It was not through a planned thing. It was just something we learnt through the debriefs. The young fellas with their phones were finding out more about what was going on in Queensland than we were telling them. We are using the old hierarchical sort of system, but that is the way of the future.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: What else came out of the debriefs that might be of relevance to what we are looking at?

Mr Henderson: Across the state, things we did well, but there was a number of things. One was from the rank and file, the welfare side. Having the union and the welfare, they felt they were looked after. On the negative side, we try to work in teams on a team roster but that got broken up a bit having these outsiders. That was just how they felt; they would rather work with their people. We were trying to break them up a bit, because you had your local knowledge and then you had the outsiders coming in. So we were trying to get one for one. That was just an issue. That is how they felt.

We put a suggestion box out so it was anonymous, because at some of our debriefs we found people will not say what is in their heart. We put a suggestion box out. We got 250 suggestions coming in. They were all quite valid. The lessons we learnt from that, was the people who actually got upset were the ones who were not deployed. They felt they wanted to be part of it, get in and help and we did not pick that up. There was a bit of angst out there where people thought, “Well, I have got 20 years policing experience. You called in the New South Wales guys and you did not use me. I was at so and so. Why did you do that?” The reason was core business. We needed to keep things going in the state. That was part of our role. But we need to sort of get that out to people.

This was a citation for emergency services personnel in the floods and the cyclone. In the police that was not just given to the people who were in the floods and cyclones; it was given to all police whether they were working during that event or were back at some police station and were not involved. That is because if half their staff had been taken to the floods, they were trying to manage with half their staff. So they got an award for their part in that as well. That is how we try to get that message out. We just have to be aware that if people have put their hands up and for some reason you do not select them, they can feel a bit left out.

[2.00 pm]

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Even though it has been almost two years, roughly, did I hear you say there has not been anyone come out with trauma or any response so far?

Ms Gavel: Maybe three accepted claims.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: Is the glass half empty or half full in the sense that you think there is still a bit of time to go before you will be happy or at peace?

Mr Anderson: Absolutely. For a variety of reasons people can have trouble coming to terms with experiences during the floods. It may not appear now. It may appear in two or three or four or 10 years' time.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: We are dealing with a flood that is a natural disaster, but of course in your particular occupation your members are dealing with fatalities on a weekly basis at least, and I guess over time it is the same issue; you will not know whether disaster brings all those to the fore or whether it is the other way around.

Mr Anderson: The biggest moderator in my experience of 25 years dealing with child safety officers, corrective service officers and police officers is the organisation's response following this sort of occurrence. If members feel supported and understood, then that is a major moderator to them maintaining good health.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: There is an observation—this may be unfair, so I will be happy to be corrected—that the families of those in the police force really take a beating and that marriages and

relationships take a real hit. Did the disaster have a big effect in that regard? When we went to New York we were told—I should not laugh because it is not funny, but it is funny in a sense—that the disaster brought out the worst. I remember one incident in which five women tried to claim the one husband. Disaster often exposes skeletons in people's lives, especially among those who are working in this field all the time. That is why I asked the question.

The CHAIRMAN: I am not sure whether you keep stats on this, but has there been an increase in domestic violence or marriage breakups?

Mr Anderson: If our HSO from Toowoomba was here today, she would be able to answer your questions in relation to some of those issues. From where we sit, no, I do not think I am aware of any.

Ms Gavel: It is very difficult with those sorts of lag indicators to say what the causes are, so we need to be careful. But Heather possibly could provide a comment.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: That statistic was important. We did go to what some would say was a narrow-focused seminar, because it was women only. But it was still important to hear their story, because during the bushfires in Victoria the rate of domestic violence was really high. It was a real shock. I think the figure quoted was 300%. I am not sure whether that is absolutely right, but the figure was really surprising to us.

Mr Henderson: Was that in the community or in the agency?

Mr I.M. BRITZA: No, among the members. They were heroes during the day because they were saving people's lives and then they went home and just —

The CHAIRMAN: Colin, you mentioned that you have the internal workforce providers. Have you done a cost-benefit analysis as to whether it is better to have internal or external providers?

Mr Anderson: I have not. But I can get an external provider very cheap. I have done that in other government agencies. You pay for what you get in this game—there is no doubt about it. With an internal service, you have people who are very focused and who are focused only on the internal service provision. When you start to deal with external providers who subcontract out to other people all over the place, particularly when you have to cover a state like Queensland, you never have your own employees supporting an organisation. It will all be subcontracted out. They are all running businesses, they all have their own families and their own priorities. The quality of work and the quality assurance around that and the intelligence you lose that you contract away. If I have to down the track because of budgetary reasons, I will look at it. But the intelligence stays internally and that is very, very important information. It is about credibility with the membership, developing relationships, understanding issues, understanding the organisation and what you can do to support and assist a person. If you are just getting a third party external to the organisation, their value-add is not as strong.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Culturally, particularly with an organisation like police, I imagine members would not be as accepting or trusting of it either.

Mr Anderson: I think so, in large part; there would be some that would probably prefer that.

Mr A.P. JACOB: Have you looked at the option of either/or. That is what we had in a submission from another jurisdiction because every individual is different. Some would prefer the peer-support model and would prefer to offload to somebody who has done police work for a few years longer, but some would prefer the external option. Have you looked at providing that as an option?

Mr Anderson: Not in this current agency, but I have in other agencies. In this agency, Queensland Police, we did provide that option. As an example, following the floods we gave 60-odd commissioned officers the choice of going externally or internally. We know that no-one took up either option internally or externally.

Ms Gavel: We do not know internally.

Mr Anderson: True; we do not know internally. We know externally that no-one took it up because I have not had to pay any bills.

Ms Gavel: And we have the EITP, so we do have a small external service.

Mr A.P. JACOB: If a person leaves the force and then has to deal with accumulative effects later on, are services provided to ex-servicemen?

Mr Anderson: It would probably be looked at on a case-by-case basis if we were to become aware of it, but we really have no system of becoming aware of it. I have had the odd occasion whereby the son or daughter of a man who used to work for us 20 years ago has contacted us because their father is having incredible problems with alcohol abuse and all the rest of it. They have sought support of whatever services could be offered. It depends on the situation and where the person is located. The issue, because we were prepared to provide some support for that particular case, is whether the ex-member is interested in support. When I spoke to the daughter, she said her father would not be interested.

The CHAIRMAN: You have a pretty low attrition rate. How many people do you medically retire?

Mr Anderson: I have these figures going back many years. It is not high. I will get them to the committee.

The CHAIRMAN: It would be good to get those.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: You mentioned that your area was only set up relatively recently.

Ms Gavel: It has been 20 years.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Is something new happening?

Mr Anderson: That was my comment. I have been on board for four years. Eve has been on board for three years. What we have done with the programs and the resources is gone back almost to a blank canvass. We have looked at what is our policy in this area and whether it is built on an evidence basis.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: So you rejigged rather than anything else.

Ms Gavel: Yes.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: There was the Doherty case in New South Wales a couple of years ago. Has that informed how you have gone about your business? Has it had any impact?

Ms Gavel: We are certainly very aware of Doherty and the issue of repeated exposure. Our policy clearly states that we are concerned about the risk of accumulated exposures. We are guided by the ACPMH guidelines on that matter. With our critical incident data base we will be in a better position to look over someone's career span to look at those incidents.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: The military obviously has a bit of expertise in this area.

Ms Gavel: That is right.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: Have you had much contact or liaison with it?

[2.10 pm]

Ms Gavel: I benchmarked with the military prior to writing our policy. The Northern Territory police were using the A/B demarcation of critical incidents. I liaised with the ADF shortly after the floods. That is where I got the psych screens that we used in Toowoomba. It was very generous of the military to provide those.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: When you are recruiting officers, are they given any kind of psychological or wellbeing test? If so, how long has that been happening?

Mr Anderson: They go through a screening processes.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: How long has that been going on?

Mr Anderson: Many, many years. It has been renewed in terms of the battery tests that they use.

Ms M.M. QUIRK: That is the issue—whether they are getting any sort of—part of the psychological testing is whether there is anything about a predisposition to stress.

Ms Gavel: In terms of our new recruits, if they have had a psychiatric diagnosis or condition for two years prior to joining, they would not be eligible to become a recruit. Our in-house employee assistance service has been around for 21 years. It is very old and has had a lot of time to learn and to adjust to, for example, the change in critical incidence stress debriefing to psych first aid.

The CHAIRMAN: Is there anything else about your system that you think is important?

Mr Anderson: I think it is important to mention that Queensland Police also invests in chaplaincy services. We have 10 full-time chaplains across our eight regions and two commands. They perform a range of services. They are also a useful and accepted resource for members to turn to with their broad range of issues whether they be marital, spiritual, organisational et cetera.

Ms Gavel: They assisted with death notices in southern Toowoomba. They accompanied the police who went to homes to advise families of those who had been killed.

Mr Anderson: Another important feature of the internal service is the credibility of having people who have been at events. Experience helps the relationships and the nature that someone is going to seek your services and field resources. That is a difficult thing for external people.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: I am not aware that anyone else has raised the idea of a chaplain going to a particular incident, but not every incident. Many years ago I spent a day with forensic photographers. I cannot remember what their title was. I spent the day with them dealing with issues in my former field. In the afternoon they had to go out because a baby had died. The mother had rolled over and suffocated her baby. Because I was a pastor at the time, I was given permission to attend the home to counsel the couple while the police did their work. I have just realised now how crucial it was to have someone on site dealing with the family so that the police could do their work.

Mr Henderson: That is exactly right. When I was in Cairns there was a bus crash on a range up there. There were a number of fatalities and many injured people. We took the chaplain with us, who was prepared to go. He rounded up the survivors and looked after them. The police were then able to deal with the accident. That extra bit of stress of having the family there and all the emotions involved was taken away from the police and they were able to get on with their business. The chaplain managed that part of it. It was great asset.

Mr I.M. BRITZA: It is good to see that their role is supported.

The CHAIRMAN: I think we are all exhausted. I thank you all for coming in and giving us the benefit of your experience. We will send you a draft of the transcript. Please make any corrections that you need to make and send them back to us. Thanks very much for your time.

The WITNESSES: Thank you.

Hearing concluded at 2.14 pm
