

# 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

Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club

Mr Matthew Twining, President

**The CHAIR** — Welcome to this hearing of the Economic Development, Infrastructure and Outer Suburban/Interface Services Committee. This is an all-party parliamentary committee which is hearing evidence today in its inquiry into marine rescue services in Victoria. Any evidence you give today will be protected by parliamentary privilege, but any comments you make outside this hearing will not have that same protection. Could you please state your full name and address and whether you are appearing on behalf of any organisation.

**Mr TWINING** — My name is Matthew James Twining, and I live at [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] I am the President of the Surf Lifesaving Club here in Lakes Entrance.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Any evidence you give today will become part of a public document, and you should be aware of that. I invite you now to give an oral submission.

**Mr TWINING** — I am not sure why I am here. We got notice a week ago to attend the meeting. We were given a document to read on behalf of Life Saving Victoria with no indication of what evidence we were going to be supplying at today's hearing. We had no notification that there would be a formal hearing, as such, so I apologise. I have been caught completely off guard.

**The CHAIR** — That is okay. Do not worry about it. That is fine. We can just have a chat, bearing in mind that it will become public and the evidence you are giving is evidence on behalf of this committee. Have you had the opportunity to read what we are doing, what the inquiry is about?

**Mr TWINING** — I have only read the Life Saving Victoria report and its recommendations that I was provided with. I have not been given documents other than that.

**The CHAIR** — Your opinion on things is important to us because you are on the ground; you are the real people. What we are doing is inquiring into marine rescue services, and clearly Life Saving Victoria has a significant role in that. What we probably want to ask you is whether you think that is being done well at the moment and whether you can think of any areas that need improvement in the way that Victoria runs its marine rescue.

**Mr TWINING** — I can only comment on behalf of our operations at the Lakes Entrance Surf Life Saving Club. Our role in search and rescue is quite limited and we are not very often called upon by the Gippsland water police, to assist. The services we provide are limited. We have restrictions so our overall role in search and rescue is quite limited.

**The CHAIR** — Could you describe what that is?

**Mr TWINING** — We can supply inflatable rescue craft at short notice to assist the Gippsland water police in conducting a search and rescue within the East Gippsland area.

**The CHAIR** — How often would that happen?

**Mr TWINING** — Not often at all — once every five years.

**The CHAIR** — Really?

**Mr TWINING** — Yes. It is very uncommon.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. What sort of craft do you provide?

**Mr TWINING** — We provide up to three 3.75-metre inflatable rescue craft with a 25-horsepower motor.

**The CHAIR** — Do you provide manpower at all?

**Mr TWINING** — We can, and we usually provide two crew: a driver and a crew per vessel. We can also provide staff for first aid and do land searches within our catchment of the patrolled area, the Ninety Mile Beach.

**The CHAIR** — Have you had personal experience of any of these rescues?

**Mr TWINING** — No.

**The CHAIR** — Do you know of any of them that have been conducted with your organisation involved?

**Mr TWINING** — Not in recent times.

**The CHAIR** — Do you know much about marine rescue and how it operates in Lakes Entrance?

**Mr TWINING** — Somewhat, and we only really know our role. We know that the Gippsland water police and the police are the overseeing body for search and rescue operations. We just follow their command and we can only provide resources in a limited area.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. From the perspective of your organisation and your role within that organisation, do marine rescues seem to operate efficiently and effectively throughout Lakes Entrance?

**Mr TWINING** — I do not know enough about everyone else's services to make a comment.

**The CHAIR** — Do you see that quite regularly there is a need for some sort of marine rescue, whether that be in Lakes Entrance or the surrounding districts? You have obviously observed that happening from time to time.

**Mr TWINING** — Not often, no. We only provide our services on Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays from the last weekend in November to the end of Easter. We are not there all the time, unlike the Coast Guard here at Lakes Entrance. They would be able to give you a better understanding.

**The CHAIR** — We have had plenty of evidence from them.

**Mr TWINING** — From the local Coast Guard, yes. Unfortunately we are not exposed to enough search and rescue events to make comment.

**The CHAIR** — Can you tell me what your role is within the organisation?

**Mr TWINING** — Yes. I am the club captain as well as the president of the surf lifesaving club. My role within a search and rescue event would be to communicate with our own club members and organise resources when called upon by the police.

**The CHAIR** — What does your club normally do? Can you give me an example of the kind of operations you would be involved in in your own club, in your own circumstances?

**Mr TWINING** — Is this in regard to search and rescue or day-to-day operations?

**The CHAIR** — No, in your organisation.

**Mr TWINING** — The surf lifesaving club provides volunteer patrols during Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays. The club also supplies lifeguards, who are employed by the state lifesaving authority, and they provide Monday to Friday paid patrols.

**The CHAIR** — And that is all year round?

**Mr TWINING** — No. From December to April there are volunteer patrols and between Boxing Day and Australia Day there are paid lifeguards working during the day.

**The CHAIR** — How many do you have in your club?

**Mr TWINING** — Members on the books?

**The CHAIR** — Yes.

**Mr TWINING** — We have 430, around that amount.

**The CHAIR** — In Lakes?

**Mr TWINING** — Yes, and probably about 100 operational members.

**The CHAIR** — That is a lot of people. Age bracket?

**Mr TWINING** — Variable with a significant age gap. We have a large nipper cohort as well, and most of the members — —

**The CHAIR** — So that does include the nippers?

**Mr TWINING** — That does include the nippers but the 100 operational staff are patrolling members. The rest are parents, associate members and life members, and the committee.

**The CHAIR** — What would be the most challenging part of your job — the organisation of all of those resources?

**Mr TWINING** — It is people management. That is certainly the most complicated task in any volunteer organisation. Managing your human resources is by far the biggest challenge.

**The CHAIR** — How old are you, mate?

**Mr TWINING** — I am 24.

**The CHAIR** — How long have you been doing this?

**Mr TWINING** — Ten years. I have been the president for one year and club captain for two.

**The CHAIR** — You certainly come across as having a very deep knowledge of what you do. It is really interesting. The motivation for people to be involved in the organisation and in the things your organisation participates in, what is that?

**Mr TWINING** — To give good service to the community.

**The CHAIR** — What motivates people to be involved though?

**Mr TWINING** — They learn a lot. In surf lifesaving you learn far more about first aid and rescues; you learn how to communicate with people; you learn how to be professional and act professionally. You learn all about politics, conflict and all of those other things. You learn life skills. The best things you get out of surf lifesaving are the life skills you learn.

**The CHAIR** — You are pretty good ad for your organisation.

**Mr TWINING** — I tried to be. I am not paid for it.

**The CHAIR** — Why are you involved?

**Mr TWINING** — For the same reasons — life skills. You see young children coming into surf lifesaving. When I say that I mean the 13-year-olds who start operational patrolling. They start young and they are often very scared, very timid and they often lack confidence. Most of them do. You see them come in at the age of 13 and then at the age of 17 or 18 they start going off to university, so our lifesavers become doctors, soldiers, paramedics, nurses. We have got about eight surf lifesavers who are doing the ambulance course down in Melbourne, which is just fantastic — we could resource our own ambulance service from the surf club in a few years time. You see them at the start, and then you end up being their references, and you are helping them get jobs and you are helping them get into university. To see them come so far in a short amount of time is very empowering. It is very rewarding, and it is certainly something that keeps you coming back every year — the development of the youth.

**The CHAIR** — One thing that you might have observed that you may be able to help the inquiry with is the operation and behaviour of jet skiers.

**Mr TWINING** — Yes. We often do not have a problem. We used to have a couple of issues with jet skiers coming too close to the area. We have got a policy in place for managing that, and the first thing that we do is just go out and say, 'Please keep your distance. There are people around, you are just riding a bit too hard for the area'. They get a verbal warning, and if they are repeat offenders, then we will write down their registration and call the Paynesville water police, who will then take over the matter — which is not something we have to do very often at all.

**The CHAIR** — Okay, that is interesting. Do you have a view on the fact that evidence we have received as the committee has sat has been that children as young as 12 years old can ride even the most powerful of those jet skis? Do you have a view on that?

**Mr TWINING** — No. Children as young as 12 can ride powerful motorbikes as well.

**The CHAIR** — No, these can legally do it.

**Mr TWINING** — No, I do not have a viewpoint on the matter.

**The CHAIR** — Okay. Is there any other evidence that you would like to provide to the committee?

**Mr TWINING** — No.

**The CHAIR** — All right. Matt, thank you very much for your time. I am sorry that you felt unprepared, that you were not given enough information before you appeared, but you have done very well. As I said earlier, I think you are a great advertisement for your organisation and the kind of people that it produces and certainly the kind of people that it attracts, so congratulations on that. Thank you again for being here. You will receive a transcript of today's proceedings within the next couple of weeks. Feel free to point out where you think there may be grammatical errors, but please do not make any alterations to the substance of the document.

**Mr TWINING** — Most grammatical errors will be from what I said. I understand. I have got a few questions though, if you do not mind.

**The CHAIR** — Very happy to answer.

**Mr TWINING** — I do not understand what the committee is about and why things are conducted under such a formal process.

**The CHAIR** — The inquiry is into a very serious matter, which is marine rescue and how that is operated throughout Victoria. Marine rescue, as you know, is a delicate balance of professionalism and volunteering, which is something that often raises some conflict. It also always raises the necessity to have resources, to be able to get grants and funding and to be able to make the circumstances as good as they possibly can be for the volunteers involved, but balancing that against the best circumstances for people who need the services. The committee of the Parliament, this committee, has been tasked with looking at that particular industry and working out whether there are overlaps, whether there are gaps in the system, whether the communications work well, whether more resources need to be put into that.

The reason it is conducted so formally is because what you are doing today is giving evidence basically on oath, which means that, if you tell lies during this, you can actually be in contempt of Parliament. That is really so that when people come they do their best to tell the truth and to give an accurate block of evidence, when they give it. Really the formality is about making sure that people understand that they are to give accurate answers to the best of their ability and to be honest in the evidence that they give. That is so when we produce our report based on the evidence given to us, after we have considered it, and we make recommendations, those recommendations really are in the best interests of the Victorian community and also the people who are serving the Victorian community. There is a necessity for it to be quite formal so that we make sure it is the best possible evidence that we can get and that we produce the best results we can for Victoria. It certainly can be overly stuffy, there is no doubt about that, but in the end it has been found to be the best way to get the evidence that we need for these reports. Have you got any other questions?

**Mr TWINING** — I will be honest. It was quite intimidating walking into the room and sitting down and having the ABC microphone placed next to me.

**The CHAIR** — Can I tell you then, if that is the case, that you have done extremely well, because you did not appear intimidated at all.

**Mr TWINING** — That is all right. As an ambo you have got to cover it up.

**The CHAIR** — No, you did very well. Certainly from my perspective you appeared to answer honestly and to the best of your ability in the areas you thought you knew the facts in, and in areas where you did not think

you knew the facts you just said so. I think that that is really to your credit, and I think you have done very well today.

**Mr TWINING** — Can we talk about the pay rise for the ambulance service now?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, of course we can.

**Mr TWINING** — Really?

**The CHAIR** — Yes, if you want to. Go for it.

**Mr TWINING** — No, I will let Fair Work Australia sort that out. It is under negotiation at the moment; I will not bring anything up.

**The CHAIR** — Sure, okay.

**Mr TWINING** — It would be good, though, but we would have to put all this away and have a beer, I think.

**The CHAIR** — We could do that too if you want to. Thanks very much for coming in, Matt.

**Committee adjourned.**