

# CORRECTED VERSION

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE AND OUTER SUBURBAN/INTERFACE SERVICES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Marine Rescue Services in Victoria

Lakes Entrance — 8 April 2014

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#### Witness

Victoria State Emergency Service.

Mr Jamie Twidale, Regional Manager, Gippsland Region (East)

**The CHAIR** — Good afternoon. The Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee of the Parliament of Victoria is an all-party parliamentary committee, and we are hearing evidence today on the inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. All evidence taken today will have parliamentary privilege, but any comments that you make outside this meeting will not be protected by the same privilege. Please state your full name, your address and whether you are appearing on behalf of an organisation.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Stephen Jamie Twidale. [REDACTED] I am appearing on behalf of the Victoria State Emergency Service.

**The CHAIR** — The evidence that you give today will become part of a public document. I invite you to proceed with your oral submission.

**Mr TWIDALE** — No worries. I have been with the State Emergency Service for just on seven months now. Before that I was with the Queensland State Emergency Service, and before that the military, where I had a little bit of background in marine.

**The CHAIR** — What part of the military?

**Mr TWIDALE** — In the engineer corps, so I had a little bit to do with watercraft operation and boating and so forth at various times.

**The CHAIR** — Is that army?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Yes, it is. My role here is as regional manager for east region, which is Gippsland, which pretty much goes from Warragul all the way through to Mallacoota and down to Wilsons Promontory. I believe you have already read the submission from the SES, and I will not go through that. However, I would like to highlight a couple of things.

Across the east region itself there are 19 vessels. One of those is an offshore unit at Inverloch, which has an offshore-capable craft, and the rest are generally inland-type watercraft. The unit at Mallacoota also has an arrangement with Surf Life Saving, and they do a little bit of cross-crewing, generally once again in very closed, closer-to-shore kinds of waterways.

In the last three years we have had 227 requests for assistance from the police, and while these are all AMSA related, a number of them obviously relate to missing persons, so they are searches for individuals and so forth. They are not necessarily always about marine craft. Since July last year we have received 61 requests, and a lot of those, again, related to land searches, water searches, inland waterways and the occasional offshore one at Inverloch.

**Mr RONALDS** — So that is just marine?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct; marine in the context of anywhere on water such as waterways, rivers, close to the shore and offshore.

A couple of examples from those: we had two events near Erica, which is north of Moe, in the countryside up there, which were for missing hikers along the river, and a missing kayaker. We had three events near Mallacoota, which is all the way over in the east, for a capsized vessel at a place — I will not be able to pronounce it, but I will give it a go — called Karbeethong; I think I have pronounced that correctly.

**Mr RONALDS** — We will believe you if you say it with confidence.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Yes. That was, once again, a boat that came adrift near the moorings, near the Mallacoota unit, which is right on the edge of the ocean. We had one search on Lake Wellington, which is near Sale, for a vessel that ran out of fuel, and we responded to help that particular vessel. At Inverloch, which is our offshore capability unit, since July last year we have had five offshore events such as searches or to assist the police.

Those are the key areas, just to give a bit of context around where east region Gippsland fits into the larger area. I am happy to go into any of those in more detail if you wish or more than happy to leave it there.

**The CHAIR** — Is that the extent of your submission?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I have got more notes here to clarify some of those individual instances, if you want them, but that is the overview of the higher level that I gave.

**The CHAIR** — I would be interested in the five callouts at Inverloch. Is there a consistency in that?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Regarding the exact detail of those generally, Inverloch is different from all our other units in that Inverloch is our only offshore-capable or endorsed unit. All our other units are all inshore or what we call enclosed waters, which is close to the shore. Inverloch jobs could go out as far as they need to, very similar to the Coast Guard. They support the water police a lot. Those jobs are almost always offshore, quite some distance, like fishermen, lost divers, craft that have by missing and those sorts of things. I will just have a look at my notes to see if I have got anything on the detail. No, I only have detail on those five, but I can get those if you wish.

**The CHAIR** — I am interested to know with somewhere like Inverloch whether there was any consistency in what has occurred and why it has occurred and whether there is something else operating there that is causing that to happen.

**Mr TWIDALE** — As in, why there are so many searches?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr TWIDALE** — That I could not comment on; I do not know. There are millions of reasons why searches could happen, and I do not know whether it is the individual circumstances or whether or not there is a trend that goes around lost fishermen or adrift craft or any of those. I would have to do a fair bit of research to really answer that question.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. You have been in your role for seven months.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct.

**The CHAIR** — And you are replacing somebody else.

**Mr TWIDALE** — I replaced Clint Saarinen, who was the regional manager for I think three years before that.

**The CHAIR** — And what are your responsibilities, more precisely?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I am ultimately responsible on behalf of the chief officer for all units in Gippsland, so that is the 26 volunteer units.

**The CHAIR** — Over all areas?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Over all areas within Gippsland.

**The CHAIR** — Performance?

**Mr TWIDALE** — The whole lot, so operational performance.

**The CHAIR** — If something goes wrong, you are in trouble.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct. SES, in addition to doing the response roles around searches, rescues and so forth, also have the control roles around floods, storm, earthquake and tsunami.

**The CHAIR** — So they are all your fault as well.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct, and in more recent times there has been a lot of support around fires as well, so it is fairly busy.

**The CHAIR** — Of course. Are the demarcation lines between services clear?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I think they are clear. As we get more and more into a multi-agency, all-hazards kind of approach, there is a possibility for them to become blurred, but I think that just comes back to communication and exercising.

**Mr RONALDS** — But there are places where you have got vessels alongside other agencies; is that correct?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct, in a lot of places.

**Mr RONALDS** — And how do you feel about talk about a one branded state — and I mention that it is only talk — office, like has been happening in New South Wales? What are your thoughts about that?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I am not really across the idea of what New South Wales has in their arrangements.

**Mr RONALDS** — Without going into detail, they basically have a single system for marine rescue. That is the best way to describe it now.

**Mr TWIDALE** — I think there is some logic around having a single dispatch and a single tasking system in Victoria, similar to what we do for road crash rescue.

**Mr RONALDS** — But does that largely go through Victoria Police at the moment?

**Mr TWIDALE** — The way that it works for everything else is that it goes through to ESTA. You call 000 or you call the 1300 number and it all goes to the same two buildings, and then it is dispatched from the same room. You might have a police call taker, or you might have an ambulance, or you might have a fire call taker, but it is the same process, it is the same computer-aided dispatch system, based on the closest responder. There would be logic to do that across the marine network as well. How you would do that and the logic behind how that would happen, would need a fair bit of work. I do not know if joining agencies is the answer, but definitely joining the dispatch and the operational tasking makes perfect sense.

**The CHAIR** — I am not fully convinced that the suggestions have incorporated SES into it anyway.

**Mr RONALDS** — Yes, I think you are right about that.

**The CHAIR** — I am not certain that was the suggestion, but in any case, your view would be that there is merit in looking at a singular dispatch system.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Most definitely. Just as recently as Friday — and I do not have the exact detail — there were a couple of divers down at Wilsons Promontory who became isolated. The police led the search.

**The CHAIR** — ‘Isolated’ is a nice word for ‘lost’.

**Mr TWIDALE** — The air rescue helicopter located them, and my understanding is that a dispatch of the police rescue craft from Paynesville was made, and yet Inverloch, which is a considerable number of hours closer, was not called at all. In the end they ended up winching them out by helicopter.

**Mr RONALDS** — Was the Inverloch vessel capable?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Yes. It is a very similar capability to Paynesville.

**The CHAIR** — You have no light to shed on the reason that may have happened?

**Mr TWIDALE** — We were not dispatched or called and were not brought into the system. I only got this briefing in the last couple of hours from my operations manager at Bairnsdale.

**The CHAIR** — Is there no system at the moment for all services to know that this has happened?

**Mr TWIDALE** — No. When you get a job through other services like, say, fire or police, when it goes through ESTA and the dispatch, it still requires that initial agency, if it is their lead, to actually request it. For example, if we have a land search, the police get the phone call, the police go, ‘We need SES assistance’ and they go back to ESTA. ESTA dispatches us.

**Mr RONALDS** — But if they decide they do not need SES assistance, then you do not know about it?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Then we do not get told.

**Mr RONALDS** — It is not dissimilar to what is happening in the marine area?

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct, so if the job is well within their capability and they can do it, then they do not need to tell other agencies.

**Mr RONALDS** — In the case of the lost divers, it could be that the police say, ‘We have got a large vessel’, which they do have now, that can get there in X amount of time and is better equipped than the Inverloch vessel; they could have done that.

**Mr TWIDALE** — It could well be, and that is why I am saying that I do not have the exact details. It could well be that the capability look was that ‘our craft is much faster’. But it also could well be that because there is no dispatch system and they are not quite sure where the different craft are, it may well be that it was not considered.

**The CHAIR** — Is that a gaping hole?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I do not know about a gaping hole.

**The CHAIR** — That services do not know where craft are?

**Mr TWIDALE** — The concept of some kind of computer-aided dispatch, everybody knowing where each agency is and what resources are available at a given time makes sense, and the lead agency then makes the call on which asset to deploy or request.

**The CHAIR** — Who would know where all of the assets are?

**Mr TWIDALE** — You would have to go to each agency. I imagine the water police would know.

**The CHAIR** — Would each agency know where all of their assets are?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I would say so.

**The CHAIR** — You would hope so.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Yes, I would be fairly confident they would.

**Mr RONALDS** — What asset is at Inverloch that should have gone out?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I could not give you the exact specification of the boat.

**The CHAIR** — It is not a test.

**Mr TWIDALE** — It is an offshore-capable rigid-hull craft. We have only got the two offshore-capable units in SES, one at Inverloch and one in the south-west of the state — the name will come to me.

**The CHAIR** — If the lead agency takes the call at the start, and let us assume they know where all their assets are, is it fair to say they may make an ill-informed call on who should do what and when simply because they do not have the visibility of the other agencies and their assets, and is that a regular thing?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I do not know if that is a regular thing, but it is a fair call. It could well be that an agency makes a decision based on what they know of their own assets and it is the right decision, but if they had known that there were other assets closer or nearby that were on station — —

**The CHAIR** — This is the part that confuses me a little bit. There is no current mechanism for them to know, other than maybe somebody individually who knows because of their own individual experience. There is no mechanism organised from an agency to let them know where other assets are from other agencies.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Everybody knows. There are documents. I think they are still in draft, but I have got a copy of it — it was in the back of the submission. Everyone knows where they are, but I will use the example of road crash rescue. In road crash rescue, at any given point in time you can call up ESTA and say, ‘Tell me what units are deployable right this second’. They will bring you up a list, because if you are not deployable, you have to notify and you have to put out a turnout notice; the computer system automatically goes ‘undeployable’ and goes to the next unit. The computer system keeps going bigger and bigger.

**The CHAIR** — It goes to the next best.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Whereas in watercraft at the moment, my understanding is everybody knows where the craft are. They have got maps, and it takes somebody to say, ‘Right, they’re the people I’m going to send, or those are the people I’m going to send’.

**Mr RONALDS** — But there is no two-way communication saying a boat in Inverloch is currently doing a job or not available for whatever reason.

**Mr TWIDALE** — No, not that I am aware of, and if Inverloch was turned out because they had got a request for police, then ESTA would know that craft had been deployed.

**Mr RONALDS** — But only if it was through the police? No, not now at all.

**Mr TWIDALE** — It would depend. If SES initiated a job, let us say we decided to send our craft out.

**Mr RONALDS** — From VicPol.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Then we have to call up ESTA to let them know and create a job, because they track where you are in and out, so people are tracking where you are.

**Mr RONALDS** — Have you got AIS on your boats?

**Mr TWIDALE** — I am not sure.

**The CHAIR** — Not with the rest of the marine industry though — ESTA do not track that.

**Mr TWIDALE** — I do not believe so, no.

**The CHAIR** — Which is consistent with the evidence we have had to date.

**Mr TWIDALE** — There are a couple of little bits I should probably have mentioned before. I want to clarify the difference between inland and offshore capability, and in particular for a flood agency during flood times. During a flood there could well be — and we saw this in Queensland — multiple people and houses requiring search and rescue.

**The CHAIR** — Do you mean the Toowoomba floods?

**Mr TWIDALE** — That is an example. I did a bit of time in Rockhampton, and that was often isolated. There were often times where evacuation was not really needed or warranted, but you would then have to go in and rescue people a few days down the track and get them out. In my opinion they would all fall under the concept of marine rescue even though they are on small boats.

**The CHAIR** — Even though this time it is the marine coming to you.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Correct, that is exactly right. While it is all the same to a point, there are distinct differences, and I do not think we could apply a single approach. When you get into a big flood, for example, the idea of having computer-aided dispatch and all that sort of stuff would not work, because you have to go to where the flood is, bring your boats to it and do your normal individual task management at the time until the flood is finished. You would bring in multiples of craft for a flood. If we had a big flood in Gippsland and lots of boats were needed, we would bring boats in from across the state and perhaps interstate to help us manage the workload.

There are distinct differences between an offshore-capable boat that is kitted, on a rack, good to go, with a well-trained crew that can go offshore, as opposed to a series of smaller craft that are used irregularly. It is still a well-trained crew but not necessarily trained to that high standard in offshore marine EPIRBs, offshore radios and all that other sort of stuff. There is a distinct difference. They are in the same bag, for want of a better term, but there are definitely differences in how we could apply a better approach across the whole way.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, certainly for coming in and giving us your time but also for the information you have provided and for shining the spotlight on some things on which we needed some more clarity and probably still do need some more clarity. On behalf of the committee, we are very grateful. Within the next couple of weeks you will receive a transcript of today's proceedings. Feel free to point out where you think there might have been some grammatical errors or suchlike, but please do not make any changes to the substance of the document.

**Mr TWIDALE** — Will do.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much for being here.

**Witness withdrew.**