

**LAW REFORM, DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE**  
**Inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice,  
in Victoria**

**Ballarat — 18 November 2013**

Members

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Witnesses

Superintendent Andrew Allen, Divisional Commander, Ballarat Division, Western  
Region, Victoria Police.

**The CHAIR** — Good morning. Welcome to this public inquiry at Ballarat which the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee are investigating on the advice of parliament, an inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice, in Victoria.

Before we start the proceedings this morning I would like to acknowledge the member for Ballarat East, Geoff Howard, here with us today, and also thank you for the interest of the media, the Ballarat Courier and others that will come through the day.

To start with I would also like to welcome our first witness, Superintendent Andrew Allen, from the Ballarat region. Welcome, Superintendent, to this public hearing in Ballarat.

**Supt ALLEN** — Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you for your time. Superintendent, we have allotted three-quarters of an hour for this hearing.

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — The normal course is, if you wish, to provide a brief presentation to the committee in relation to the reference, and obviously your particular interest, and then we have a number of questions we would like to ask of you, both in relation to the presentation but pertinent to the inquiry itself.

**Supt ALLEN** — Certainly.

**The CHAIR** — Are you happy with that?

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes. Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Before you start, Superintendent, I will have to read you the conditions around which you will be presenting at this inquiry this morning. So, again, welcome to the public hearing of the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the Constitution Act 1975 and further subject to the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act 2003, the Defamation Act 2005 and, where applicable, the provisions of reciprocal legislation in other Australian states and territories. However, it is important that you note that any comments you make outside the hearing, including effective repetition of what you have said in evidence, may not be afforded such privilege. Have you received and read the guide for witnesses presenting evidence to parliamentary committees?

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**The CHAIR** — It is also important to note that any action which seeks to impede or hinder a witness or threaten a witness for the evidence they would give or have given may constitute and be punishable as contempt of parliament. We are recording the evidence and will provide a proof version of the Hansard transcript at the earliest opportunity so you can correct it as appropriate. I would now like to invite you to make a verbal submission and then we will ask questions as appropriate after. Thank you, Superintendent.

**Supt ALLEN** — Thank you, Mr Chairman, and thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present here today.

By way of brief background, I have been in my current position in charge of the Ballarat Division for six years and currently command a total of 289 sworn police across the division, which covers the local government areas of Ballarat, Pyrenees, Golden Plains, Moorabool and Hepburn. The division has two police service areas covering these LGAs, being Ballarat and Moorabool.

Just by way of the divisional profile, the divisional population is located predominantly in Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh, which also holds the only 24-hour police stations for the division. Services for policing after hours are provided by numerous 16-hour and one-member police stations. The policing landscape across this division provides a combination of density population policing

issues with the larger towns, as well as rural policing issues within the smaller communities. The community safety and satisfaction data in regard to division 3 is generally above the state average, and with regard to perception of safety and local police service delivery satisfaction.

I thought I might provide some commentary in relation to the terms of reference, starting with the first point of reference. Question 1, 'Is the use of methamphetamines, particularly 'ice' escalating in Ballarat? If so, why and why now?' From a practitioner and operational policing perspective, yes, it is seen to be definitely increasing. There has been a substantial increase in the last 18 months to two years and it would appear the extremely addictive nature of ice is catching and addicting people very quickly, more so than other drugs. Part of the problem is that people are using it as a recreational drug in place of cannabis. In the past these same people have likely smoked cannabis occasionally and they are now trying ice. They then find themselves heavily addicted within a week to two weeks of first trying it, establishing habits of up to \$300 a day, leading them into committing crime.

Question 2, 'It has been suggested to the Committee that in the past alcohol and cannabis rather than hard drugs, such as heroin, were the most likely drugs to be used in Ballarat. Is this the case and why have hard drugs been less likely to be used?' Alcohol and cannabis remain significant issues within the Ballarat community, and they are abused primarily for recreational purposes. It does lead to commission of crime across all areas and we see it transgressing across family violence, mental health, assaults—being public assaults—and volume crime.

Heroin, as we know, has probably been considered to be the harder drug and really only used in the domain of chronic long-term drug use in Ballarat. It is avoided by recreational drug users. Ice is now replacing that recreational drug area, with some significant consequences. We would suggest the impact on the community from ice use is far greater than heroin has ever been. The use is wider and the drug is not creating the same hesitancy or concern that makes people avoid heroin.

Young people—innocent young people—and other members of the community are happy to try ice. We do not know why, but it seems to be that addictive nature, and it would appear that it has taken over as the harder drug of choice. The reasons for this appear to be increased supply, ease of purchase, increasing purity levels, and the users believe that smoking ice is easier and safer than injecting heroin. It would appear that previous heavily addicted heroin addicts will try ice but then may return to heroin. Similarly, progression around the young adults attending nightclubs where ecstasy was previously available—they seem now to prefer sourcing ice—and we are finding that ice is more commonly used by people who are employed and in their mid-20s to mid-30s. A euphoric, confident feeling they get and sexual advantage appear to be the most likely causes for ice use by that cohort.

Question 3, 'How serious is the issue of crystal methamphetamine ('ice') use in Ballarat? Is it, as has been stated in some sections of the media, at "crisis" point or is this an exaggeration? How does this compare to the prevalence and harms caused by other drugs including alcohol?' We would suggest that the impact of ice and the addiction is equal to that of alcohol across the community. It is driving volume crime. By 'volume crime' we talk about theft from motor cars, theft of motor cars, even to property damage, and other local crime matters in regard to property and assaults. At the current time we believe that ice is causing significantly greater harm across the community than cannabis et cetera. We are also finding it is moving out to smaller regional areas outside the larger populace cities. We have not seen that before in regard to the volume and the addiction levels.

It is evident, that increase in—and we can talk about the volume crimes but extending to burglaries and assault and robbery, but we have not yet broken down as to the causation in each crime category. That is something that we probably are leading to to get a proper picture. Information that we are receiving through the community and police sources suggests that about 85 per cent of all that information currently relates to ice use, trafficking and addiction, and that is an increase that we are seeing over the past 18 months.

Question 4, 'To what extent does your experience show that poly drug use is a problem in the context of methamphetamine use? If so, what other drugs including alcohol are being taken in

association with methamphetamines? What are the consequences of this and what challenges does this present for police?'

We are finding significant use of the polydrug into the Ballarat police service area in particular. It is difficult to enforce because of the lack of legislation in that area, and that is something I may refer to later. The drug is available and purchased from adult shops and, of course, investigation is extremely difficult and complex. It is also difficult to track the quantities that are being sold through these outlets, and it would appear that this polydrug is a systemic step towards moving up into the area of methamphetamine.

Question 5, 'What types of problems/challenges do methamphetamines pose for law enforcement in Ballarat?'

We believe it is driving most of our crime categories, and trafficking now is seen by users to support their addiction, which is extremely quick from the point of first trying the drug, to getting into a significant habit. We are finding also that traffickers of ice are arming themselves with stolen and homemade firearms with significant frequency in the current environment. It is a significant problem across our division, as it is in other country areas, and we do, across the Western Region, compare our trends and firearm crime with each police division. It is interesting that in Ballarat over the last 18 months, whilst executing search warrants in relation to ice investigations, 25 firearms have been located. Twenty-three of those firearms were stolen in burglaries, and two of those were homemade.

We are seeing that people under the influence of ice are showing a greater propensity to violence and tend to resist police very early when confronted. They do display heightened levels of anxiety and paranoia. It also extends to the area of road trauma. We are seeing the use of ice in relation to driving on the roads and, whilst there is no specific data, we are seeing that trend increase and we are seeing drug offending, in particular with ice, giving those people overconfidence in their driving ability.

Question 6, 'Which crimes are most associated with the use (and supply) of methamphetamine and where are they occurring?' Again we are saying it is driving the boom in crime across the division, particularly from theft of motor cars and burglaries, and we have seen that rapidly increase in our data over the past 18 months, and some of the debriefing that we have been holding supports that.

Question 7, 'Are there particular groups that come to your attention that are at (high) risk from problematic methamphetamine use?' I have mentioned, and reiterate, vulnerable youth are certainly at risk; exposed. Those people on the fringes of the drug community are becoming addicts, and we are finding now that people known as tradies in the trade area who have never had any trouble with police in the past or convictions in the past are trying ice in the recreational sense and then become addicted, and we are certainly aware from a number of specific case studies that that has occurred.

Youth seem to be the highest risk group, with increased addictions causing long term effects to the addict personally—and then family and the broader community—leading to family violence, paranoia and anxiety. Current ice users are incorrectly reporting to arresting members that local ice supplies are being cut with poisonous cutting agents, which is the cause of skin irritations they are experiencing. It is most likely that the increased purity levels are causing the irritations, as ice naturally causes dry and itchy skin.

Question 8, 'Does Victoria Police work in partnership with other organisations in Ballarat to address the harms and challenges caused by methamphetamine use?' Our youth resource officers have been working extremely hard in this area, both in Ballarat and Bacchus Marsh. We have developed increasing partnerships with residential care facilitators, which have been assisting to identify issues immediately impacting upon these stakeholders.

We have partnerships established with DHS and out of home accommodation, hopefully aiming to minimise the exposure of young children to ice in regard to their DHS care principles. We also utilise the Victoria Police SupportLink program to refer those people that we find commencing an

addiction to ice and engage the local support agencies to support them, not just for methamphetamine use but other drugs of choice.

Question 9, 'It has been said that there are links between methamphetamine use and co morbid mental illness. What challenges does this pose for police?' Across front line policing we are encountering more and more ice affected people on a daily basis; calls for service; assist Ambulance Victoria et cetera, with calls to the accident and emergency areas of the hospital to assist with affected individuals. Again the paranoia has extended to those who are addicted to arm themselves to provide protection from other drug users who may seek to run through their premises, commit aggravated burglaries; to steal drugs, property or money.

There is a significant area in Ballarat of mental illness, as in a layer of mental illness due to ice, with paranoia being the initial problem. That, we have seen, flows on to assaults and aggravated burglaries. In relation to the data that we have recorded over mental health transfers—these are not specifically for ice but they are the figures for mental health transfers that we report on, called a section 10 under the Mental Health Act, where we have individuals assessed through the health service—in 2011 we had 112 transport cases, in 2012 we had 237—calendar year—and the projected figure for 2013 is around the same, about 234.

That then escalates to genuine risks to people working with these affected people. Emergency services workers are subject to assaults—police, ambulance, health workers and others—and of course there is a flow on effect. If there are assaults, there are matters to go through the court, there are matters to be taken care of into custody areas, or are they going to then be under the auspices of section 10 of the Mental Health Act? So there is a flow on effect which clearly has a greater impact on the community.

The increased usage is the intervention calls for service that we are required to attend, be it someone having an episode in a family situation, a neighbour or just out in the public, where we see individuals affected, but people believe in the first instance it is an alcohol issue. When police turn up, it is not an alcohol issue, it is something else. Decisions have to be made very quickly and an assessment made as to whether or not that is the case and how to treat that individual at that time.

We are seeing a trend emerging of people undergoing psychosis being directly conveyed to hospital by associates rather than calling an ambulance, and again that lack of involvement with police prevents us from probably getting the true picture, but we believe that there are some cases that are just delivered up to the hospital and then we might get a call to the A&E, with that particular individual having been privately transported causing an issue.

Question 10, 'What strategies should be put in place to best address the issue of methamphetamine abuse in regional communities such as Ballarat? What could the committee recommend in this respect?' One of the issues that we agree on and are working with stakeholders in relation to is to see increased education within schools and communities at risk. The early intervention process, like we have attempted to do for disadvantaged and disengaged youth, is certainly something that we are keen to pursue and work with our stakeholders on.

We are also involved in a lot of proactive community measures. We have run ice forums, both in Bacchus Marsh and in Ballarat, with our young people. There was significant interest in the ice forums in Bacchus Marsh, and we are onboard, as I say, with the Department of Human Services and the out of home care service providers. Of course we are trying to minimise the risk of long term recidivist offending in that regard. We do have our enforcement strategy but we also have the proactive and intervention strategy occurring, the success of which is probably too early to measure at this stage, but certainly it is a high priority across the division.

As the Victoria Police submission indicates, I certainly take note of that in regard to my submission and support that on the basis that it is not just a policing issue, it is a whole of community issue. We are certainly at the front line with other emergency services and so forth, but the engagement with our key stakeholders in the Ballarat area is positive and we are working particularly hard to enhance that and hopefully overcome the serious issue of ice addiction.

I think it will be a medium to long term effort but, as we have seen and as I saw when I was an investigator in the early eighties with the heroin flood and the addiction to heroin, it took some time to overcome but we did eventually get there. Let's hope for the sake of the whole community we can do that with this particular addiction period. Those are the matters I have to put to the committee.

**The CHAIR** — Thanks very much, Superintendent. If I could just start with a quick question, you did not talk much about the impact of ice users to any specific increases in domestic violence or in the home violence, and I just wanted to ask if you could perhaps refer to any data that you might have to indicate that. Secondly, could you give an opinion about whether you believe that there is more use of ice particularly—we are talking about crystal meth—in those who traditionally have not been drug users in the past, even for recreational use or long term drug use. Is this drug specifically more attractive to those sort of non core or non historical users of drugs—heroin, ecstasy, speed—in the past for recreational long term use?

**Supt ALLEN** — It seems to be that what we are finding is a preparedness to use it as a recreational type of drug, not so much leading on from other usage. The ease with which it can be obtained is the attraction and, further, the ease with which the addiction escalates. People have said, from those who have taken it, they go from zero to 100 in a very short space of time depending on purity. Using the tradies perhaps as an example, they have never been into drug use but are trying this. Whether that is to give them a boost to keep working longer hours, to heighten their ability after hours out in nightclubs and so forth, I think we are still putting the picture together, but it would appear that it is a recreational use of choice but the impact is not quite known until that addiction hits.

In relation to the family violence, I think we are seeing it. It is hard to quantify. I do not think we have a specific dataset that we can say an addiction to ice has caused this family violence incident. However, we know that it is interwoven with mental illness, with assaults, with family violence. So to try and unpack that and to get some semblance of the impact in families is still a bit difficult. That is probably a challenge for us, to move in that direction and try and get some data around that, but I think where we do lose out is if there is a family incident and the aggrieved family member does not want to call the police and there is a psychosis happening with the individual and that individual is taken directly by the family to the hospital or elsewhere for assessment. That is probably the missing piece that we do not have a true picture of at this time.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you. Mr Scheffer.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Thanks, Chair. Thank you for your presentation, Superintendent. At the outset of your presentation I was a bit distracted with some other things, so I might have missed this, so forgive me if I ask you to repeat what you have already said. Could you just tell us what the increase in drug offences in the Ballarat Division, Western Region has been over, say, the 2012-13 period.

**Supt ALLEN** — Okay. The actual detection of drug offences?

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Yes.

**Supt ALLEN** — We have seen an increase for possess and use by about 25 per cent. That is overall detected drug crime.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — What is that in numbers?

**Supt ALLEN** — I would be able to come back to you with the actual numbers on that.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Do you have a ballpark?

**Supt ALLEN** — I do not, and I am looking across for some prompting.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Okay. So this 25 per cent could be operating from a low base, for all we know.

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — You are talking illicit drugs at 25 per cent?

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — Do you have breakdowns of cannabis, heroin, cocaine, ice—

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes. We could obtain that. That would be corporate data that we could obtain in relation to those specific categories. The practitioner's submission to me is that the evidence is there that ice has been the greatest increase in that detected drug offences category.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — So you can provide us with that data?

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes, I can have those figures for the division provided.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — What I am particularly interested in, given that we now know—and you attested to this yourself—that polydrug use is a very common way of using drugs—

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**Mr SCHEFFER** — is how that is disaggregated when you put those figures together. I do not expect you to answer that now, but if you could include it in the data that you provide.

**Supt ALLEN** — Yes.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** — In terms of the profile of the crimes that are being committed, do you see any evidence of the different effects of, say, ice and other drugs to the types of crimes that may be committed? More specifically, are the types of crimes more related to supporting the habit as opposed to being under the influence of ice?

**Supt ALLEN** — I would say, yes, the effects are more so escalated, as in the addiction is escalated, and the propensity, the desire and the burning greed to commit crime is certainly there and has been noticed as the increase over 18 months, particularly in those volume crime categories. I think the aggressive and unpredictable nature of the effects of methamphetamine is clearly evident, inasmuch as in the division's last review we are looking at the numbers of increased assaults on police, as an example, and how many assaults would be attributable to that particular category of confrontation. I also think that the usage is probably driving the habit—that very quick consolidation of a habit—and then drives that person not only to commit crime but to probably onsell on behalf of traffickers, so it takes over their lives completely in some cases.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** — In terms of law enforcement, do you think there need to be any policy changes in relation to that in you being able to in fact do more in terms of policing?

**Supt ALLEN** — I think there are a couple of areas there. Certainly those areas have been part of discussions across the division for a little while.

**Mr CARROLL** — Thanks, Superintendent, for your presentation. In relation to the supply of the drug ice in Ballarat, do you think it is coming up from Melbourne or being manufactured right here in Ballarat?

**Supt ALLEN** — We believe it is being transported in, predominantly.

**Mr CARROLL** — Do you think, being transported in from Melbourne, it is being imported or the precursors are being imported and then being made in Melbourne and then transported up?

**Supt ALLEN** — I think we can only go as far as saying the source seems to be from the metropolitan area. As we have seen in other perhaps drug fields, those contacts and those transport arrangements and levels of trafficking are somehow networked between regional and metropolitan areas.

**Mr CARROLL** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Can I just ask, Superintendent whether there is an organisation here in Ballarat that is active in the distribution of ice locally. I refer to our reference in relation to organised crime and outlaw bikie clubs.

**Supt ALLEN** — We have no distinct evidence to support that, Mr Chair, at this time.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** — Could you elaborate a little bit more about the polydrug issue: how prevalent it is here in Ballarat and how much you see that link of grooming or getting people to step up into using ice.

**Supt ALLEN** — We have certainly seen the polydrug out there as, if you like, the stepping stone from perhaps cannabis into methamphetamine. We have had two armed robberies that I am aware of which were committed to steal, amongst other things, polydrugs. So in the scale of moving up into serious crime I would say it is significant.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** — What types of outlets are they being sold in?

**Supt ALLEN** — Mainly adult shops. There may be others, but adult shops predominantly.

**Mr SOUTHWICK** — Thank you.

**The CHAIR** — Any other questions? If not, thank you for your contribution this morning.

**Hearing suspended.**