

LAW REFORM, DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

**Inquiry into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice,
in Victoria**

Wodonga — 24 February 2014

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Detective Leading Senior Constable J. Bray, Wangaratta Criminal Investigation Unit,
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Detective Sergeant D. Loiterton, Wangaratta Divisional Tasking Unit, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR—Good morning, and welcome to this public hearing of the joint parliamentary committee of Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention. This is a joint parliamentary committee of the Parliament of Victoria and we are currently investigating an inquiry given to us by the parliament in relation to use and supply of methamphetamines, particularly ice, here in Victoria. This is one of seven regional inquiry meetings we are conducting during that inquiry and I welcome you all here this morning.

We have with us as our first witnesses at this hearing, Supt Paul O'Halloran, who is a superintendent divisional commander of the Eastern Region, Division 4 North-East, from Victoria Police, and Det. Ldg Snr Const. Jason Bray. Welcome to you both. Before we start I would also like to acknowledge we have the member for Benambra, Bill Tilley, here with us this morning. Good morning, Bill, and thank you for your time this morning.

Before you give evidence we have to read you the conditions under which you are providing evidence to this committee this morning. 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. It is important that you know that any comments you make outside the hearing, including effective repetition of what you said in evidence, may not be afforded such privilege. I understand you have read and received the guide for witnesses presenting evidence to parliamentary committees. I notice affirmative nods. 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 understand you do have a written submission which you are happy to table to the committee as part of their report.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Yes, I have.

The CHAIR—Thank you. We have allocated time to 10 o'clock this morning. I do not need to give you the background of this inquiry. I understand the executive has provided you with the reference and the details around the reference for the inquiry. On that basis I would like you now to make your submission to this committee.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Thank you, sir. Before I commence I think it would be helpful for the committee to get an understanding of the geographical and resources in the north-east, particularly my division, division 4, and then I will speak about specifics if that would be helpful. Currently my division covers a geographical area of some 17,621 square kilometres with a population of 125,987. The division comprises the Wangaratta PSA and Wodonga PSA, with the divisional headquarters at the Wangaratta Police Complex. There are two 24-hour police stations at Wangaratta and Wodonga, and 11 16-hour and 11 eight-hour police stations which cover those remote areas.

The division has its own criminal investigation units, divisional tasking units, sexual offences and child abuse investigations teams, family violence units, highway patrol, youth resource officers, crime prevention officers, and recently we have established a crime scene services unit, both at Wangaratta and Wodonga. Those specifically relate to crime, and crime issues, within the division. Additionally, the division transitioned into advancing investigation management on 1 September 2013. That restructured the approach to investigating crime across the division, which is in line with the state.

We have a full-time staff of 265.3, average age of 44.1 years, which is above the state average, and we have 10.8 unsworn staff. The priority rating system lists at the division the top 6 as being assault, family violence, property damage, road trauma, assault non-family violence, theft other and burglary residential.

In order to prepare myself for the committee I had an intelligence brief done by my staff to look at the current issues and it is quite clear that currently ice is impacting across this division, as it across the rest of the state. We have seen methamphetamine offences have increased by 600 per cent from 2009 to 2013. It is an average increase of 66.25 per cent. In 2009 there were 21 offences, whilst in 2013 there were 147 offences. Overall, drug offences have risen dramatically across the eastern region, and methamphetamine has shown a steady growth over the last five years.

Some of this, I would suggest, is in relation to obviously the increase of ice and usage of ice and amphetamine type substances. Some of it, I would suggest, is also about target of police operations which is actually focused on those types of offences and offenders. We have also seen a large amount of increase of intelligence, or what we would refer to as information reports in relation to ice specifically. Those information reports have increased of some 240 per cent since 2011, and specifically ice accounts for 86 per cent of the intelligence reports relating to drugs. It would be quite clear that there is a significant increase of ice and amphetamine type substances in the division.

Some of the impacts that I believe we are seeing in relation to not only the use and trafficking of ice are issues of associated offending, such as residential burglaries, aggravated burglaries, assaults and even family violence matters. We conduct what is known as offender debrief, which is common across the state, where we not only look at the actual standard offence that has been committed but we look at the drivers behind the offending. It is very important that we look at those opportunities where offender are taken into custody and spoken about not only the primary offence but what is leading to that type of offence.

It would be fair to say that we are in the early stages of offender debriefing but quite clearly there is a number of offenders who have been debriefed which would indicate the driver behind the offending is ice, and ice addiction or debts in relation to ice. Those offences, as I said, are generally property offences and burglaries. We should see that type of intelligence improving as we move forward. We are seeing youths, particularly in the 18- to 24-year-old group that are likely to be involved in use of methamphetamine and ice. However, there are older groups that we have come across in relation to some specific operations which Detective Senior Constable Bray can talk about, that older group that are actually trafficking and supply to these younger persons. That is the general picture at this stage and if you have any questions you would like—

The CHAIR—We might invite Detective Leading Senior Constable Bray to make some opening statements and then we will invite the committee to ask questions to you both.

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—From July last year through to around September I conducted a major drug investigation in the north-east of Victoria. It was in relation to a group of people who based themselves predominantly on the New South Wales side of the border, and they were responsible for sourcing large amounts of ice amphetamine, commercial quantities, a kilo at a time, and then they would distribute it amongst the street with the dealers in the north-east of Victoria. Their drug scale operation was also accompanied with extreme acts of violence. The violence was there to enforce that and also to eradicate any competition as such. There was an older gentleman that run that complex syndicate and there were 13 others below him that he controlled and that were responsible for the distribution side of things.

Over a six-month period we estimated there would have been upwards of \$4 million worth of amphetamine that was sourced and trafficked in our local community. I can discuss some problems that we had during the investigation with the syndicate based in New South Wales and the distribution and the trafficking and carrying in Victoria that posed some issues; in particular the way we attacked and investigated that, some legislation that we have in Victoria does not go hand in hand in New South Wales, particularly in regards to surveillance and some methods that were used there with electronic surveillance. We had some difficulties

there in how we attacked it and what sort of investigation we conducted.

We found that throughout the investigation the trafficking was not only limited to a lower class, struggling type class of person that we have probably seen in the past. There were some decent families that had their children involved in this type of illegal activity. Those families themselves were under enormous pressures. Their children were incurring substantial debts—\$20,000 \$30,000, \$40,000 debts that their children had incurred. In most cases those families had to bail their children out or else there were significant consequences. There were a number of arson attacks, serious assaults to enforce those debts. It affected a great amount of people within our community, a substantial impact locally.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Perhaps if I could go through some of the operations, a bit of a sense of what we have seen through some investigations if that would be helpful to the committee.

The CHAIR—Yes.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Apart from that major operation that Detective Bray spoke of, a divisional tasking was conducted—Operation Thoroughfare—in August of 2012 which targeted vehicles on the Hume Freeway. Intelligence would suggest that a large amount of drugs get trafficked along the Hume Freeway. We assist in relation to the interception of vehicles. This operation resulted in 170 vehicle checks, 200 people were checked, 52 drug tests conducted, eight people were processed in relation to drug offences, including trafficking and possession of methamphetamine and cannabis. It is a significant issue, and we know that Hume Highway goes through the heart of this policing area.

We have conducted a number of investigations, operations, into organised motorcycle gangs in this area again. Although the drugs that have been seized in the north-east have not been significant there is an issue of motorcycle runs that get conducted from interstate New South Wales and from Melbourne, again up and down the Hume Highway. It is a major path that they use when they do their runs. They generally occur from about this time of the year through till April. We also had a major cannabis investigation in this area, which is in March 2013, and that was a substantial cannabis crop which was 2.794 tonnes, 6,880 plants, and two offenders were processed in relation to that.

In August 2013, a male was found in possession of \$37,000 cash, 30 grams of ice and amphetamine type product. That was on the Hume Freeway. We had a firearms warrant which was conducted, a search in Wangaratta, semiautomatic handguns, 10 silencers, ammunition and a large assortment of firearm material. The target was a brother of a convicted drug trafficker. In September, in Harrierville, 25 cannabis plants and chemicals and one kilo of cannabis, drugs intercepted in Wangaratta, two offenders in a hire car. In September of 2013, 86 grams of ice, methamphetamine, 21 grams of GHB, and \$2,130 cash; another intercept on the Hume Freeway where 7.5 kilos of cannabis were seized, a man was arrested and sentenced to two years and \$10,000 fine. They were from Wagga Wagga. In Numurkah we have had a number of search warrants done up there where ice has been seized and \$17,000 cash on one occasion and then 28 grams of ice and \$19,000 cash on another occasion, and there has been a number of clan labs that have been discovered in and around that Moira Shire area as well.

While that seems quite concerning, and it is, however, I think it is part of a situation that I think is quite common across the state, not only in the north-east. I would like to add that in 2012 that I was operational support superintendent in the western region which covered obviously the area you would be quite familiar with, and I was based at Geelong. That was in about mid-2012 where we started to see the emergence of ice, I think. It really came onto the radar. I received advice from the intelligence manager who was receiving information that offenders who were committing serious and violent crimes, such as armed robbery and assault, were addicted to ice, and further intelligence at that stage from debriefs you could see that as an emerging issue. It really started to come onto the radar from my knowledge in mid-2012 and it certainly has escalated through that period of time.

The CHAIR—Can I open the batten in relation to questions. What you are telling us is what we have been hearing in many regional hearings we have had. We have been to Mildura down to Traralgon in East Gippsland, to Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, going to Warrnambool. We are starting to get a bit of a feel ourselves in relation to the social and health impact of this drug. If you read and believe the Border Mail it is almost an epidemic up here in Wodonga and Shepparton. That is why we are here because we know the prevalence has increased significantly in this region.

What we want to know—and I will allow the committee to phrase their own questions in this respect. We are due to table a report in parliament in August. We are due to make recommendations to the government to which they have to respond within six months. We need to find out now, given we know the extent of the problem, what measures the government needs to put in place in relation to law enforcement and harm minimisation. Detective Leading Senior Constable Bray talked about interstate problems associated with jurisdictions in how you do your work. My question is, given we know the problem and given we know the impacts, what can we do now in relation to strengthening our law enforcement to deal with the supply side but equally so provide some early intervention from the harm minimisation side. They are the areas we want to tackle.

What strengths and resources do we have to give police in relation to trying to stop the use, organised activity, whether it be bikie clubs, organised crime or general dealers, but also be able to decide the education process because as I said to someone yesterday, it still baffles me why someone that is young and intelligent would want to put chemicals in their body that knows it is going to harm them and possibly kill them, and whether we are not messaging that well enough. I would like to hear your thoughts on that.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Law enforcement solely is not the answer to this, like a number of issues. In my view it is a community problem, it is a social problem, it is a government problem, it is a policing problem across the state. In order to address that we need a multifaceted approach. Certainly education is a big one, particularly for youths at various levels and whether through schools or other networks we can educate our young people in relation to the risks, not only of putting those chemicals into their bodies but also the ongoing risks of serious offending, which I think Detective Leading Senior Constable Bray has indicated.

Certainly from the information I have received from my members across the division, better resourcing and health is required, that there is a holistic approach to both offenders and victims in relation to this, that we broke that cycle. I am led to believe that some of the health services are stretched in being able to cope with offenders and users of the drugs. You made it clear, and I agree, a multi-agency commitment both in Victoria and across border and nationally needs to be done. It is a matter of the whole country aligning properly in treating and amphetamine type substances.

I would suggest from a law enforcement perspective at the national, international, level—the AFP, together with their partners overseas—in intercepting drugs before they reach our country is extremely important. Obviously the trafficking of drugs around the country, they not only work in Victoria, they work nationally, certainly the resources from Crime Command need to assist in the regions to be able to come out and provide support when we are doing these investigations. In order to have lengthy, quality sentences given to these offenders you need to put a brief of evidence which articulates their culpability or level of offending. That requires extensive police resources. You need surveillance, you need electronic equipment which I will not publicly talk about, but all those resources are time-consuming, expensive and take a long time to run. To investigate one syndicate would take months if not years to do properly. That is a significant amount of resources. To apply those resources for such a long period of time would take you away from doing other things in the division. Additional support, and certainly with a rollout of additional police members, we need those to be deployed in relation to the drivers of crime and drug trafficking. There is not one simple

answer to this. It is not only a law enforcement issue.

Quite clearly we would be supporting significant and strong sentencing in relation to drug traffickers and drug trafficking of these matters. The important thing is breaking the cycle. It is clear that some people find themselves using drugs and then very quickly find themselves in a debt situation, and some of these people are coming from quite decent families. An education program, combined with a law enforcement and government agency support—it will take some work to get that done.

Mr SCHEFFER—Thank you for your presentations. I am interested in the area of poly drug use and particularly the use of alcohol and methamphetamines together. Recent witnesses have indicated to us that one of the benefits—if I could put that in inverted commas—of ice is that you can use that and it helps you drink more alcohol. The combination of being able to take in more alcohol and that being facilitated through the use of methamphetamines, that cocktail, as it were, can create the kind of violence, whereas previous to that, witnesses have generally said it is ice which is the primary cause of the violence and erratic behaviour. Can you throw any light on that? The people that you pick up and you deal with, is there that alcohol-methamphetamine combination?

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—It is exactly what you said, with the people we have spoken to and charged—and we always try and glean an understanding of why they do it and how and what effects they get—the response is they can take the drug, they can stay up for three, four days, whatever they choose, as long as they continue taking the drug, and with alcohol that is the effect in that they can drink as much alcohol as they like. The amphetamine has an effect and allows them to do that, and remain active for long periods of time.

In respect to the use of the main Sydney controller, I sat with him after he had been processed and charged and tried to glean an understanding how it all worked and why. He himself described it as an epidemic, he said that we have major problems and we have dropped the ball. He says—say if you compare it to cannabis, going back in the last decade, if you have a group of people at a house that are using cannabis, once they have used they are less likely to leave that house, less motivation, they will remain and probably do no harm to anyone, but the difference with ice amphetamine is that it is pretty much used in the same way as the cannabis user smokes. You can have a house there with, say, six individuals sitting at a table. One person will bring out a pipe and smoke amphetamine and it will get passed around. Now, there may be two or three children there, a good education and a good background, and have never touched it before, but it takes a strong child in amongst peer group pressure not to try it. He says himself he has never seen anyone that has not liked the drug and that it is highly addictive. He says the effects that it gives you, being capable of drinking as much as you like, going out for as long as you like, those effects are appealing to the young, the youth, and that is our battle, I think.

A lot of it does come back to education. I do not think there is enough known about it, especially amongst the youth. They have seen it on TV, they have seen it glamorised with some shows. It is also glamorised with people in the community, sports people are using it. They do not see the actual bad effects that it causes against these sports people. They see that they go to rehab, they are out two weeks later and all is fine. The education has to be there. School children have to be made aware of the bad effects.

Mr SCHEFFER—I am sorry to interrupt you, I am conscious of the time, but I put to you that we know that there is more harm from harmful alcohol consumption in the aggregate than there is from ice, even though ice causes huge harm to individuals. What I am driving at, is it reasonable to say that what the quantity of ice in the community is doing is actually enlarging the danger of alcohol which is why we are seeing a lot of reporting of violence in the streets that is described as alcohol-related, but that is kind of boosted or buoyed up by the quantities of methamphetamine. People are using it in a way to heighten the harm of alcohol.

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—I believe that is true. Alcohol has been around for a

long period of time now and while we have always had problems associated with alcohol I think the problem is a lot more significant now with violence and it obviously has got to be a bit more than just alcohol use. I think we can attribute that to drug use, amphetamine use. It makes people more active, yes.

The CHAIR—Is there another witness that wants to come to the table? I can see a couple of people behind me champing at the bit. I do invite you, if I wish to make a statement—bearing in mind we have limited time and I do want the committee to have the opportunity to ask questions. If there are police officers at the front that would like to make a contribution to this section, please feel free to come to the table.

Supt O'HALLORAN—If I could invite one member, Detective Sergeant Loiterton, to discuss that question of ice and alcohol which might add value.

The CHAIR—Yes.

Det. Sgt LOITERTON—Damian Loiterton, Wangaratta Divisional Tasking Unit. Speaking on that issue of licensed premises, speaking to licensees in the Wangaratta area specifically about ice and alcohol consumption as well. Ice, traditionally between \$60 and \$100 for a point of ice, and you go out to the pub and you buy a stubby or a Jim Beam can, you are looking at \$8 or \$9 a can or a stubby. A lot of it is, especially with MDMA and the pills as well for \$20 or \$30 and they give you that hit, and the alcohol consumption on most parts actually drops, and more sales in water and other drinks, rather than alcohol combined—that is just a licensee in Wangaratta I have spoken to about their alcohol sales after a certain period of time. You can obviously see people drinking water, and stuff like that, affected by those substances. It is a cheaper option.

The CHAIR—Thank you.

Mr SOUTHWICK—Superintendent, if I can come back to something you said earlier about Moira Shire has discovered a number of clan labs of late. Could you elaborate further in terms of the quantity of that. I am talking specifically—is it the type of thing that is more of a personal use, or do you think that activities in the clan labs locally are for local supply? If that is the case how much activity is manufactured locally, as opposed to coming in from outside of Albury and Wodonga?

Supt O'HALLORAN—I have limited intelligence around the extent at this stage, and I would have to be cautious as some of those matters would be before the courts. It would be fair to say that the manufacturing of those drugs is not only for personal use, and it is for profit. There is a combination of things that happened in relation to amphetamine type substances and ice. There are drugs that are imported from overseas, from Asia, and there are drugs that are manufactured across the country by various groups, and there are drugs that are manufactured locally. There is a combination. There is profit and there is money to be made. I do not have those specific details and that is something I could perhaps provide at some later stage.

Mr SOUTHWICK—Sure. Secondly, in terms of the cross-border, cross-jurisdictional activity, you mentioned that earlier.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Yes.

Mr SOUTHWICK—What could we be doing to ensure smoother operations when it comes to cross-border activity and in particular could you also maybe provide to the committee some information around unexplained wealth and any obvious signs of using the border for being able to purchase property and that type of thing.

Supt O'HALLORAN—I will ask another detective who works at the Wodonga area to give some evidence in relation to that shortly. In relation to cross-border issues it adds a

layer of complexity with all types of offending, but particularly with drug offending, with situations here where we have the primary offenders on one side of the border, and the impact is being felt on our side of the border. In relation to any of those operations, as has been said before, we have to do joint operations where we can with our New South Wales counterparts. There are complications in the law in relation to running control operations. There are complications in running surveillance teams both sides of the border, and there are complications in relation to retrieval of evidence from one side of the border to the other. For example, extraterritorial warrants have to be executed and offenders have to be extradited. We live in a federation and obviously they are additional barriers, that if we could look at some issues to make that smoother, would make our investigations, I would believe, a lot smoother, a lot quicker and a lot more efficient. I might ask, if I could, one of the detectives who works in that area, if the Chair would be willing to hear from that member.

The CHAIR—We would also like to home in on what Mr Southwick said in relation to unexplained wealth. Do you see that as an opportunity for legislation to—

Supt O'HALLORAN—Yes, I would. That particular question I would refer across to Detective Bray who has worked on these large investigations. But unexplained wealth, certainly, where people have accumulated large amounts of money, where there would be serious questions to be asked of how they have done that—and they have also been identified as drug traffickers in the drug business—any strengthening of that legislation would be helpful.

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—Nowadays you have a particular criminal who is very educated, he has been charged a number of times now, and he has an understanding of how we look at wealth and for that reason he is very disciplined in that he would never show any wealth. The people below him were never to buy new cars, never to buy big TVs, never to show any wealth whatsoever. He never banked the money, he always buried it in the ground. That goes for the drugs as well. Therein lies a problem that a lot of these criminals are educated in regards to our tools with wealth, surveillance. He knew that by locating himself in New South Wales and operating on this side of the border that it was another problem for us. He did mention to me that New South Wales had harsher penalties in the courts than what Victoria did have, part of the reason why he was located over there but operating here. In particular, concentrating on wealth is a good tool but I do not think it is going to be applicable to everyone, and probably not applicable to the more experienced criminal.

Mr SOUTHWICK—You said 'harsher penalty'. Could you elaborate on what that might be.

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—We see it in not only drugs but in a lot of other criminal offences in that offenders are more likely to get an immediate term of imprisonment on the New South Wales side than what they would be in Victoria.

Mr McCURDY—I want to touch on a point that Detective Bray spoke about in that ice appears to be infiltrating families of non-drug using history families. Do you see ice—for example, against marijuana or ecstasy, is it growing exponentially? Is it particularly different to what we have seen in the past?

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—I think the difficulties with a lot of families, it is a highly addictive drug and it is expensive. The way these syndicates operate nowadays is that it is not usually a cash for drug agreement, it is drug and pay later, and the debt is incurred quite quickly, a debt that these children cannot satisfy so they go into illegal activities, such as they traffic in drugs themselves, or will fall back on their families and ask for them to bail them out. They do not have that financial support from their families. They are finding that a lot of these people that would normally be involved in criminal activity will become drug traffickers, not so much burglars or dishonesty type related offending, it is more so they will use a drug and they will sell a bit themselves. That is what we are seeing most of.

Mr McCURDY—Is there an increase in violence, whether it is family violence or armed robberies or burglaries that are going on? Do you see any changes? We have heard throughout different parts—and not only regional Victoria—that this drug can have a far greater traumatic effect on people.

Det. Ldg Snr Const. BRAY—I see the significance with the drugs with your long-term career criminals. In the past they would take a drug, such as cannabis or some other drug, that would probably numb them and they would be less active. This type of drug, when they are taking this drug, they are able to stay awake for three, four days on end, they are a lot more active, and therefore when they are a lot more active they are offending a lot more. In the last year, for instance, we had a career criminal that I have known for probably 10 years. In the past he may go out and do a burglary or a break-in of some sort, once every week or two weeks, depending on what his circumstances are at the time. On this particular night he did upwards of 20 crimes. He did four aggravated burglaries, six burglaries, broke into 12 cars, and he says he was on ice that night and did not know what he was doing, but a lot more active. He was able to leave home and stay up all night. That is probably one of the greatest problems in that you have career criminals now taking this drug and becoming more active.

Supt O'HALLORAN—On that point, in my experience, earlier in my career, there was an epidemic of heroin and that habit led to do burglaries and armed robberies. The greater risk with ice and amphetamine type substances is the effect that that has. If they are using that at the time, as Detective Bray has said, they are a lot more agitated, active, they are full of poly drugs, and the other concern, not only in relation to that type of crime but road policing as well, we see an increase of testing of drivers and again detecting an increasing amount of amphetamine type substances in their body. You have, unfortunately, people with a cocktail of drugs in their system.

Mr SCHEFFER—Superintendent O'Halloran, in your opening remarks you talked about the way the Hume Highway was used as a conduit for the transporting of amphetamines.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Yes.

Mr SCHEFFER—You mentioned in one instance a hire car being used. Are these commercial vehicles being used? There were reports in the media—not in Victoria—of heavy transports being used for transporting of amphetamines in north-eastern Australia. I might be wrong on that. I thought I read that somewhere. I am wondering what kind of vehicles are used and what that says about the organisations behind the transportation of methamphetamines and other drugs.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Look, my understanding is that it is a variety of vehicles, depending on the circumstances of the offenders. If a truck is available and it can be used, that will be used. Often there are hire cars, particularly from the organised crime syndicates that will transport drugs up and down the highway, and it is individuals in cars. I would not be in a position to say that it significantly involves heavy vehicles, hire vehicles or private vehicles. I think there is a combination thereof. Again we can only go on the ones we have intercepted on, the ones we received intelligence on. It would be too difficult to draw an inference exactly how many vehicles and what type of vehicles. I would be suggesting it is a combination.

Det. Sgt LOITERTON—The ones we have dealt with in Wangaratta and surrounding are normal sedans out of a private rental company. Obviously when you talk about our CATCH program and stuff like that, it is something to look at, using cars along the Hume Freeway. Like I said, probably in the last three or four months, it has all been sedans. Like Detective Bray touched on before, younger people are being encouraged to go down, the car is hired for them and then utilised to drive the drugs back to the point of sale.

Supt O'HALLORAN—There would be a combination of all those types of vehicles, all those types of offenders and all those types of circumstances but needless to say being a major conduit between Sydney and Melbourne, obviously it is used.

Mr SOUTHWICK—I am wondering how active pharmacies are locally in monitoring pseudoephedrine sales and using Project STOP here as part of that.

Det. Sgt LOITERTON—We have utilised local pharmacies on quite a number of occasions where they have provided a starter from the drug sales from the pseudoephedrine sales. We are provided those probably on a three- to six-monthly basis, get a list of people. As yet we have had no result personally from Wangaratta's point of view as a review of the STOP data. Depending on the pharmacy as well, I do not think all pharmacies are part of the STOP project. There lies the problem if you have one or two pharmacies in the town who are a part of it, and you have four others that are not, there is no monitoring across the board.

Mr SOUTHWICK—Are you aware of how many are and how many are not a part of that program?

Det. Sgt LOITERTON—I am aware of two in Wangaratta that we deal with that we receive the STOP data from in Wangaratta alone, and Wangaratta has six pharmacies.

Supt O'HALLORAN—I have been advised that most of Wodonga are complying with that STOP program.

Mr McCURDY—In terms of drug testing drivers or individuals, how well positioned are we? In terms of resources of how much money, I am thinking more about technology, are we on the right track? Do we feel that the resources are available to us or do we still have a way to go?

Supt O'HALLORAN—I think we have the right technology but it is in relation to the testing, the kits and the availability of that. I think it is going to be an ever-increasing focus of Victoria Police to be in a position to be able to conduct those tests, given the evidence that more and more young people are using drugs—a combination of drug and alcohol. We need to be in a position—I think it is very important that we provide sufficient preliminary oral fluid tests and the machines that will support that. We run a number of operations up this way specifically around that. We ran a recent operation called Operation Strawberry Fields which covered an event over the border and we got a large number of hits of drug use.

To answer your question the technology is there, it is something that is coordinated centrally by Road Policing Command and I think we need to be resourced from our own highway patrols locally to be able to support that process.

Mr SCHEFFER—I have a quick one on the tail end of my previous question. You said on your way through that there were more pick-ups of drugs on the road between now and April. Why would you say that? Is that to do with cannabis crops or is that to do with methamphetamines.

Supt O'HALLORAN—I do not believe that it is because of April, that time of the year, there were more pick-ups, I think it was when those operations were conducted. Again sometimes these things can occur in relation to specific intelligence that would lead you to run an operation, or otherwise it could be a matter of police actively targeting—

Mr SCHEFFER—There is no seasonal thing?

Supt O'HALLORAN—No, there is no seasonal thing. One of the successful programs that has been spoken to is Operation CATCH where our highway patrol people are trained to look at indicators that may identify offenders by their behaviour. That is a level of training that assists in relation to looking at the indicators that might indicate some offending or criminal conduct. That has resulted in quite a number of successful seizures, not only of drugs but other things as well.

The CHAIR—Can I have a point of clarity. I came up late last night and caught the end of the Tony Mokbel story, and in part of that there were 20 litre liquid containers of pseudoephedrine. It was done on an organised basis. I think it came from Thailand, from memory. I am not clear yet, is there an organised group providing the supply and distribution of methamphetamine here in the Wodonga area, or is it small dealers, or is it the outlaw biker clubs that are particularly active? Who is in the space of distributing the drug? Was it individual dealers?

Supt O'HALLORAN—My understanding is it would be individual dealers. I do not have any evidence at all to say that there is an organised group supplying all the precursor chemicals to groups up here, I think it is a variety.

Det. Sgt LOITERTON—I would have to agree. We have come across the clan labs in Wangaratta alone, small amounts of pseudoephedrine. It was late last year, there were two clan labs. They were not operational but small amounts of pseudoephedrine. If you were looking at the Mokbel story last night, that was large quantities of pseudoephedrine coming out of the cities, either along the Hume Highway—Sydney, Melbourne. Like the superintendent said, there are no large quantities of pseudo that have been seized in the Wangaratta area.

The CHAIR—We are nearly out of time. It has been a most interesting segment. Can I thank all of you very much for providing evidence to this committee this morning. We do appreciate your time and your written submission, which I understand you are happy to table to the committee.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Yes.

The CHAIR—Thank you.

Supt O'HALLORAN—Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.