

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Tuesday, 21 September 2021

#### MEMBERS

Ms Fiona Patten—Chair

Dr Tien Kieu—Deputy Chair

Ms Jane Garrett

Ms Wendy Lovell

Ms Tania Maxwell

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Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela

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Mr Tim Quilty

Dr Samantha Ratnam

Ms Harriet Shing

Mr Lee Tarlamis

Ms Sheena Watt

**WITNESS** (via videoconference)

Sergeant Wayne Gatt, Secretary and Chief Executive Officer, the Police Association Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome back, everyone. Thank you for tuning in. We are very pleased to have joining us now the Police Association Victoria, and we have the Secretary and CEO of that organisation, Sergeant Wayne Gatt, with us today. Thank you for joining us.

If I could just let you know that all evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is under our *Constitution Act* but also under the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore anything that you say today is protected by law—you are protected against any action; however, if you were to repeat similar statements outside this hearing, you may not have the same protection, and any misleading or false evidence to the committee could be considered a contempt of Parliament.

As I said, thank you very much for making the time to join us. We have also all got a copy of your five-year strategic plan, the 2017–22 plan. If you would like to make some opening remarks, we will then open it up for committee discussion. Thanks, Wayne.

**Sgt GATT:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, committee members. I suppose to your terms of reference, obviously there are some issues that the police association's members would have views on. I will probably limit in short form my opening to allow you an opportunity to perhaps ask more questions than hear me speak, with the intention of providing you with a summary and perhaps further and better particulars, plus this discussion, so that you can understand the research and some of the views behind some of the assertions that we make.

So with respect certainly to the factors influencing the growing remand and prison populations and strategies to reduce rates of criminal recidivism, obviously these are bread-and-butter issues for our members and indeed always have been in the sphere of policing for as long as it has existed. But our members have for some time expressed some concerns. Madam Chair, you make reference to that strategic plan, or the *Your Safety: Our Priority* document, where in that document we articulate a range of concerns that we have or have put on the horizon for policing. Indeed some of those issues, and I suppose a deviation from what we would say would be best practice policing principles, ultimately lead to increased incarceration of people in the longer term and sometimes do encourage, if you like, a revolving door of incarceration and recidivism at times.

In particular there are three sorts of areas that we are concerned with, and that is the adoption of what we would call a task force model of policing that targets high-volume yet low-impact crime at times. Secondly, the gradual stripping of police resources from community policing roles, a loss of prioritisation of community engagement activities in policing, and that has been a gradual impact over many years, and the decimation of programs and activities that are designed to intervene with youth at risk—we would focus on those three issues. Of course they are many, varied and very complex, but we would say with respect to the terms of reference that those would have the most impact.

I am happy to take questions or I am happy to explain in a little bit more detail, if you like, what I mean by those.

**The CHAIR:** Well, we have got plenty of time so let us open it up for questions and you can speak broadly on those. Thanks again for this. I just wanted to touch on this idea of youth at risk and that lost prioritisation, as you mentioned, of community policing. I know in your action plan or priority plan you talk about appropriately funded early intervention policing initiatives, and that was going towards targeting youth at risk. I was wondering if you could just give some examples of what those programs might look like and where you see the diminishing of that ability for police to deal with youth at risk.

**Sgt GATT:** Certainly. Our members in years gone by will talk to times where proactive programs and preventative approaches by Victoria Police were more front and centre than perhaps they are today. Indeed the focus in terms of curtailing recidivism now seems to be a perilous pursuit of reduction in statistical crime, so looking at crime statistics and being almost entirely governed by crime statistics data. To some extent we do not say that that is an easy balance. Indeed it is a difficult balance because there is a community expectation that high crime stats drive levels of community discomfort. They drive perceptions of people being less safe in the community, but indeed what they can cause you to do is focus on the net result of crime as opposed to one of our principal roles in policing—and that is to prevent crime in the first instance.

One of those key areas in terms of crime prevention is to focus particularly on young people and youth at risk. New and emerging communities are also vulnerable in our pursuit in terms of reducing crime. These are areas where Victoria Police had previously had dedicated policing roles that it had developed to engage with those communities, to support those communities and to inject and intervene and defer to other support agencies. That is a very important policing linkage. Now, that is not to say that those roles do not exist but they have been diminished in our view, and our members regularly advise us that the primacy of those roles is somewhat diminished by the redeployment of those roles into more operational roles and operations that are really the antithesis of what they are designed to do. We would advise a strong isolation of those roles to focus on that important work.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Thanks, Wayne. Talking about crime statistics, we just had the Crime Statistics Agency in this morning, and they were mentioning the steady decrease in the cautioning of young people. We were just sort of speculating on why that is the case. Is that interlocked with this steady decline in that kind of more community policing where you sort of know the patch?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, it is interesting, and I note the chief commissioner's recent edict to not limit the number of cautions that are issued to young people. It is an interesting move, because what I would say is that the former setting—and its success is yet to be determined of course—limits it to a previous caution, after which the person is then diverted into the criminal justice system proper. Obviously the more you pursue a task force led policing model that seeks to identify, locate and hold offenders to account, as opposed to a model that seeks to disrupt, defer and prevent crime, the more likely you are to find people on their second, third or fourth go. So in doing so what you do is you proactively push them into the system, and if you do that enough times you will put them into the juvenile justice process in particular. So I do think the two are actually interlinked and intertwined, and I do think that is an interesting move that will potentially have an impact on those levels of incarceration with young people.

That said, we still have a role to play in balancing that precarious peace that is the community's right to feel safe and to see people held to account, even though they are young people and people at risk, particularly in the commission of serious or violent crime. What we would say is that our members still require a degree of discretion. Now, I am not sure what the chief commissioner's settings with this will be, but that discretion is still essential—essential—with respect to making sure we can discern situations that still need to be brought before the courts and those that are so small and minor and really should be considered in the preventative or disruptive space.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, thanks. I tend to agree with you on that. One of the other areas that you pointed out in your report—and obviously we have seen some significant changes—is around bail laws. We have been hearing from numerous witnesses that the impact of the change in bail laws has really increased remand, that in fact breach of bail is probably one of the most significant reasons for someone now being remanded and that a large portion of those people remanded would not have received a custodial sentence when their time came before the courts. Do you think we have got the setting right now, or have we swung too far the other way?

**Sgt GATT:** Look, I do not think we have swung too far the other way, but I do think there are other elements that are not spoken about in this discussion that are letting the system down. The criminal justice system more broadly is completely under-resourced. If you look at the current wait times to see a matter put before the courts, it now waits in terms of years. The longer that gap between the alleged commission of an offence, at that point, and the time when a person is actually brought before the court to have their day in court and to have their say, the more likely particularly a person at risk is to reoffend. We do not have a system yet that quickly brings those people before our courts, and indeed if it was more streamlined, if justice was more swift in its delivery, then people would be less exposed to reoffending whilst on bail. We still need reasonably strong settings with respect to bail, particularly where people are committing or allegedly committing offences that have a high harm and high impact on the community: aggravated burglaries, assaults, serious indictable offences—incidents which put the community at significant risk. In that situation we will always say the balance must be with community safety.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Look, I think that is an interesting point, because I think what we have been hearing is that sometimes it is a shop steal that puts someone in prison on remand, it is not an aggravated burglary or a violent assault. So I guess it is trying to find that line.

**Sgt GATT:** And Chair, that is the measure, isn't it? So if you have a string of repeated indictable offences such as theft, which is an indictable offence, and the repeat occurrence or commission of those offences means

that—the *Bail Act* says—the only way we can stop that offending is to remand somebody in custody, then the next question must be, ‘And what day are they going to be put before the courts? And how quickly is that brought?’. Because if that is a matter of days, then simply bringing them before the courts might be the best thing for them, because remaining in the community and continuing to commit offences ultimately will catch up with them as well. It will have a downstream detrimental impact on that individual and potentially impact their potential for rehabilitation.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. Thank you. If there is time, I will come back. Kaushaliya.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Sergeant Gatt, for your time today and also for providing us the TPAV’s policing priorities report. Something that is often underappreciated in policing is the connections that frontline police form with the communities they serve. What role do you think community policing plays in reducing recidivism and reducing crime?

**Sgt GATT:** I am glad you asked the question. It is fundamentally the premise upon which policing should be built, but it is also something that we have walked away from. Increasingly our members have been deviated and moved into a task force model of policing. We are seeing our police officers, despite repeated resourcing injections from the Victorian state government, barely able to staff and man their police stations at the present time. They have been locked into a response model that sees our local police, who once could actively patrol and engage with community, locked into a vicious cycle of going from job to job to job. Effectively what this means is that every attendance that we go to sees somebody taken into custody or processed as opposed to police actively trying to engage with the community, disrupt crime and prevent it before it occurs.

It also fails to build the effective and meaningful community confidence with policing that is the cornerstone upon which policing operates in the community. If we continue on this trajectory, we really do worry about the future of policing in Victoria. We are heartened by this chief commissioner’s recent moves and discussion around re-engagement with community, but those words need to be met with real action—and that starts with the resourcing of police stations because that is where that work is undertaken. If the resources delivered by state governments are constantly applied to task force policing models, all you will see is more people put into prisons and you will see less and less engagement with community.

**Ms VAGHELA:** You also mentioned about new and emerging communities and how you engage with them and support them. How successful do you think we are in engaging with those communities? What are your views on that?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I think, to be fair, if you look at the last five to 10 years and issues that have had real prominence in the Victorian landscape in terms of crime and offending, you cannot argue that we have had some communities who have been challenged in terms of integration support, and whilst that is very unfortunate, the challenge then rests with police but more broadly the social services to engage with those communities to provide that support, to provide them an alternative. Particularly when you combine new and emerging communities with youth at risk and you put those two elements together, you have a recipe for elevation in crime categories that we have particularly seen in terms of aggravated burglary and high-harm offending in some of our suburbs and areas in Victoria, which has really rocked and worried the broader community.

The challenge is to not do less in terms of that engagement but to do more, to prevent more, to engage more. Now, that all does not rest at the feet of the police, I have to say. What I will say is often what we see is that the footy is handballed firmly into the court where we are playing and that we are asked to suddenly fix that problem. The issues will have their genesis in poor social services that existed in the years preceding an issue becoming criminal, and it is the lack of investment in those new and emerging communities that ultimately leads to police intervention down the track—and once they are on our escalator it is very hard to get them off.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Do I have time, Chair, or will I come back?

**The CHAIR:** A quick one, yes. Thanks, Kaushaliya.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Sergeant, in the report there is talk about community safety but also about police safety, so obviously it is in the interests of public and community safety for police officers to be at the top of their game, something that they cannot do when they themselves are experiencing mental health challenges. You have been outspoken about the need to be aware of the acute mental health challenges associated with working in law

enforcement. What more do you think the government can do to support mental health and wellbeing among police?

**Sgt GATT:** If I bring it back to the terms of reference of this committee, I will certainly say that police put on their uniform every day to see crime prevented and crime reduced. We want to divert people away from the criminal justice system and we want to see early intervention, but we need resources to do that. We need police and a stream of police continually committed into our system with a growing population—albeit one that has stalled during COVID-19, but I am sure it will resume post COVID-19. Those commitments need to grow commensurate with the population and crime in Victoria so that our members can properly provide quality in their policing to the community. That has an enormous impact on the health and wellbeing of our members, because that is why they join the job to become police officers in the first place.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Tania.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning, Wayne. How are you?

**Sgt GATT:** Good morning.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Wayne, you touched briefly on lack of resources, and in particular I want to speak about court wait times. We know things like an IVO can take on average about 12 days between the time that that IVO was applied for and it going in front of the Magistrates Court. We know that, particularly in rural and regional areas, that can go one of two ways: it can either go before the court quite quickly or it can have a long wait time. What would you see as ways that can be better managed, apart from just resources, to ensure that that person's safety is a priority?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I think it is like all crime categories: if the focus is on early intervention, what we do is we effectively diminish the amount of times we have to get into that compliance space, into that processing space. That is the first part. I keep coming back to this because—I keep saying—it is the cornerstone of policing and it is the balance by which we should measure our success. They are as old as the profession of policing, these principles. We should measure ourselves by the amount of crime that we prevent, not by the amount of offenders we hold to account—that is the measure of the failure of policing to fundamentally undertake its work.

The second piece is to see meaningful reform in the criminal justice processes that goes to supporting our courts and the integration of policing with the courts. These processes take time. They are not highly evolved, and they certainly have not evolved in the nearly 27 years since I have been a member of Victoria Police. Briefs are constructed in much the same way they were back then. The paper trail is still very heavy. It is not electronic; it is slow and cumbersome. Wait times are growing exponentially. What we are doing is seeing more of our police tied up in defunct administrative processes that have not evolved, have not integrated with our lawyers, barristers, prosecutors and the broader judiciary, and we are effectively handcuffing police from having more meaningful preventative engagements with community. This requires massive investment from government, and it is investment that recognises that if you spend money on making the system of justice more efficient you see enormous efficiencies—enormous efficiencies—in the way that police can operate, and positively operate.

If I give you a good example: the issuance of penalty notices in the Queensland police force has been electronic and on the spot through handheld technology now for over a decade, and Victoria Police and the Victorian state government have yet been unable to introduce something that is operating a few hundred kilometres north of us into the Victorian jurisdiction. That is just one small element of an act that police undertake each and every day. If you then think about how we bring more serious matters before the courts and present evidence, think of the efficiencies that could be realised that could redirect police resources into more preventative and constructive ways to support community and to prevent crime in the first instance.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thanks, Wayne. Have I got time, Chair, for another quick one?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, one more.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Lovely. Thanks, Wayne, and thanks for enlightening us all on that cumbersome, antiquated administrative system that has been VicPol for many, many, many years. I want to touch base on officers spending time at hospitals with mental health patients. Obviously that removes your resources off the streets. They are not present in the community, and they can spend hours sitting in a hospital. What do you see

as ways that we can divert those officers from having to sit in hospitals, being there with somebody who is a mental health patient?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I could probably speak for hours on that topic alone, but look, let me put it in context. Our members report in research conducted by the police association that the average time spent on single occurrences of mental health ranges between 4 and 6 hours. And if you put that in context, an 8-hour shift is the general shift undertaken by a police crew. That is the majority of the shifts dealing with one issue, and our members are responding to one person in mental health crisis every 12 minutes in Victoria, so this is a massive driver, in fact perhaps almost the primary driver, along with family violence intervention, for Victoria Police.

Effectively it is about getting upstream with mental health intervention. We agree with and support the royal commission's findings into mental health reform that is required. But if you want to look at the police intervention and the freeing up of those resources, then it simply is trying to minimise those handover processes that exist in hospitals, enable police to quickly and expediently deliver people to places where they can receive care, but to invest and solidly invest in in-community and peer care in terms of mental health, to ensure that police are not the people being called to help people in a health crisis, but clinicians are being called—and I will say not to people in crisis but in-community care and support is provided to people with mental health conditions, to help them manage it before they are in crisis. The only reason police are called is because we have let it go too long or because the system has failed them and they are falling into crisis that our health system then cannot support.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thanks, Wayne.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, Matthew.

**Dr BACH:** Thanks, Chair, and many thanks, Sergeant Gatt, for being with us. I have in particular noted your very strong commentary about community policing. I think in response to a question just now from Ms Maxwell you said that this idea that you have been discussing is as old as policing, and I simply want to reiterate that: anybody who does not agree with you should refer back to the comments of Sir Robert Peel in the House of Commons in 1829, when he established the Metropolitan Police Force. So I think your call for a greater focus on community building and community policing is particularly important right now, especially given, Mr Gatt, some of the things that you have recently been discussing in the media and elsewhere. How do your members feel, Sergeant Gatt, that earlier this morning and later tonight they are expected to enforce a curfew?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, the enforcement of a curfew in terms of public health orders is particularly topical at this moment. What I will say about the role that police are playing in enforcing curfews and other health measures is this: that every time we lay at the feet of a police force or service additional duties that are non-core, it takes police resources away from what is core. So, you know, whilst people have different views in the community about the value of CHO directions and otherwise—and I will not go into that space—suffice to say I will say it is the same people tasked with the responsibility of preventing crime, which continues in Victoria whilst we sit here in the COVID-19 pandemic, that have to do both of those jobs. And whilst we sit here and we have hundreds of our members deployed to border operations, to Operation Tidewatch, which is hotel quarantine Victoria, and indeed hundreds if not thousands of my members over the past seven days deployed to demonstrations and protest activity in Victoria, whilst we are doing that, we are stripping police stations. And I do not blame Victoria Police for that, not in any way. It is a natural consequence of these additional duties that are provided to us. We saw 20 police stations close on Saturday. There is no way around that, I might add, and I do not in any way blame Victoria Police for the requirement to manage the emergencies that it was tasked with. But we need to recognise that additional duties—be it COVID enforcement, be it failures in the mental health system, be it a failure to see early intervention and support in family violence—whatever these things are, they divert police from those local preventative initiatives.

**Dr BACH:** And in particular, Mr Gatt, in some recent comments in the media you discussed in, I thought, deeply emotional terms, based on some feedback you had clearly received from your members, the impact of being sent out to police the playground ban. Do measures like that make it more difficult for you and your members to do what I know you want to do and what you have discussed today, which is to build really strong connections in the community to prevent crime and to prevent recidivism—to come back really strongly to our terms of reference?

**Sgt GATT:** What I would say is, you know, with COVID-19 this is an experience that my counterparts and my peers around the world have experienced—the need for police in many, many, many jurisdictions across the world. I was speaking to my counterpart in the police federation in Scotland only a few days ago, who cites similar pressures on police in terms of the relationship with the community during this pandemic. It is really difficult. We are enforcing unpopular rules, and they are not rules that the police have made. They are not rules at times that we have asked for. In fact on most occasions none of them are rules that we have asked for, yet they are rules that we have been tasked to enforce. And when you enforce something that is not popular and indeed when you have to enforce more so on the general community than what is normally the offending community, it divides sometimes you somewhat from the ordinarily strong relationships that you have with that community.

It will take time to rebuild some of those relationships, but I have overwhelming trust that the community in Victoria supports its police to a point that, once this crisis is over, it will be able to recognise the value that comes from the lined up, supportive relationship with its frontline police and PSOs.

**Dr BACH:** Yes. I hope so too. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Sheena.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Sergeant Gatt, for being with us today and for sending us some information for consideration in our deliberations. I wanted to go further to recidivism and reducing the crime rate. A reflection that we often hear is that we really need to address the root causes of crime, and I would be interested to know from your perspective what do your members in their frontline experience think really are the main causes of crime?

**Sgt GATT:** Well look, there are people that are bad, and there are people that are bad at times because they lack social support. And overwhelmingly at the seat of most offending at some point in that journey of offending is a low level of support to a person in terms of their social situation. Now, whether you look at it in terms of people that are over-represented in crime categories for whatever reason, at some point you will see a system in terms of social support that fails to support that. It could be employment. It could be health. It could be education. Now, these have little to do with the work of police officers, but unaddressed, unsupported and uninvested in, they culminate in people that are brought and ultimately engage with police

If we look at Indigenous affairs and the deep and very heartfelt desire of our members to increase relationships, to reduce incarceration rates of Indigenous persons in custody, you see that what is at the seat of those higher than usual rates of offending at times is a lack of support. It is a lack of support in those areas, and that is where governments have to, in our opinion, focus their attention if you are to break these cycles. It is not about putting more police into the policing elements, indeed it is about putting police into the prevention space—absolutely. It is also funding the education space, the health space—the true drivers of crime ultimately that are at the seat of disadvantage in the community.

**The CHAIR:** That is right.

**Ms WATT:** Yes. Lovely. Thank you. I think I think might have another question if I have got time. Thank you. I have just got another one about recidivism and really what many have identified as a sort of revolving door in our prisons and that that door sometimes comes from the juvenile justice system and then to the adult system. I wonder, what are we seeing as the factors that really lead to post-release offending, and what can we really do to reduce the likelihood of this happening? I mean, it is similar to what you have just talked about, but I do wonder, particularly around that post-release reoffending space, if there are any contributions you have on that.

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I do not think this is rocket science, and I think it is probably well known to this committee to be honest. If the circumstances that led to the incarceration of a person at risk or a young person in general existed prior to them being incarcerated and exist on the day that they are released from custody unsupported or unchanged, the probability of that person reoffending will not be lower—it will be higher. Their experience and their exposure within the current system will only lead to a greater propensity for them to be re-incarcerated or reintroduced into the system. Again, I get back to this point: it goes to the capacity of governments in terms of developing the social services to interrupt the generational disadvantage that occurs in some of these communities that sees us break the cycle of criminal offending.

Ultimately, once a person has been incarcerated as a young person, I make this point: they have probably had not one, not two engagements with Victoria Police—it will be tens of engagements with Victoria Police. It is not easy for a young person under the child and young persons Act in Victoria to be incarcerated. It is absolutely a last resort. Rehabilitation is the fundamental principle of that Act, and indeed sometimes it frustrates the community when sentences that do not incarcerate are handed down by magistrates; sometimes they are questioned. But indeed I think it is important to highlight that by the time you actually have somebody who is incarcerated at that age, we have failed them, looking backwards, so many times. It is an absolute measure of failure, because that is not the first time. Nobody goes to prison in Victoria under the age of 18 because they have had one trip up. They have tripped up so many times they are bruised and battered all over their body, and I think that is the important point to this here. That is not one missed opportunity; for those people it is 10, 20, 30, 40, 100 missed opportunities to intervene. And that is not the role of the police; that is the role of the broader system of support that exists in Victoria.

**Ms WATT:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, and I think it is really how we spend that money, as we say, at the fence at the top of the cliff rather than, you know, having to do task forces and having to focus on that ambulance at the bottom, which increasingly we are doing.

**Sgt GATT:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Just a quick one from me, Wayne. You mentioned the court delays, the paper trails and the lack of technological advancements in this area. We have heard from a couple of witnesses that some of that actually has improved with electronic briefs and the like because of COVID. That may just be affecting the lawyers. Has it had any positive effect for the police at all?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, it is hard to tell at the moment. We are so under pressure that small gains can sometimes be lost in the broader resourcing pressures. I will not say that it is electronic briefs, because I do not believe that that has been materially improved during COVID at all, but I will say that we have seen improvements in bringing people before courts. So the use of AV technology—much the same way as we are speaking today, Chair—has reduced the requirement for police to transport prisoners, to bring them from custody before the courts. I think these are massive improvements that in my humble opinion should never be reversed, must remain—in fact must be strengthened—in our police stations and must be resourced properly to ensure they can safely manage electronic systems and be retrofitted to enable this to continue at every police station in Victoria. With that I do agree.

But there is so much more scope, and if, Chair, I can highlight particularly one area, it is the issuance of family violence intervention orders, for example, in the field by police. This is an area where the police association, prior to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, provided advice to enable us to quickly and promptly deliver support and safety to the victims of family violence in the community. It remains an unresolved element of that royal commission, despite it being more than five years since that finding of the royal commission was made, but it is a fundamental way that police can more quickly and efficiently enable people in the community to receive that sort of support.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Kaushaliya, do you have any further questions?

**Ms VAGHELA:** Yes, just a quick one. Sergeant, the police association has been involved in the development of the Victoria Police redress and restorative engagement program for people who are victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. What reflections can you give us about that scheme and what it could tell us about behaviour change for repeat offenders?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I am actually proud to say that the police association has supported this reform in Victoria Police and that we advocated strongly for a redress scheme on behalf of our members who have been victims of sexual assault at times, historically, within the culture of Victoria Police. What I will say is the strong messaging from Victoria Police on this has been important in terms of changing and slowing culture that we had sought to injure our members, particularly with respect to this nature of offending. More broadly, I think that redress within other crime categories and perhaps other organisations—and we see it within institutional sex abuse, for example—has a real role to play in developing a culture of responsibility within organisations to self-manage their responsibility for people within their care, in this case Victoria Police with their employees in the case of institutional sexual offending. Perhaps in other areas it is young people within their care. But

similarly, there are other areas and other institutions that hold a responsibility to the people that they engage with. A proper and effective method of redress to provide victims of crime the opportunity not only to seek compensation and restorative justice but also to hold employers, to hold agencies and organisations, to account drives positive moves to actually self-regulate their behaviour in a way that provides a safe or a safer community and a safer Victoria.

**Ms VAGHELA:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Tania, did you have any further questions?

**Ms MAXWELL:** I do if that is okay, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. We have got just a couple of minutes.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Great. Sergeant, I just wanted to touch base. We have had a lot of Aboriginal organisations come and present to the committee who have mainly talked obviously about that over-representation of Aboriginal people in our justice system. We have had some discussion around not only the over-representation but at times they have felt that there has been racism from Victoria Police towards young people who are of Aboriginal descent. Can you provide any information as to what training or what is in your remit to govern and ensure that that is not happening to our young people?

**Sgt GATT:** Well, I will say that Victoria Police does invest time in the education and training of our members to deal with Indigenous communities. Indeed this has been active for many years, and indeed as a young constable I remember that training personally. I remember refresher and reinforcement training indeed that was provided to police, and that has only developed and grown over the journey with Victoria Police. What I will say, though, is the disadvantage that leads Indigenous communities at times, and very sadly, to come indeed into contact with police, that underlying disadvantage, must be addressed. We focus on these engagements with police, and of course they have to be ethically sound, they have to be of the highest standards, but what deeply concerns our members is looking at a situation that causes these people, sadly, to be put into situations where we have to engage with them on these terms. And look, I think fundamentally what every police officer in Victoria wants to see is Indigenous people in our communities on an even and equal standing with other Victorians and to ensure that they have access to the same support, the same landscape, to provide them with the opportunity to perform to the same standard. It is not about holding people to different account in the community, not by any means whatsoever, but it is about making sure that everybody in the community has the same start and has the same opportunity and that disadvantage over long periods of time is actually corrected and addressed.

**Ms MAXWELL:** Thanks, Wayne.

**The CHAIR:** Sheena.

**Ms WATT:** Tania nicked my question, but thank you so much for answering that so thoroughly, Sergeant Gatt. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Well, we have got a police officer here if you would like to press charges.

**Ms WATT:** Yes!

**Ms MAXWELL:** I just thought it has been raised so often it is something that we needed to have addressed from the other perspective so that we can see what is being done in that area, so thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Wayne, thank you so much for today. I understand your members are doing such an extraordinary job, and I understand they are protecting Parliament House right now.

**Sgt GATT:** Yes. We note that, and our thoughts are with them, and we are very proud of the work they do. If I could just close, Chair, in saying that I do want to make that point again that community policing, with respect to all of the questions that you have provided us, fundamentally supports all of those initiatives. It goes to the question of Indigenous support, it goes to the question of crime prevention, it goes the questions of ethics in the way we deal with the people. Undealt with, unsupported and allowed to be diminished to any great extent, you will have negative impacts across the whole of the system.

**The CHAIR:** You know, I do think that sometimes that notion of police being the ultimate crime preventers gets lost. You know, you are the 'catchers of baddies', and we forget that one of the main purposes is to prevent crime in our community.

**Sgt GATT:** Absolutely.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, so that is a really strong message today. Thank you, Wayne. Thanks, everyone. We will just reset for the next witness. Thank you.

**Sgt GATT:** Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**