

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

Melbourne — 9 December 2013

Members

Mr B. Carroll
Mr T. McCurdy
Mr S. Ramsay

Mr J. Scheffer
Mr D. Southwick

Chair: Mr S. Ramsay
Deputy Chair: Mr J. Scheffer

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms S. Cook
Legal Research Officer: Mr P. Johnston

Witnesses

Ms S. Hunter, Chief Executive Officer, Crime Stoppers Victoria.

The CHAIR — I open the public hearing of the Law Reform, Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. I welcome Ms Sam Hunter, chief executive officer of Crime Stoppers to the hearing this afternoon. Thank you, Ms Hunter, for your time.

Ms HUNTER — Thank you.

The CHAIR — My name is Simon Ramsay; I am a state member for Western Victoria Region and chairman of this joint parliamentary committee. I ask the other members to introduce themselves.

Ms Hunter, we are here as part of a reference given to this committee to inquire into the supply and use of methamphetamines, particularly ice, in Victoria. We thank you for your time this afternoon. We have provided a time from 3.30 to 4.15 p.m. and then we have one other witness to finish the day, so we are working within those timeframes. Before we ask you to provide a verbal submission to the committee, I will just read you the conditions under which you are providing evidence to this hearing this afternoon.

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 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 to parliamentary committees?

Ms HUNTER — Yes, I have.

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. Thank you again for your time. We look forward to hearing your verbal submission in relation to this reference. Thank you.

Ms HUNTER — Thank you very much, Simon. I am Sam Hunter, CEO of Crime Stoppers Victoria, and I would like to thank the parliamentary inquiry for having us here today and for hearing our views on the subject of methamphetamines. I would just like to provide a bit of background for Crime Stoppers initially, if I could.

Crime Stoppers was established in 1987 as an independent, not-for-profit charitable organisation, and our mission is to provide the community with a suite of confidential reporting tools for those who, for various reasons, prefer not to deal directly with the police. We take reports from the community via telephone, online website reporting and through our iPhone app. We are the initiating agency of over one-third of all information reports that are submitted to Victoria Police, and in 2012–13 information supplied via Crime Stoppers led to over 1000 arrests. In a quick audit of our records before I came here today, over \$1.9 million in drugs were seized in one month alone in 2013 as a result of information provided confidentially to Crime Stoppers. In the first six months of 2013 in excess of \$6 million in drugs were seized as a result of calls. This alone demonstrates the importance of Crime Stoppers Victoria as a trusted, community intelligence-gathering organisation.

Our established, high brand recognition and large and growing number of reports and intelligence collection are attributed to our core community promise of confidentiality. Crime Stoppers believes that this is of importance to all members of the community but particularly relevant to small regional and rural communities where confidentiality is important to ensure ongoing social cohesion. We know from our recent experiences with bushfire arson across the state that regional and rural Victorians are good community citizens who do want to help and contribute to their communities. However, speaking to police can also lead to social isolation and exclusion, if one is

seen to be 'dobbing'. It can cause communities to fracture, and in the worst-case scenario it could lead to the people providing information being harmed.

Crime Stoppers provides a valuable tool to all community members who have information but do not wish to become known. All calls are confidential — we have no ability to trace calls. Callers are speaking with civilians, not with police officers, and all online reporting is encrypted so we cannot see the genesis of any of the information we receive. The trust in Crime Stoppers as a community organisation is one of the key tools to the success of Victoria Police in obtaining high-value intelligence in a regional and rural setting.

I am sure that the committee to date has heard from experts in the fields of law enforcement and the health sector in regard to the issues covered in the terms of reference, and Crime Stoppers is not an expert in either of these areas. We are, however, experts in engaging with the community to provide intelligence. Through this information we significantly impact on the supply and distribution of drugs. We understand that this supply chain often relates to organised crime, and the impact of the use of ice in regional and rural areas not only has the effect of contributing to crimes against the person and property but significantly fuels stolen firearms in a regional context.

In regard to community education and crime reporting, Crime Stoppers is well placed to assist in delivering crime prevention and crime detection tools and campaigns. We have a 26-year record of success in this type of work and we provide the only external, confidential conduit of information into Victoria Police.

I would like to now specifically address the terms of reference, point 1. Crime Stoppers is well placed to work with Victoria Police and the AFP on any intelligence collection strategies and campaigns that would be best implemented using a confidential reporting service which is encrypted to the highest level of security.

In regard to the terms of reference, point 2, Crime Stoppers Victoria is in close contact and collaboration with Crime Stoppers Queensland as they develop a state government-funded OMCG strategy which in part offers enhanced rewards for OMCG information leading to arrests and disbandment of gangs. The Crime Stoppers Dob in a Dealer campaign, which I will refer to later in my notes, actively adds to the disruption of OMCG drug distribution and activity.

On the terms of reference, point 3, I would like to speak briefly on the role of Crime Stoppers and its ability to respond to community and police concerns in relation to ice in a regional and rural context. I would like to refer to our Dob in a Dealer campaign and give you a brief on what we have done in regard to that. In February 2013 in Warrnambool Crime Stoppers launched an eight-day trial campaign called Dob in a Dealer. This simple print campaign consisted of posters displayed by local businesses and the local media printing our campaign call to action and providing editorial support and supporting this with radio interviews. This campaign yielded the following results: we received 48 information reports, which were passed on to Victoria Police; 81 per cent of those reports were drug related; one-fifth of the information reports supplied specifically mentioned the Dob in a Dealer campaign.

In an analysis of information available prior to the campaign period, only 30 information reports were received and of these, 40 per cent were drug related. This campaign led to an over 100 per cent increase in drug-related information in eight days. Post-campaign analysis shows 30 information reports being initiated and a reduction of drug reporting back to around 40 per cent after that period. This important intelligence, which was passed on to police, has had a positive effect on the Warrnambool community. This high level of intelligence saves police time and resources, it provides the comfort of confidentiality to the community and it is an effective disruption weapon against drug dealers and distributors. The information can also provide the building blocks for valuable intelligence gathering regarding the chain of supply and the potential involvement of organised crime gangs. Fewer drugs in a community surely can only have a positive impact, especially on regional and rural towns, which seem to be so badly impacted by ice and methamphetamines.

This simple and effective campaign relies on Crime Stoppers' established relationships with the media and police. A coordinator can be quickly embedded into the community to work with local police, the media, councils and health agencies to roll out the campaign. The success of the campaign can be fed back to the community, which will take pride in the fact that they are contributing to a better and healthier community. This campaign can be rotated around different areas that are being impacted at any particular time.

On term of reference 4, a recent Australian Institute of Criminology report noted that up to 9 per cent of all stolen firearms are taken from an unsecured gun locker or off the back seat of a car. The most common theft of firearms occurs in the regional and rural setting, where guns are a necessary part of farm life. Theft from weekenders and farmhouses are fairly common, and we understand from evidence previously provided to the inquiry that these firearms are increasingly being used in relation to ice armed robberies and potentially with local dealers swapping ice for guns to more organised distributors of drugs. Crime Stoppers is currently working on a campaign to increase awareness of gun control in regional and rural Victoria and is hoping to have this activated in the second quarter of 2014. This will work in with the key strategic objectives of the Victoria Police firearms strategy.

On crimes against the person, we believe that there is a need for enhanced crime prevention messages to be delivered across the state which are designed to have a flexible delivery model in order to respond to different localities and regions as different crime trends arise. Victoria Police statistics show that the following crime categories have shown growth in the past 12 months: aggravated burglary by 16.3 per cent; assault by 14 per cent; rape by 11.8 per cent; going equipped to steal by 21.3 per cent; and handling stolen goods by 27.3 per cent.

A 10-year Western Australian study of prisoners found that users of amphetamines and methamphetamines are 2.1 times more likely to be involved in prohibited and regulated weapons offences than non-users. This reinforces the need for regional and rural communities to keep their guns safe. This study also found that amphetamine users were 1.6 times more likely to be involved in robbery, extortion or related offences; 1.8 times more likely to be involved in burglary or break and enter; 1.8 times more likely to be involved in theft; 1.4 times more likely to be involved in fraud and deception — and identity fraud is common in buying precursor drugs for manufacture; and 1.5 times more likely to be involved in crimes against property.

Crime Stoppers does believe that there is a need to provide greater community education and awareness around gun and farm equipment storage in particular to ensure greater community safety, and more broadly around crime detection and crime prevention education around some of the broader effects that drug use has on the community.

On term of reference 5, this is not within the scope of Crime Stoppers expertise.

On term of reference 6, the evidence contained in the Australian Institute of Criminology's Western Australian prisons study — the statistics I referred to under term of reference 4 — is a very good indicator that illicit drugs and illegal activity are closely related.

On term of reference 7, outside our trial Dob in a Dealer Warrnambool campaign, Crime Stoppers Victoria is unaware of any recent geographically targeted public campaigns around amphetamine use which call on the community to be an active participant in reducing or disrupting drug supply.

On term of reference 8, considering best practice, while we are not experts in the field of drug investigation, our speciality, as I mentioned before, is intelligence collection and crime reporting. Crime Stoppers understands that the Australian government's national drug strategy has identified the following points: there are many different kinds of drugs and drug users; the nature and patterns of drug use are constantly shifting and changing; the purity, potency and availability of drugs is dynamic rather than static; and drug-related crime and the drug-using criminals are undergoing continuous change.

We believe that as a small, responsive charity we have the flexibility and mobility to respond to the changing drug scene and crime trends on a region-by-region basis. This may mean deploying Dob

in a Dealer and a gun crime prevention campaign in one locality whilst more appropriately deploying Dob in a Dealer and a rape/sexual assault campaign in another locality — that is, responding specifically to crime concerns in areas as opposed to statewide campaigns. Our ability to engage pro bono media assistance is one of the enduring platforms of Crime Stoppers Victoria's success and allows for a cost-effective and flexible response, which supports police and reduces crime, disrupts drug activity and leads to increased intelligence and ultimately arrests.

Crime Stoppers believes that, by working collaboratively with the agencies such as the AFP, Victoria Police, state and local governments and local health agencies, we have the ability to execute campaigns which will cause disruption to the supply of methamphetamines to regional and rural Victoria, increase Victoria Police and AFP intelligence holdings on organised crime and reduce criminal activity associated with organised crimes, in particular the theft and use of illegal firearms.

Crime Stoppers Victoria employs best practice around confidentiality, housing all secure information received online or via our app with the Australian Institute of Criminology. By working closely with Victoria Police, we are able to launch campaigns that best support Victoria Police strategies around drugs, firearms and organised crime activities.

In conclusion, during recent conversations around the state, time and again I have heard police and community health workers say, 'We could lose a generation of kids through ice'. It is a daunting prospect. It is a one of the great challenges of our time, and I believe it requires a multidisciplinary and multi-agency approach. Crime Stoppers will rise to the new challenges facing our regional and rural areas and is committed to playing an important role in detecting crime and empowering Victorians to make their community a safer place. I thank you very much for your time today.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Ms Hunter. Would you be willing and happy to table that submission to the committee as a written submission?

Ms HUNTER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Thank you. That will perhaps save us from going to some of the answers to some of the terms of reference that you have responded to and allow the committee to ask other questions. Thank you for that very detailed and informative submission.

Mr McCURDY — I am from regional Victoria and Dob in a Dealer certainly appeals to me. Was the genesis of that in the region and was it an expensive thing? I am just trying to get some clarity on it.

Ms HUNTER — When I was in Warrnambool last year during a bushfire arson media campaign I was speaking with one of the police members down there who identified methamphetamines as a problem for the area and he asked if there was anything we could do to help. We actually did it at quite low cost, because it was a quite quick campaign to launch and run. It was not very costly to run in the first instance, but as to rolling it out in a more comprehensive way, we would prefer to have better results and better analytics behind it, to have somebody dedicated to moving it around to make sure that the message is consistent and the analytics being collected are consistent. It was very low cost.

Mr CARROLL — Thanks, Sam, for your presentation. Following Mr McCurdy's question, to localise Dob in a Dealer what would be the next step? Would you have to make a funding application to Victoria Police, or is it something else; how many resources at your disposal? To do it properly, like to do the population and the data statistics for where ice is at its most prevalent — say, CBD Melbourne and some of the regional areas — would you need additional resources?

Ms HUNTER — We would, because Crime Stoppers Victoria is currently staffed by me and a digital marketing manager. That is the full sum of our resources, and we have one extra part-time administrative person. So we are quite lean. For somebody to work, in an ideal world, we would have someone who would work out in the regions, specifically moving that around and delivering it.

Because of Crime Stoppers' established relationships with the media we do not have to pay for media. If Victoria Police wanted to buy ad space, for instance, or the government, they would pay for that. More often than not Crime Stoppers Victoria get that space donated to them because of our charitable status. So we would embed someone into, say, Ballarat in the lead-up for a couple of weeks to work with the local media and the local police and local health agencies to make sure that everyone was on board and on message and ask for local media support to run a campaign.

Mr CARROLL — The committee was up in Mildura recently and it was in the local press in Mildura about the number of call-outs the police are getting and the number of infringement notices et cetera that they are issuing for people involved in drug-related crime. The thing that came up in the local press was the online service that Crime Stoppers does, as in people emailing in and contacting online. Are you getting almost as much now online anonymous contact than you would via the toll-free phone service?

Ms HUNTER — Last financial year we received 46 000 calls, we received 11 385 online reports and we had 102 690 visits to the website.

Mr CARROLL — So that data that comes in goes to the Australian — —

Ms HUNTER — The data that comes in online?

Mr CARROLL — Yes.

Ms HUNTER — It goes up to the Australian Institute of Criminology, where it is encrypted, yes.

Mr CARROLL — And then to the local police regions?

Ms HUNTER — No. It comes down to the Crime Stoppers unit.

Mr CARROLL — Then how does it get out to — —

Ms HUNTER — The police flag it as to which area it is best responded to by.

Mr SOUTHWICK — Thank you, Sam, for your presentation and good work. I have a few questions, firstly, looking at other jurisdictions. I know Queensland has invested significantly and really focused around the outlaw motorcycle gang work. Could you elaborate maybe about that and the successes of that and maybe other jurisdictions?

Ms HUNTER — Recently the Queensland government gave Queensland police \$20 million and Crime Stoppers Queensland \$5 million specifically to combat outlaw motorcycle gangs. I believe there have been some legislative changes to make that happen. The Crime Stoppers part of the package is to offer enhanced rewards for information leading to the disbandment.

At the moment Crime Stoppers Victoria offers rewards. Our rewards are up to \$1000, so I would suggest that most people who are involved in outlaw motorcycle gangs would not think \$1000 would be worth reporting crime around some serious criminals. So they are using that fund. They will run a campaign later this year, and they are just working through the legalities and the legislative changes to make sure they are reflected in their advertising. They will run a statewide advertising campaign, and they will pay enhanced rewards from that money.

Mr SOUTHWICK — So it is yet to roll out, and they are at the moment working through that. Also, on your annual budget, in terms of the in-kind support that you mentioned before from the ads and everything that you are able to achieve from being a not-for-profit organisation, what multiplier effect might that look like in terms of dollars?

Ms HUNTER — Our annual operating budget last year was just under \$1 million, and our pro bono media we have estimated to be in excess of \$5 million a year. As you know, each month we have half a page in the *Herald Sun* for 'Wanted', and that is parolee absconders primarily. Weekly we have representation in the *Herald Sun* as well, and two nights a week we

have GTV9 and WIN TV around the state showing a target crime for us, and that is about a minute to a minute and a half of TV twice a week. We also have a number of radio stations that support Crime Stoppers by presenting community service announcements as well as specific target crimes each week; 3AW, Gold FM, JOY FM and Casey Radio are all strong supporters of the Crime Stoppers brand.

We have 115 multilingual media partners which represent every language group in Victoria. We have not assessed the value of that media at the moment, but each publication supports us, whether it be a monthly publication or a weekly publication or biweekly, depending on the ethnic newspaper involved. We will be measuring that footprint this year. We are yet to do that.

Mr SOUTHWICK — We have heard a lot from family members who are crying out for and seeking help from various sources and in some instances seeking intervention. Do you receive any phone calls like that that you know of, where you might be the first port of call and one might think to call?

Ms HUNTER — Not to my knowledge. If someone was in immediate danger or being threatened by a family member, we would immediately transfer it to 000. I could further research that, but to my knowledge at this moment, no.

Mr SOUTHWICK — Lastly, in terms of targeting Crime Stoppers to a younger demographic — not to say the brand is not recognised by the younger demographic — have you looked at social media? I know there was another campaign that you did; was it around family violence?

Ms HUNTER — Yes. We do have a youth brand called Say Something. You certainly can link through to our crime reporting pages, but it is more of a crime prevention message for young people aimed at probably primarily around 15 to 28 or 30-year-olds. That has had two significant campaigns last year: one about sexual assault and one about youth violence.

Mr SOUTHWICK — Using that model in terms of crime prevention, could Crime Stoppers create something that would be effectively a supportive-type framework for those who are victims?

Ms HUNTER — Absolutely. We are currently rebuilding our website courtesy of the state government — thank you very much. We are delivering a project from April this year which has renewed online reporting, so much more comprehensive collection of information, because whilst people are more and more likely to report online the level of intelligence we get is not as good as it is via a phone call. So we are just building a new website to make the fields a little bit more in-depth in terms of intel collection, and obviously they will have a greater crime prevention message and access to other resources.

Certainly our saysomething.org.au website is aimed at showing particularly young people where they can go to access additional resources in terms of, you know, drug agencies, headspace if they have mental health issues — so a portal for the information education.

The CHAIR — I was going to ask you a question very similar to that, but I will not duplicate. I suppose the broader question is: when someone rings Crime Stoppers and gets someone else on the line and they are saying that they either need help themselves personally in relation to drug abuse or have a family friend or relative or one of their own children in fact who has an addiction to, say, ice, how would you respond to that call, rather than saying, 'We've got a portal here. You can go and look at a drug agency somewhere down the road'? Have you had many of those calls, and how would you signpost them on the phone? Have you had to?

Ms HUNTER — Not to my knowledge. Our normal process would be, when we are launching a campaign — so, for instance, when we launched our sexual assault campaign last year — to brief the call centre around the campaign we were running and give them a resource list of referrals. In this instance people could be referred to, for instance, the Centre Against Sexual Assault or the Women's Information and Referral Exchange. We would task our call centre with the right resources in terms of the campaign we were launching. To my knowledge we have not

yet identified a list of agencies to direct calls to in relation to ice, but I can certainly investigate whether we have been receiving those kinds of calls.

The CHAIR — Can I just broaden this one out again? If I ring up in a highly distressed and agitated state seeking support — and I am asking this question because we have had an instance where a mother, in fact, was having difficulty being signposted to the right authorities — would you not contact someone to contact me? I am not sure about the legality of being able to do that, but if they were prepared to give you a name and address, are you able to get someone to make contact with them? It is easy to say, ‘Go on the website; you’ll find some help on this site here’, or to direct them somewhere else, but when you are agitated and highly strung you actually need support coming back to you directly.

Ms HUNTER — If they were in a distressed state and thought they were in danger, we would probably transfer them to 000, because our call centre is not resourced with providing help of that nature.

The CHAIR — Have you had to do that?

Ms HUNTER — Not to my knowledge, but I have only been in the role for a year. We do task people specifically with the resources on campaigns we know we are launching, but obviously we do not have a pool of resources to be able to divert each call to somewhere specific. We do not have arrangements with secondary providers to transfer calls directly to them at this stage.

Mr SOUTHWICK — Just on Simon’s question, if you want to run a specific campaign, a bit like a Lifeline or GriefLine-type scenario — —

Ms HUNTER — We would enter into an agreement with the relevant agencies and let them know what our campaign materials were and let them know where we were launching it. We would enter into an agreement where we could transfer calls to them, and then we would brief our call centre staff on which service provider to contact in which instance, but we usually do that on a campaign-by-campaign basis.

Mr CARROLL — I know you have only been CEO for 12 months, but what data could you give the committee in terms of the trend with methamphetamine use, in terms of any reports generated over the past five years or one year and in terms of statistical analysis of phone calls coming in and perhaps what regions they are coming from, like the CBD? Do you have that sort of data analysis?

Ms HUNTER — We do not have the regions that the calls are coming from, because we cannot trace where calls are coming from. We can know the area it has been dispatched to. That is a body of work where, once that information is received by Victoria Police, it becomes their information — their data — but I can certainly talk to Victoria Police about having that released.

Mr CARROLL — Okay. That would be good. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. It looks like we have exhausted the questions. Thank you again for the written submission you are going to give to the committee and your responses as well. We appreciate it. Thank you, Sam.

Ms HUNTER — Thank you. Have a good Christmas.

Witness withdrew.