

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into budget estimates 2009–10

Melbourne — 14 May 2009

Members

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Witnesses

Mr B. Cameron, Minister for Police and Emergency Services,

Ms P. Armytage, Secretary, and

Dr R. Kelleher, Executive Director, Police, Emergency Services and Corrections, Department of Justice; and

Chief Commissioner S. Overland, Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — I declare open the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing on the 2009–10 budget estimates for the portfolio of police and emergency services. On behalf of the committee I welcome the Honourable Bob Cameron, MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services; Ms Penny Armytage, Secretary of the Department of Justice; Chief Commissioner Simon Overland of Victoria Police; and Dr Roslyn Kelleher, Executive Director, Police, Emergency Services and Corrections, Department of Justice. Departmental officers, members of the public and the media are also welcome.

In accordance with the guidelines for public hearings, I remind members of the public that they cannot participate in the committee's proceedings. Only officers of the PAEC secretariat are to approach PAEC members. Departmental officers, as requested by the minister or his chief of staff can approach the table during the hearing. Members of the media are also requested to observe the guidelines for filming or recording proceedings in the Legislative Council committee room.

All evidence taken by this committee is taken under the provisions of the Parliamentary Committees Act and is protected from judicial review. However, any comments made outside the precincts of the hearing — that is the door — are not protected by parliamentary privilege. There is no need for evidence to be sworn. All evidence given today is being recorded. Witnesses will be provided with proof versions of the transcript to be verified and returned within two working days of this hearing. In accordance with past practice, the transcripts and PowerPoint presentations will then be placed on the committee's website.

Following a presentation by the minister, committee members will ask questions related to the budget estimates. Generally the procedure followed will be that relating to questions in the Legislative Assembly. I ask that all mobile telephones be turned off.

I now call on the minister to give a brief presentation of no more than 10 minutes on the more complex financial and performance information that relates to the budget estimates for the portfolio of police and emergency services.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you, Chair and members. I will go over a slideshow and then we will answer questions in the normal way. Given this is an estimates committee, in the event there are other —

Mr WELLS — In the normal way? What other way is there?

The CHAIR — The process that is normally followed is that of the Legislative Assembly; there are no supplementary questions.

Mr CAMERON — And also the way you take it in turns. That is the normal way, the way that has happened on the eight previous occasions when I have been here, Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS — Okay. I just wondered if there had been any changes.

Mr CAMERON — Or is it nine? Then if there are other issues —

The CHAIR — Sorry to interrupt you, Minister. For the cameraman who has just arrived, we are following the rules of Parliament in terms of filming. The rules are that you film and use recordings only of people who are speaking. You should only film those people and not ambit shots of Parliament House. There are strict rules in regard to filming here, and as you know, you should follow them. I note for the record that they have not been fully followed, and I will be speaking to the president of the press gallery in that regard.

Mr CAMERON — In the event that we need to follow up particulars, we will correspond with you as we have done on previous occasions.

Overheads shown.

Mr CAMERON — We will go to the slideshow. This is the justice budget, and you can see there the way that justice has the different components. In relation to the police and emergency services budget there has been an increase of 6.97 per cent — so 7 per cent — on the current financial year in terms of budget impact.

If we go to the next slide in relation to the police budget you will see the increase in police budget over the course of the years. What you see there is an increase as the police force has also continued to grow. Obviously, you would expect that to occur.

If we go to the next one in relation to police numbers, what we see in the red column is the tapering off of the Liberal policy of reducing police, and we see the increases which have occurred over time. The police are estimating — —

Mr WELLS — How many on the street, though?

The CHAIR — Without assistance.

Mr WELLS — How many operational police have you got — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — If he is going to put that up there — —

The CHAIR — Please ignore the interjections, Minister.

Mr WELLS — Operational police as compared with other states might be an interesting graph as well.

The CHAIR — Through the Chair please, Mr Wells.

Mr CAMERON — You will get your chance to answer — —

Mr WELLS — Chance to answer, that is right.

Mr CAMERON — Or ask questions.

Mr WELLS — I will ask questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister.

Ms MUNT — That counts as your first question.

The CHAIR — I remind all members that we need to focus on the hearings and not on the interjections.

Mr WELLS — Are you going to say — —

The CHAIR — You are just a serial offender, Mr Wells. Just control yourself.

Mr WELLS — No, if it is going to start with making some of those comments — —

The CHAIR — Minister.

Dr SYKES — Has Koo Wee Rup got one 'p' or two 'p's'?

Mr CAMERON — One.

The CHAIR — Keep going, Minister.

Mr CAMERON — In relation to infrastructure improvements, we have had a large commitment to improving infrastructure. This budget allocates \$32 million for 10 new police stations as well as for the refurbishment of the World Trade Centre being the headquarters of Victoria Police. That has been part of an ongoing program which represents the largest ever police station building program in the state's history.

In relation to policing, our commitment will see over 1750 additional police during the course of this government from when we came to office until June 2010.

If we go to the next one, there are various road safety initiatives in this budget. Some of those are: the 200 moving-mode radar units; extended drug testing; as well as newer road safety technology being used in relation to hand-held lasers — using the latest technologies in those areas as we replace some older equipment; and also screening breath testing as well.

Obviously an issue that we all have a vested interest in is the road toll and trying to drive down that road toll. There is always an interest here, particularly from you Mr Sykes, in relation to the metro and the country road tolls. While last year we saw a low road toll, we did see an increase in the country — and if you care to ask, I have got I have a slide about that later on. In relation to drug and alcohol testing, we see that also as being extremely important, particularly drugs because this is relatively new and the increases there will be welcome.

In relation to hoons, there will also be initiatives that we will hope to introduce in the course of the next financial year as well.

In relation to the crime rate, there you see — —

Mr WELLS — You are kidding!

Mr CAMERON — There you see what has happened with crime — —

Mr WELLS — That is pathetic.

Mr CAMERON — That increase there — —

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — They have given up recording.

The CHAIR — Without assistance!

Mr CAMERON — During the 1990s and the decrease that was observed over the course of the last 10 years.

Mr WELLS — Do you honestly think people are going to believe you?

The CHAIR — All right. Thank you.

Mr CAMERON — And of course we have a great police force, and they have been doing a great job.

When it comes to emergency services, I think the events of recent months have demonstrated how Victorians have never been so reliant upon the dedication and commitment and the professionalism of all of our emergency service organisations. Here are some figures for the nine months to the end of March: ESTA has handled 1.3 million calls. Obviously if you look at the preceding nine months that is actually a fraction under, but there was the enormous peak that occurred on 7 February, on Black Saturday. Although there has been a 1 per cent decrease, what we have seen with the CFA has been an increase in calls during that time of 10 per cent, and the MFB up 3 per cent but VICSES was down 22 per cent — but you will remember that VICSES had quite a big year the year preceding.

Just in relation to recent initiatives, we are seeing the rollout of the protective clothing to fire services; the CFA tanker replacement — \$137 million during the life of the government, delivering 655 replacement vehicles; and you will remember last year we announced in the budget the CFA radio replacement, and that was because CFA radios would start to be cannibalised in 2012. We announced that so that the planning can be done for radios to be in place by 2012.

If we go to the next slide, in this particular budget we wanted to build on the substantial communications commitment that we had given previously of \$440 million since the statewide integrated public safety communication strategy was endorsed. The key things that have happened there to date have been the mobile metropolitan radio network for Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and the MFB; the mobile data network for Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria, where they use mobile data in vehicles; and the paging system — the emergency alerting system — which was a great transformation for the CFA, AV and VICSES as well. There has been a refreshed state net mobile radio network, that is in country areas, for Victoria Police, AV and DSE.

This budget delivers more on improving communications as well as improvements to paging systems. If we go to the next slide, we bury into there what some of those commitments are. It is funding for CFA, VICSES and Ambulance Victoria to purchase call taking and dispatch from ESTA, freeing up their budgets; improving the statewide radio network to allow the CFA and VICSES to call back to the dispatcher directly — just like in

VicPol, who can call back to the dispatcher, the CFA and VICSES will be able to do that in future; and also providing radios for VICSES as part of a better radio network.

If we go to the next slide, there will be additional investment for radio coverage in growth corridors and bushfire-affected areas as well as to cover the former Alexandra district ambulance service — that has gone into Ambulance Victoria — and obviously that is important to help communications in all of those areas. The budget also has the funds for the CFA operational officers announced previously, and also a commitment of \$21 million to buy new CFA trucks and also 42 ultra-light fire tankers — the slip-ons — and they will commence rollout in December this year. But during the course of this year there will be slip-ons from the CSESP program last year that will come on line as well.

In relation to VICSES, there is a critical asset program as part of the budget which is important. VICSES volunteer units are supported with a \$6.8 million program. At the moment that would be around \$0.8 million a year, so \$0.8 million over four years would be \$3 million or so. So there has been an increase there in relation to the commitment to individual units within the VICSES.

Sixteen extra slip-ons will be coming on this year; that is as a result of the CSESP announcements last year. In relation to communications black spots, work has commenced to deliver coverage of black spot areas — that work will commence this year — and on improving use of the emergency alerting system, the paging system, work is under way at the present time about changes or possible changes to protocols to free up and give greater redundancy. This is particularly important for the SES because at the present time they use non-emergency lines. The emergency line is quick, and non-emergency lines can be slow, so this work will try to make those alterations for the benefit of the SES — and also with the non-emergency lines as well, it is hoped to improve them with the changes to protocols.

So if I can just make the point that recruitment and retention of emergency service volunteers is important. There is a commitment this year for that as well with a campaign, and importantly we have to learn the lessons from Black Saturday. Part of that has been the Department of Justice contributing funding to the bushfire CRC, and what they are doing is a whole lot of work on the houses and buildings that burnt down on 7 February and what the details were around those to help dissect what happened on that day. Because up until lunchtime on 7 February the policies had served Victoria well, but given what occurred on 7 February obviously they are all under the spotlight, and that is why the government has announced the royal commission.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. We have got approximately 2 hours for questions on the police and emergency services portfolio. I would like to begin, as I have begun with the Premier and other ministers, with a question regarding the federal funding and the federal grants for your portfolio departments and agencies. What are you receiving in the budget, and can the department provide the committee with a detailed list and description of these grants and the accountability mechanisms that are there and being used with respect to the funding and grants?

Mr CAMERON — I can give you an outline. There are not many in this portfolio area. If I could just make commentary, though, in relation to the fire season and the fires as a result of Black Saturday, obviously the commonwealth is making a dollar-for-dollar contribution in relation to those issues, which will be substantial. Treasury is coordinating that on behalf of the state of Victoria and working with the commonwealth Treasury around those things.

If I go more broadly to the programs, though, the commonwealth provides funds to Victoria in support of a national partnership on Disaster Resilience Australia, and that national partnership replaces a number of individual programs that the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner was administering on behalf of the commonwealth. The aim of that program is to strengthen efforts to combat man-made and natural threats and disasters across Australia. In 2009–10 the commonwealth, through that NP, provided funds for administering two programs: \$1 million for the bushfire mitigation program and \$1.1 million for the national disaster mitigation program.

The bushfire mitigation program funding is provided to assist in bushfire mitigation through the construction, maintenance and signage of fire trail networks to assist local communities to better prepare for bushfires, and the national disaster mitigation program carries out national disaster management studies and strategies. Funding is provided to the OESC, and the states are required to contribute two-thirds of the funds with the

commonwealth contributing a maximum of one-third of project costs. All funds are distributed based on a grant application process, with rigorous quarterly and annual reporting against performance outcomes.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. I assume you will provide the details of the accountability mechanisms?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. We can provide all of those as follow-up as well, but they are administered on behalf of the commonwealth, and obviously, given that they are their programs, they have accountability mechanisms for their programs.

The CHAIR — And any accountability which comes from a sort of central department through to any agencies that are involved in them that you actually put on them yourselves would be useful.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. We will follow that up as well.

Mr WELLS — Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 34, under ‘Emergency services’:

Funding of \$102 million over four years and \$45 million ... has been provided to ‘Project 000 Response’ — —

Mr CAMERON — Hang on.

Mr WELLS — And I am sure that you are well aware of 000.

Mr CAMERON — Let me open the page. Whereabouts, sorry?

Mr WELLS — Down the bottom.

Dr SYKES — Last paragraph.

Mr WELLS — It may be news, but it is regarding Project 000 Response.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — Right. In the lead-up to Black Saturday experts had told you more funding was needed for the 000 emergency number, experts had told you Victoria needed a telephone-based warning system and experts had even mapped out the path of the fire on Black Saturday, but it was overlooked. Why did you, as head of Victoria’s emergency response, and your government, as a provider of basic services, ignore your own experts and do absolutely nothing?

Mr CAMERON — Are you talking about community information warning systems?

Mr WELLS — I am talking about the 000 emergency number.

Mr CAMERON — No, you are talking about community information.

Mr WELLS — The experts had told you that Victoria needed a telephone-based warning system, and experts had even mapped out the path of the fire. I refer you in addition to the report that you received in August 2008, the review of the 2008 windstorm, which also pointed out the same problems with the 000 system, and nothing was done. So can you please explain to the committee why nothing was done by you in particular and by your government?

The CHAIR — Minister, the way the question is framed it is for you to answer, but we really should be asking questions about the budget and the budget estimates rather than — —

Mr WELLS — I think, with respect, the effects of Black Saturday will have a significant impact on the forward estimates. The minister does not need any sort of protection. He should be able to answer that question the way it has been framed.

The CHAIR — I am not interested in protection or anything, Mr Wells. I am interested in conducting a hearing, as indeed you should be, in respect of the estimates going forward. I always direct ministers to deal with issues insofar as they relate to the estimates, and I expect the minister to do so.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. So if you go to the issue of the windstorm, the issue there was about being able to divert people to ring another line rather than 000, because 000 was for the immediate issues around safety and life. But because people were not aware of another line to ring they were ringing 000 with questions about trees being down here or a line being down there — those type of non-life-threatening issues. What the emergency services commissioner recommended was using a line like we do with the bushfire information line. For example, as a follow-on from that, you will remember in early March of this year when we were expecting an event that did not eventuate quite to the extent that — —

Mr WELLS — This is March 2009?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, this is a couple of months ago.

Mr WELLS — This is after Black Saturday?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, this is just a couple of months ago.

The CHAIR — Through the Chair, please, Mr Wells.

Mr CAMERON — I am telling you — —

Mr WELLS — I am asking the question about the lead-up to Black Saturday, not the events after Black Saturday.

The CHAIR — I am asking the minister to focus on the funding and the budget estimates. That is what he needs to do.

Mr CAMERON — That is right. I am telling you what happened. If you want to raise the windstorm, I will have to tell you what happened. It was about the use of another line. So in relation to issues that could potentially have arisen during the course of the night — remember this is in early March when there was a fear of fire getting away in the night and storms — what it said, and the messages were put out — —

Mr WELLS — This is March 2009?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, this is a couple of months ago.

Mr WELLS — This is after Black Saturday.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, would you allow the minister — —

Mr WELLS — We want you to focus on Black Saturday, what happened in February.

Mr CAMERON — I am telling you what happened.

Mr WELLS — This is after the event.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, could you allow the minister to answer? You have asked your question. If you wish to ask any more questions, go through the Chair, please.

Mr CAMERON — As a consequence of the emergency services commissioner's view about wind and the need for other lines, that was picked up, so that in the event that we had other events, we would try and direct people to other information sources. So what occurred — and you will remember there were radio advertisements to say people should ring up the bushfire and storm information line. So the VBIL, the Victorian bushfire information line, was called the bushfire and storm line. That was advertised. So that if people had queries, they would be ringing the VBIL. So it was out in the public's mind as to what to do. That was a key learning as a result of the windstorms, and that was adopted. In relation — —

Mr WELLS — Hang on. No, but it wasn't — —

The CHAIR — Through the Chair.

Mr WELLS — Through the Chair, how can say that was a learning experience when it was not implemented prior to Black Saturday? You are talking about March. We are talking about what happened prior to Black Saturday.

The CHAIR — I think that question is really not relating to the estimates.

Mr WELLS — How could you possibly be focusing on early March?

Mr CAMERON — Because what you are talking about is the learning from the wind event and trying to direct people to another line like the VBIL and that is exactly what we did. We had another large — sorry, there were predictions of a large storm event with also the impact of fire, in early March, and we learnt from what happened and that is what occurred.

Mr WELLS — Minister, just a moment. You were given this report in August 2008. Black Saturday happened in early February.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Mr WELLS — Why did you take action in early March, not prior to Black Saturday, when you were told how it was off the index for bushfires?

Mr CAMERON — No, but it was.

Mr WELLS — No, you did not.

Mr CAMERON — You are confusing the issues, Mr Wells. You are confusing community information warning systems with the windstorm report. They are two very different reports. One was about the learnings from windstorm, which we learnt, and that is what you saw occur in early March. The other one — —

Mr WELLS — But the question is: why did you not implement those learning things in the report prior to Black Saturday?

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, I think we have had the answer.

Mr WELLS — Are you saying that they should not have been in place prior to Black Saturday?

Mr CAMERON — No. I am quite happy to continue to explore this.

Mr WELLS — Are you saying that it should not have been in place prior to Black Saturday?

Mr CAMERON — I am quite happy to explore this because Mr Wells is confused about the issue. The windstorm report was about directing other lines, which happened. We did not have another big wind event prior to March. When we did — —

Mr WELLS — We did not have a big wind event?

Mr CAMERON — We did not have a big — —

Mr WELLS — What do you call Black Saturday?

Mr CAMERON — That was a fire event.

Mr WELLS — Are you saying that Black Saturday was not impacted by the winds on Black Saturday?

Mr CAMERON — Mr Wells, we have a Victorian bushfire information line and that is where people know to get information about bushfires. The issue with a wind event is that people do not know where to get information, and that was a key learning out of the wind event. Let us go now, though, to community information warning systems.

The CHAIR — Very quickly and relating to the budget estimates because I am not interested in things which the royal commission should be looking at; I am not interested in events of the past.

Mr WELLS — No, this is about the actions of the minister — —

The CHAIR — Do not interrupt, please.

Mr WELLS — This is the actions of the minister that impact on the budget.

The CHAIR — I am happy for the minister to talk about the budget, but please do so and get on with it.

Mr CAMERON — As you know, Victoria has wanted a national information warning system for some time. We have pushed that. That is included from the highest levels, from the Premier to the Prime Minister, and, as you know, that has now been announced. The only jurisdiction — —

Mr WELLS — But it is too late.

The CHAIR — Do not interrupt.

Mr CAMERON — The only jurisdiction in the nation that was pushing and driving that was Victoria. That is why the Premier, John Brumby, when he became the Premier took the issue up.

Mr WELLS — Please!

Mr CAMERON — And he got it on the COAG agenda.

Mr WELLS — Where was the big push prior to Black Saturday? Where were your actions to put this in place prior to Black Saturday?

The CHAIR — Mr Wells.

Mr CAMERON — There was a big push and that is why it got on the COAG agenda.

Mr WELLS — Hang on — a big push after Black Saturday?

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, you have had enough. I think we will move on.

Mr CAMERON — You can ask that next time.

Mr WELLS — That is an absolutely disgraceful answer.

Ms MUNT — Can I have my turn now?

The CHAIR — You can have your turn and, Mr Wells, I would like you to control yourself and go through the Chair, please.

Ms MUNT — In your initial presentation you touched on funding for IT.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Ms MUNT — As it relates to the forward estimates, could you please outline what you see the challenges for Victoria Police are in IT and how they will be addressed in the coming year?

Mr CAMERON — Yes. Thank you very much, Ms Munt. IT has been an ongoing issue in Victoria Police for a long period of time, as you will be aware. Just to give you a bit of history, late last year Chief Commissioner Nixon said that there were procurement and contractual issues with Victoria Police. That is also partly the subject of a criminal investigation, but she alerted me to procurement issues. We had a discussion about that. It was my view that the Auditor-General should be informed. That was also her view, and the Auditor-General was informed. I had a conversation with the Commissioner for Law Enforcement Data Security. I wrote to him and, as a result of that, he has also done a review around governance.

When Chief Commissioner Overland came to his post, the Chief Commissioner made it clear that IT was a key issue for him and he wanted to have a look at the whole IT arrangements, and the CLEDS report, the governance report, would form part of his conversations. The CLEDS has given me a report around governance. He goes back and details ongoing issues since the mid-1990s.

There has been reform. The reform has been slow; it has not been fast enough. He gives ultimately five key recommendations for immediate improvement. The chief commissioner is working through those issues as he also works through the issues about what the entire figuration should be.

What the CLEDS (Commissioner for Law Enforcement Data Security) says is that there should be a person appointed with overall responsibility for information management and security. Obviously it should be a high-level role, given that is what he is suggesting the way the government should go — nominating the Victoria Police appointee for information management and security as a security executive within the organisation with clear reporting lines and responsibilities.

He says it should retain the central Victoria Police ICT area, focused on delivering ICT support to the organisation but review the in-house and outsource capabilities, including, importantly, the procurement capacities. He talks about reviewing the existing standing committees to identify the appropriate forum for a coordinated approach to information management and security and implementing a program of cultural change through Victoria Police to reinforce the structural and governance arrangements. It broadens out from there.

The chief commissioner has that report as well. It has been sent to him. It has also been sent to the Ombudsman, because the Ombudsman also announced that he wanted to have an inquiry in relation to some of these things. The chief commissioner is considering all of these matters. I might hand over to the chief commissioner.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — I have received the CLEDS report. I think it is a very good report. The recommendations seem sensible and well structured. I have an additional piece of work happening where we have engaged an external consultant to work with our internal IT people to give me some advice on the appropriate operating model for IT and information management across the organisation.

They have been talking to the CLEDS, and KPMG, which undertook the work for the CLEDS. I shortly will receive that report. I think that will then give me a solid platform to make decisions about how to reorganise and restructure.

I think one of the key things is we need to separate out the management of IT — that is, the software and the hardware — from the process of managing information. We need to get the governance arrangements right and the accountability arrangements right there. That seems clear and obvious to me. That will then form part of a broader corporate services review that I have announced, which we will undertake to look at some reorganisation in the corporate services area of the organisation.

I am in the process of making senior appointments into executive director roles. I do not actually have incumbents in those roles at the moment but will have shortly. There will be three of them, and then they will have the responsibility for leading the broader corporate services review. That will include the restructuring, the reorganisation and the implementation of the recommendations coming from the CLEDS but also from the internal review or the external review that I have initiated.

Ms MUNT — Do have some sort of time frame in mind for these initiatives to be put in place?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — The CLEDS has suggested time frames within his report. I think I will be able to meet those. This is obviously a priority issue for me. We need to get this right, so I would be planning to be moving on implementation from about midyear and looking to have full implementation within about 12 months.

Ms MUNT — That is great. Thank you.

Mr CAMERON — You can have a copy of that report, if you want.

Ms MUNT — That would be very good.

The CHAIR — If you could table the report for the committee — thank you very much, Minister.

Mr WELLS — Thank you, Minister. I was fascinated to learn from the previous question that Black Saturday was a firestorm and not a windstorm.

The CHAIR — I think we can just get on with the questions without the interplay.

Mr CAMERON — Obviously on very high fire danger days like that — what we call the classic fire days — you start with the day extremely hot, a strong wind that gets hotter and hotter. The wind of course is one of the big risks to a situation when there is fire because it will get away so quickly.

Mr WELLS — I refer you to budget paper 3, page 34 again — the same page, so you would still have it open — in regards to ‘Project 000 response’. I also refer you to a Victoria Police document ‘Risk Register’, which the chief commissioner would be aware of. This was prepared for you on August 2008. It says:

Risk: inability to ensure emergency response capability remains. Inability of ESTA to respond to emergency/BCP and disaster recovery situation.

That information was first prepared on 13 November 2006 and was prepared as a document in August 2008. Furthermore, in the same document it says:

Insufficient trained deployable staff to provide operational communication support staff to an event, such as major bushfires/ searches/ incident specialist (immediate communications facilities, assistance for planned and unplanned events, such as searches — —

The CHAIR — Where are we going with this?

Mr WELLS — Hang on! At least give me the courtesy of asking the question.

The CHAIR — I am seeing this as a long way away from estimates. It is something that seems more for the royal commission.

Mr WELLS — I understand your sensitivity to this, but this is something very important to the opposition.

The CHAIR — I am, because I do not see that this estimates hearing — —

Mr WELLS — It refers to budget paper 3.

The CHAIR — Excuse me; just a second. I just want to be very careful that what we do here today does not affect what is happening in the royal commission.

Mr WELLS — No, this has got nothing to do with it. The second part of that document prepared by Victoria Police was about insufficient trained deployable staff to provide operational communication support. You were told in August 2008. Then there was the inability to ensure the CAD emergency communications services. Victoria Police had this information in November 2006.

The CHAIR — It does not relate to the estimates.

Mr WELLS — It prepared this document for you in August 2008. You knew about the inability of the 000 system that was given to you by Victoria Police.

The CHAIR — Could you get on to the question?

Mr WELLS — You knew about the insufficient staff being able to provide that information, yet you provided absolutely no support to fix this problem. That is an absolutely disgraceful situation. You failed in your role as a Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Why did you not take action to fix this problem when Victoria Police advised you in 2006, prepared a report in 2008?

The CHAIR — I think you need to answer that with regard to the actions in the budget papers.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. As you know and as I have outlined, we have put in \$440 million in relation to improvement of communications, and this budget builds on that further. I have already outlined, early on in the slides, the building on of those initiatives. One of those initiatives is with Ambulance Victoria coming into ESTA, so — —

Mr WELLS — Minister, you were told in 2006 — —

The CHAIR — Let the minister answer the question.

Mr WELLS — Victoria Police told you in 2006, and you took no action.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, you are out of order. The minister, to answer?

Mr CAMERON — I think what you might be getting at is D24.

Mr WELLS — No, hang on. I did say the inability of ESTA to respond to emergencies. So it is part of the overall emergency services that Victoria Police notified you about in November 2006.

Ms MUNT — How does that relate to the forward estimates and the budget papers?

The CHAIR — It does not relate to the estimates, but the minister can answer as far as it relates to the estimates.

Mr WELLS — Black Saturday had an enormous impact on the forward estimates, so I expect the minister should be able to answer these questions.

The CHAIR — He is, if you would give him a chance.

Mr WELLS — He had this information in 2006, and he did nothing about it.

Mr CAMERON — If we are talking about ESTA, we are talking about Victoria Police in the metropolitan region, Mr Wells. What we do in this budget is put \$3 million in to improve our response in the metropolitan area, and that is the response that ESTA does in the metropolitan area. All of the agencies are responded to by ESTA in the metropolitan area, and this budget puts in that \$3 million.

Mr WELLS — But, Minister, it is too late. You were given this information in 2006.

The CHAIR — You have had your question, Mr Wells. We will move on.

Mr WELLS — A report was prepared for you in 2008, and you did absolutely nothing about it in the run-up to 7 February 2009.

The CHAIR — Mr Noonan?

Mr WELLS — So is there an explanation as to why? The information was given to you.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells! You have made your — —

Mr CAMERON — I am quite happy to say what happened was that ESTA did provide those services. They used their reserves. In this budget what we are seeing is the government putting in \$3 million.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Yes, but this is after the event.

Mr WELLS — But this is after the event. It was your inability to act when you were given information — —

The CHAIR — Thank you, Mr Wells!

Mr DALLA-RIVA — You were told about it earlier.

Mr WELLS — Victoria Police gave you the information, and you did nothing about it.

Mr CAMERON — ESTA has responded by using their reserves. Essentially the issue you are getting at there is on Friday and Saturday night there are periods of high demand, particularly with ambulance and with police, and ESTA responded to that by providing those services.

Mr WELLS — What about the fire services? You said ambulance and police, what about fire services?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, the fire services, but they do not have peaks on Friday and Saturday nights like ambulance services and police do. That is a long and historical thing, Mr Wells.

The CHAIR — Mr Noonan?

Mr WELLS — So fire services do not have peaks on Friday and Saturday nights? What happened on Black Saturday? You do not call that peak time?

Mr CAMERON — That is a peak time, but it is not on a Friday and Saturday night. You are talking about — —

Mr WELLS — Black Saturday was Saturday night. How can you say that was not peak time, on a Saturday night?

Mr CAMERON — We are talking about the regular movements on a Friday and Saturday night. On Black Saturday ESTA geared up for Black Saturday.

The CHAIR — Okay, we have had the answer. Mr Noonan?

Mr NOONAN — Minister, I want to ask a question about crime stats, which has aroused some interest down the other end of the table. I note in budget paper 3, at page 144, there are some output targets as part of this budget estimates process. I want to refer to your presentation on the reduction of crime and ask if you could give the committee a general overview of the trends in crime and the success of Victoria Police in reducing crime generally.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Mr Noonan. Obviously Victoria Police does a lot of work about where there are crime problems and being able to deal with that. You have seen on the slide the large reductions that we have seen in crime. That is not to say that there are not problem areas, and Victoria Police gives a big response to those problem areas.

If I could make the point around assaults, for example, Victoria Police, you will be aware, is working through issues there like Operation Razon and the Safe Streets task force.

If we go to crime more generally, in the last financial year, the 2007–08 financial year, what we saw was a 1.9 per cent decrease in the rate of crime in Victoria. That is now 24 per cent below where it was in the 2000–01 period, which the slide that I showed you and was picked up on. That is the lowest point of the rate of crime since the introduction of computerised systems in 1993. Those figures really reflect also the ABS data around where Victoria sits in relation to crime. That obviously is welcome, but that is not to say there are not particular problem areas.

In the 2007–08 crime statistics it says that crimes fell during that year in a number of categories. Homicide was down 15 per cent; assaults were down 0.8 per cent, including a reduction in the rate of non-family violence assaults of 1.2 per cent. Overall crimes against the person were down 0.2 per cent, against property down by 2 per cent, and residential burglary down by 4 per cent. Since 2000–01 we have seen robberies down 30 per cent, the rate of aggravated burglary down 37 per cent, the rate of residential burglary down 47 per cent, theft of vehicles down 25 per cent, and theft of motor vehicles down — —

Mr WELLS — What about assaults?

The CHAIR — Let the minister answer.

Mr CAMERON — I want you to ask me about that.

Mr WELLS — What about assaults?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — What about Ombudsman's reports?

Mr WELLS — You jumped over assaults.

Mr CAMERON — I actually mentioned it — —

Mr WELLS — No, you mentioned it for last year, but you did not mention the aggregate figures. Tell us about assaults, how much they have increased since 1999–2000.

The CHAIR — Minister, just a moment.

Mr CAMERON — As I said, there are some — —

Ms MUNT — You were not listening.

Mr WELLS — No, he has not; he jumped over them.

The CHAIR — Minister, just a moment, please, and Mr Wells. We are actually conducting a hearing here. It is not the floor of Parliament where we have interjections and people responding to each other and yelling across the floor. It makes it very difficult for Hansard to keep a record of this. So, Minister, if you could avoid trying to provoke people, and if people could avoid — —

Mr WELLS — Just stick to the facts — that is all we need.

The CHAIR — If people could avoid — like you are not — interjecting.

Mr WELLS — What? I am just asking him to stick to the facts.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, I am speaking as the Chair and you are continually interrupting. I really do think this is not showing a lot of respect to the proceedings. The minister, to continue?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much. I have detailed those, but I have said there are some problem areas. While assaults may have decreased slightly — the rate of assaults in the last financial year — there is a fair emphasis on assaults, particularly around particularly around entertainment precincts.

Mr WELLS — What is the increase?

Mr CAMERON — I told you in the last financial year there was a decrease of 1.2 per cent in the rate, but there is an emphasis around entertainment precincts. That is why we introduced banning notices.

Dr SYKES — The Hummers!

Mr CAMERON — Something which you opposed, Mr Wells. Do you remember?

Mr WELLS — Which one?

Mr CAMERON — The banning notices. You opposed the banning notices in entertainment precincts where police have now issued over 1000.

Mr WELLS — You do not have enough police out on the streets. That is what the problem is. You have got too many stuck behind desks.

Mr CAMERON — We have seen the Safe Streets task force.

Mr WELLS — The lowest operational number of police anywhere in the country is in Victoria.

Mr CAMERON — You asked me — —

Mr WELLS — According to the ABS.

The CHAIR — Without assistance! The minister, to answer the question without assistance.

Mr CAMERON — You can ask me about those things if you want.

Mr WELLS — The ABS shows that the lowest number of operational police — —

The CHAIR (to Mr Wells) — You have had your turn.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — He keeps on interjecting.

The CHAIR — I have already said we are not into interjections; we are into answers and questions. Have you finished your response yet, Minister?

Mr CAMERON — No. Indeed what I want to say on the issue is that entertainment precincts, as I said to you, was a problem. That is why we have increased penalties, for example, for serving drunks on premises. That is why we have more police in this budget to bring it to 11 250 by June of next year. We totally reject Mr Wells's policy of reducing police by 800.

Mr WELLS — But Victoria has the lowest number of operational police.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells!

Mr WELLS — It is down into the low 80 per cents according to the ABS.

Mr CAMERON — What we have been about is increasing police, so that has been very helpful.

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, the minister is answering the question — but without your assistance.

Mr WELLS — He is not really being truthful about that particular answer.

The CHAIR — Stop the grandstanding, and please, Minister, get on with the answer.

Mr CAMERON — If I could just say, Chair, when Mr Wells's turn comes around I am happy for him to ask about those things. I am happy to point out their policy of decreasing police and our policy of increasing police and where we fit nationally with what the Grants Commission says.

Mr WELLS — How does that relate to forward estimates? How come you are not drawing him into line?

Dr SYKES — Meanwhile, back to the cheat sheet; keep going!

Mr WELLS — We have got one set of rules for Labor and one set of rules for us.

The CHAIR — No, we do not actually. Minister, in respect of the estimates, please?

Mr CAMERON — Mr Wells, if you want to interject I am happy to counter-interject, but the Chair is probably not happy for either of us to do it.

The CHAIR — I would prefer if neither of you interjected. I am not happy for either.

Mr WELLS — You have two sets of rules — one for you lot and one for us.

The CHAIR — No. That is entirely incorrect. Minister, have you finished answering the question in respect of — —

Mr CAMERON — Thank you. There has also been the operation around Operation Razon about licensed premises. I might get the chief commissioner to talk more about that.

The CHAIR — All right. In respect of the estimates, please, and the action going forward.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you, Minister. In respect of Operation Razon, that is really part of the Safer Streets strategy, mainly around licensed precincts in and around the CBD. We have had a significant surge in police numbers out on the streets since about November of last year — anything up to 150 additional police on overtime from additional moneys that were provided to us by government last year; some \$11 million. The evidence is that that is working. Assaults in and around the CBD have plateaued — that is, I think there has been a very, very slight increase — but when compared to other figures, that is a reasonable result.

There has certainly been a very significant increase in the amount of action that police are taking. If you have a look at some of the overall crime statistics over the last 12 months, when you compare this last 12 months with the previous last 12 months, there is a slight increase, but most of that is driven by public order offending. That is reflective of the fact that we are out on the streets and we are taking action — arresting people, dealing with them and using the banning notices. We have a real commitment to continue with this effort.

I was out on the streets myself probably four or five weeks ago talking to our people. They tell me that the strategy is working. We need to find a way to sustain that. We have currently been doing that on overtime with the additional money that has been provided. That is not sustainable moving forward. It is part of the reason why I have been talking to government about bringing forward some of the recruiting in the next financial year so that we have the numbers that we need to sustain efforts such as the Safer Streets program and to get on top of the public order issues there.

But there are also clearly some issues for us around robberies, which have been trending up. They tend to be soft-target robberies, more offending in the street. Simply because people carry mobile phones, iPods and other things late at night, they are a soft target and they tend to be robbed in those circumstances. Clearly we have got work to do there, although, interestingly, the evidence is in and around the licensed precincts where we have been working it looks like we are displacing some of that robbery offending.

It is clear that people who are of that mind have made a decision that it is too risky to engage in that sort of conduct in those areas, so it has been displaced. Some of that displacement is into the transport system, which is again why we have got a commitment to put additional resources into the transit system to help us get on top of that particular issue.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, I would like to ask you about the emergency management capability for which you are providing \$217 million in this year's budget. In the lead-up to Black Saturday the Premier, the Deputy Premier and the fire chiefs all warned that 7 February was going to be a bad day — likely to be the worst since Ash Wednesday. You, in earlier answering Mr Wells, referred to it as a classic fire danger start to the day.

A week after, there was a reported comment by the Emergency Services Commissioner, Bruce Esplin, which said:

Esplin called the Police and Emergency Services Minister Bob Cameron and advised him to come immediately from his Bendigo home to Melbourne.

'I told him we are going to experience losses and we need his leadership,' Esplin says.

The question is: given the expected conditions, why were you not in Melbourne to deal with the emergency situation on that Saturday? Why did it take Bruce Esplin's call to have you come down on Saturday to provide leadership, and what leadership did you provide once you arrived?

Ms MUNT — Does that relate to the budget estimates?

Mr WELLS — This is a crucial point.

Ms MUNT — On which page of the budget papers is that on?

Mr CAMERON — I am happy to answer.

The CHAIR — I really do not see that as a question related to these estimates.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is related to the estimates.

Ms MUNT — Which page? Which line item?

Mr WELLS — Are you telling me the responsibility of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is not relevant.

The CHAIR (to Mr Wells) — Can you allow me to finish?

Mr CAMERON — Perhaps I will answer it by stating the arrangements that will occur in the next financial year, because they are similar to the existing arrangements. That might be a way to do it.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister. As I said before, I do not see this committee taking over the role of the royal commission or indeed of questions in the house.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Chair, can we just determine if the government is seeking \$200-plus million —

The CHAIR — Excuse me. We are here to talk about the budget estimates. Minister, you have suggested a way forward, and I am happy with that.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. The way forward next financial year will be the way it has occurred previously, including with both governments, which is that when you have an emergency there is a control agency, the control agency runs the issues and the emergency management arrangements apply. The minister does not have any operational role, and you would not expect a politician to have any operational role.

Dr SYKES — You would expect leadership, Minister.

Mr CAMERON — However, what does happen when you have a major incident is that a response has to occur, and we have to make sure that that occurs, and government, of course, plays a key part in that.

So if we have a day where things happen, the emergency services commissioner will telephone the minister, he will flag that there could be an issue and the minister will then go into town or go to wherever.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — You knew about this before the day. You did not need the call from Bruce Esplin.

The CHAIR — The minister is answering the question.

Mr CAMERON — This occurs with every total fire ban day. Generally there is not an issue, but if there is an issue, the minister will come down, because what we have to then do is start the government's response for the next day.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Are you saying it came as a surprise to you when you got the call from Bruce Esplin?

Mr CAMERON — So, if I could just use as an example something that will occur next financial year, but I will use an example from 7 February. We decided that we were going to have a cabinet meeting. We had to make arrangements for various ministers to go to different places, including the police commissioner, and that was done. I also spoke — as I would next financial year — on the 7th to the opposition and told them what was happening, I spoke to the Leader of the Nationals and told him what was happening, and we put all of those arrangements in overnight.

The commonwealth was also involved during the course of the night. As the scale of the event became more apparent the commonwealth was more actively engaged, and as you know, for example, on the morning of 8 February the Prime Minister was also out and announcing that the army would provide assistance over and above what the army would normally provide. In a normal fire there might be a request for the army to provide some caterpillars, but they went over and above that.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, this is all after the event. We are talking about where you were. You knew this was coming, and you chose to be 3 hours away from Melbourne.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Even your boss was saying it was going to be an ugly, ugly day!

Mr CAMERON — It was, potentially.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Minister.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Why did you have to take the phone call?

Mr WELLS — Why did you need the phone call from Bruce Esplin to tell you to come down from Bendigo?

Mr CAMERON — Because it depends what happens if there is fire. Often with total fire ban days — —

Mr WELLS — But the index was 300. It was off the scale!

Mr CAMERON — That is what happens.

Mr WELLS — Why did you need a phone call from Bruce Esplin?

Mr CAMERON — Longstanding arrangements, Mr Wells.

Mr WELLS — So you have to wait for the phone call before you take any leadership role?

Mr CAMERON — It is a longstanding arrangement that the minister does not interfere in the operations of fire services.

The CHAIR — Ms Huppert has the call.

Ms HUPPERT — Thank you, Minister. I have a question — —

Mr CAMERON — If I can just make the point that it is a longstanding arrangement that the minister does not interfere in the operations, but the minister is — —

Mr WELLS — But you waited for a phone call. Surely as a leader in the community you would go down.

Mr CAMERON — Yes, and that is what happens to get things going for the next day.

Mr WELLS — So you wait at home for the phone call from Bruce Esplin before you take any initiative?

The CHAIR — We have had enough on that. Ms Huppert?

Ms HUPPERT — I have a question about theft of a motor vehicle, and this follows on from the answer you gave Mr Noonan in his earlier question in relation to crime statistics about various categories of crime. In relation to property crime, could you please outline the measures that will be taken during the forward estimates period to reduce the level of theft from motor vehicles?

Mr CAMERON — Theft from motor vehicles poses a problem, particularly opportunistic theft, and it is like the police have said previously — if people did not leave valuables in their cars, then thieves simply would not see them and then steal them in terms of taking advantage of the opportunity. You would not leave your wallet on the dashboard, so please do not leave your Navman, for example, on the dashboard.

If we have a look at what has occurred during the last year, for example, we see with GPS receivers and navigation units a 300 per cent increase in their theft. We have seen decreases with things like handbags and other things, but with those opportunistic things — things for which thieves can get a quick sale — we have seen an increase. We particularly want people to think about taking away the valuable in the first place to avoid that issue.

You might be aware that Victoria Police has entered into an arrangement with VicRoads, and now there is a pamphlet going out when people re-register their car which states, 'Remove it, lock it or lose it,' and that is part of getting out that message. But I will ask the chief commissioner if he wants to make some comments about these things.

The CHAIR — Particularly regarding your action in the forward estimates and the funding for this particular activity, please, Minister.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Overall we have done very well over the past four or five years around both theft of motor vehicles and theft from motor vehicles. That is because of a range of measures that have been put in place, but we are obviously going to face increasing challenges here.

The point the minister made is right. If you look at the data, in 2006–07 1600 GPS units were stolen, and in the 2007–08 year that figure was 6700 units stolen. The same applies to laptop computers — it went from a little over 4000 stolen in 2006–07 to nearly 6500 in 2007–08. So we have recently launched a new website, *Victoria Police News*. As part of that there is a portal called 'My Place' that will allow people in the community to go in and see what is happening with crime and road toll in their particular area.

The data is at what we call police service area level, which equates to a local government area. We think it is important. It will lead to greater transparency around crime statistics and the road toll because we will be releasing data every three months, and my view is to try and make that data as timely as we can. As we improve I will be looking to release that data on a more regular basis. So there is the transparency issue.

But the other important benefit that will come from that is that it will alert the community to what is happening in their area. If theft from motor vehicle is an issue in their area, they will understand it, but more importantly we will be able to give them good crime prevention advice with respect to taking preventive action themselves. Because all of this crime is preventable; it is absolutely preventable. If people do not leave valuables in cars, they cannot be stolen.

We just need to keep making that point. It is around this issue of mutual responsibility that I have been talking about in my time as chief commissioner, and I intend to continue to talk about it, because whilst there is a lot that we can do, if we actually engage with the community, if we get it working with us, there is so much more that we can achieve. There is a very simple range of measures that can actually help us around the crime rate. An obvious one is to not leave your GPS units in the car; take them out, lock them in the boot, make sure you rub off the sticky marks that are left on your windscreens. It is really simple, obvious stuff.

Theft of numberplates is obviously also another key issue for us. There were over 10 000 numberplates stolen last year. Again it is around fitting numberplates with one-way screws — it is another very simple way of actually stopping numberplates from being stolen. That will have a flow-on effect across the crime stats, because we know a lot of numberplates are stolen, put on cars, and they will then be used in a petrol drive-off. They will go in, fill up with petrol, they will not pay, they will drive off, but they will have false plates on the car. There is a knock-on effect.

If we can stop the plates from being stolen in the first place, it will help with fraud and petrol drive-offs and a whole series of other things. That is a really important initiative. We are obviously continuing to work with the community and to work with other experts looking at ways where we can actually have an impact on crime.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for that.

Ms PENNICUIK — Minister, since January last year there has been a series of gang assaults on Indian students and Indian Australians, particularly in the western suburbs, some of which have resulted in coma, partial blindness, stabbing wounds and death. So far the government's response has been to set up a helpline to assist Indian students. The Federation of Indian Students of Australia has warned that the police have failed to prevent this gang violence against Indian students and the federation is sceptical about the ability of other state government initiatives, such as the helpline, to stop this violence. The minister would be aware there have also been similar problems in the Kensington area, and the Kensington legal centre has been advising about that. What extra resources for the police has the government introduced in the budget to address this violence on trains in particular and across the state more generally?

Mr CAMERON — I think the issue that you are getting to, Ms Pennicuik, is that Indians are well known as peaceful and pleasant people, and there are people who are picking them off by taking advantage of them — going up and robbing them of their wallet or their iPod or whatever might be readily available. This is a concern to us. It is a great concern to the police, and the chief commissioner will elaborate on that. There have been operations, and the chief commissioner might want to talk about those. There have been operations in Brimbank, and there have been arrests. Can I just say that peaceful, pleasant people being picked off is the very sort of crime which is ugly and distasteful. It is an issue which police are very conscious of. Chief Commissioner, I might get you to expand on some of those operations and the issues around Indians.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thanks, Minister. Thanks for the question. This is obviously an issue of concern. I do want to make the point, though, that a number of these robberies we think are racially motivated but a large number are not; they are opportunistic. It has to do with the way Indian students in particular behave, the areas they live in and how they go about the community. We obviously need to work with them to make them aware of the risks and to also again help them take actions that can prevent making themselves targets. That can mean not having obvious displays of wealth, being careful with phones, iPods, that sort of thing, and thinking about how they move about, particularly on the public transport hubs — if they can move in groups, staying together — those sorts of things. We are having those discussions with them.

In January the Brimbank police service area launched the Police Indian Western Reference Group. The group involves various community organisations and members of the Indian community, who collectively discussed ways to decrease the level of victimisation of Indian students. So there is dialogue going on, and I think that is an important part of it. We also recognise that we need to up the enforcement effort. We have dedicated significant resources to the problem. We have doubled the size of the EMBONA robbery task force. Only last week detectives arrested and charged seven offenders for robbery-related offences. The third of a series of planned operations tackling robberies and antisocial behaviour in the western suburbs earlier this month resulted in police arresting 20 offenders for 19 offences, including intentionally causing injury, possessing controlled weapons and hindering police.

There is also the helpline that you have mentioned. Again, by itself, it is not the total answer, but it is important around getting information out to the community. It really is going to require a mixture of responses, which is about stronger enforcement action. Again we have recognised that, particularly on the transit system. It is why we have got a commitment to put 50 additional resources into the transit system to actually help further reduce crime on the transit system. I do make the point though: our transit system is safe. If you look at it — —

Ms PENNICUIK — I do every day.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — The data there says it is safe. I know there is a perception that it is not, and I know clearly there are incidents that happen on it, and they are not acceptable. We need to work hard through some additional resources into the area to reassure people, to make it comfortable for people to use the transport system here in Melbourne. We recognise that as an issue. That is an initiative that we will be taking in the next financial year.

Ms PENNICUIK — Are there any extra liaison officers in those communities that I mentioned being employed?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Particularly in those areas, it is not just Indian students — Brimbank, as I am sure you are aware, has an incredibly diverse cultural mix, as do a number of other key areas. We understand that. We do have community liaison officers. We are looking at increasing the number of liaison officers that we have to engage with these new and emerging communities. I think we have a pretty reasonable relationship with the Indian community and the Indian students. We obviously need to improve that, but it is not just the Indians. As I am sure you are aware, we have got hundreds of different races — ethnic backgrounds — here in Melbourne. There are real challenges around new and emerging communities in some of the areas that we have identified.

A key strategy for us is to really work hard to engage with those communities, to get them to trust police and to get them to work with us. If we are able to do that, we will get better outcomes for them and for the broader community.

Mr SCOTT — Minister, I would like to raise the issue of family violence assaults. I note in budget paper 3 on page 336 there is a reference to this. I wonder if you could detail for us what the outcomes have been in this area and what initiatives are undertaken in the budget to tackle this issue.

Mr CAMERON — This year we will continue to see police playing a very important role when it comes to family violence. If you look back, we saw a big reform regarding family violence in the Cain years, with the Crimes (Family Violence) Act. But in 2004 we saw Chief Commissioner Nixon change the approach of police to say, 'Family violence will be treated as a crime. We are going to deal with it vastly differently. We will not just hope that it settles down and ignore it, we are actually going to be up-front and open about it and deal with it'. In the three years since that 2004 code of practice we have seen a 190 per cent increase in the charges laid by police and a 28 per cent increase in intervention order applications. Police have given that a big focus.

Recently we saw a change in the law concerning the way police can handle issues of family violence, particularly late at night. What happened before was frustrating for police — they would have to wait, for example, to get an order as to who was going to be in the home. That would take a long time because you had to be able to find the duty magistrate, which was a convoluted process, whereas police are now able to do that themselves after hours. That has made a big difference. Deputy Chief Commissioner Overland, as he then was, had a key role in terms of these arrangements. We have a tremendous commitment for the next financial year

from Chief Commissioner Overland, as he now is, in terms of family violence. I will get the Chief Commissioner to make some comments.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — For instance last year, in the 2007–08 financial year, there were 31 676 family violence incidents attended. There were 7612 charges laid as a result of police attendance at those incidents — that is, charges were laid for 24 per cent of the incidents attended. The total number of intervention orders taken out was 31 556. I think that data reflects the change in emphasis, and the continuing change in emphasis, we are taking in dealing with family violence.

Previously, when an offender was processed for a family violence incident the primary charge was assault. That is approximately 62 per cent of family violence incidents. Property damage constituted the primary charge in approximately 12 per cent of incidents. There has been no significant change in the percentage breakdown of relationships between parties involved; however, there has been approximately a 63 per cent increase in child offenders — that is, where a child is the perpetrator. It has moved from 265 child offenders in 2006–07 to 432 in 2007–08. We need to understand that, and we obviously need to look to start shifting resources to deal with that emerging issue.

The proportion of family violence incidents which involve a repeat attendance by police is approximately 29 per cent. That has remained relatively stable over the last five years. So again, part of our continuing focus is around trying to reduce the number of repeat visits, because it seems to us that is the real measure of success. We also know the more often we are called back to a house the more frustrating it is for our staff, who have to go back to the same premises time after time. It is obviously of concern to the family — it represents some escalation of threat and danger to them — and so we need to work hard to reduce that.

The Family Violence Protection Act 2008, which came into effect in December of 2008, has assisted in that. It has given us important new powers to detain offenders and to deal with them. Over 1000 safety notices have been issued, and approximately 50 per cent of those have been issued on weekends and public holidays. Nearly 60 per cent of those notices have converted into full or interim intervention orders, which is higher than the conversion rate for the complaint and warrant process, which was around about 45 per cent in 2007–08. We have undertaken a comprehensive training scheme, with over 5000 members having been trained in the new legislation. Approximately 83 per cent of operational members who required the training have received it. Again, consistent with the code, we are looking at referring people on — men in particular, who tend to be the offenders in this case — into behavioural management programs. We are also looking at appropriate referrals for women and children.

There is a significant crossover into sexual assault, and we know that, so we have also been looking at improving our response to sexual assault. We have been trialling sexual offence and child abuse investigation teams, and we have had centres operating in Frankston and Mildura. Those centres are being evaluated at the moment. The early evidence has been very, very positive in terms of the improved service to victims coming out of this, and we will be talking to the government about the possible expansion of that program moving forward.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. I am sure I speak on behalf of all members of the committee in commending the initiatives and the work police are doing in this regard, because we all regard it as very important. We all have issues in our communities coming through our doors as well as through yours, and so we appreciate the more intensive effort being made in this regard.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you, Mr Chair.

Mr WELLS — Just to follow up, Chief Commissioner, is there a need for further legislation regarding young offenders and the issue of domestic violence and the young offenders involved in that?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — I think at the moment the legislation available to us is appropriate, but it is obviously a situation we will need to continue to monitor. I think the broader issue is what we do with young offenders and how we treat them. I think simply putting them through the criminal justice system is not a full and complete response, nor is it necessarily appropriate. I think it is about having appropriate referral pathways for them so they can be dealt with. Often there is a reason why these people are behaving in this way, and I think it is important to try to understand that and to help them deal with it.

Dr SYKES — Minister, my interest is in the timeliness of response to large-scale emergencies such as national disasters, and I refer to the heading ‘Emergency management capability’ on page 156 of budget paper 3. There is a line item about timeliness. Part of natural disaster management involves the collection of predictive information, the analysis of it and then taking action on that analysis of the predictive information. That action may involve resource allocation or early warning. If we look at Black Saturday, a number of communities had little or no early warning of the impending events, even though that information has been shown to have been available.

I understand that in 1992 there was a launch of the standard emergency warning signal. It was relaunched in 1998 and it was used during the 2003 bushfires, but it was totally silent on Black Saturday. My question is: why was that so? Is it not appropriate to have — even if the system is not perfect — support of an imperfect system so that some people have warning rather than no warning at all, which has led to many tragedies and pain for a lot of people?

The CHAIR — Once again, Minister, we do not wish to delve into issues before the royal commission.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. This is a matter before the royal commission, but just to go over the history coming out of 2003, that was what was suggested, which Dr Sykes has said. After the 2006 fires there were suggestions made the other way because of the confusion that it caused, but also during that period of time we saw a difference in relation to the use of the ABC. So coming out of the 2002–03 fires we saw the memorandum of understanding with the ABC and the ABC being used. Operationally those decisions are made, and operationally the decision was made about the use of the ABC.

I know what you are saying, Chairman, about the royal commission, but just in relation to the SEWS nationally, that matter is being examined but they are also waiting for the outcome of the royal commission as well, as I understand it, because that is an issue before it.

Dr SYKES — Without crossing into the role of the royal commission, there is a basic principle of management and leadership by the government of the day that you operate with the best available tools you have got. I noted after 7 February, whenever the next high-concern day was — and I cannot remember the date — that there was a use of existing technology through the telephone texting system.

Mr CAMERON — Yes.

Dr SYKES — But that was after the event. So my question is: are you committing to using current technology and supporting the use of current technology, as the government and as the people that set the direction, pending the development and implementation of best technology and best application of best technology?

Mr CAMERON — That is an operational decision about the SEWS, and that obviously is before the royal commission. We will go back to the text message, for example, that occurred in early March. Remember the bureau warned of potential strong winds and a storm arising through the night and the fear of a fire, including the existing fire, spreading substantially. The decision was made to warn people of that by way of pager, because that would be a very unusual thing for that to occur during the night. That was done on a statewide basis. Obviously, the concern of fire in the night and people being totally unaware of the potential of a storm is different to a situation where it is already very hot in the morning and it is very windy. If you get home after work — I think it was on a Monday night — and it seems just a little bit windy, you would be totally unaware of what might occur during the night.

That was trying to use technology to try to alert people to that issue that might occur during the period of time that they were asleep. Obviously being able to use different mediums is important, but what we do hope is that the national community information warning system, which Victoria pushed for and got on the COAG agenda, is implemented. We have now seen the federal legislation passed to enable access to the phone numbers to be implemented. If that is implemented, the warning will be able to be given in a closer geographic area, but it would still have to be worked out operationally what the particular messages would be.

A community information warning system works particularly well for things like a tsunami, because you can isolate all the people who live along the beach or within a mile inland and warn them that a tsunami is coming in 4 hours. Or in a flood, like in Wangaratta — no, not in Wangaratta.

Dr SYKES — Benalla got flooded.

Mr CAMERON — In Benalla, for example. You could send a message to everyone in Benalla, ‘You’re going to have a flood at 5 o’clock this afternoon, give or take’, because they know roughly how long the water is going to take to get there. In relation to fire, obviously with a rapidly moving fire the message would have to be far more broad. Maybe it will be ‘You should listen to ABC radio’ or something, but that has to be worked through. What we do hope is to have that national information warning system operating before the next fire season.

Dr SYKES — Sticking with the budget, what I am interested in is optimising the use of currently available technology pending the implementation of the best that is on offer, because we know that there can be a long gap between a decision taken in principle and the on-ground implementation.

Mr CAMERON — I accept that.

Dr SYKES — Is there a commitment by the government to ensure that we make the best use of what we have got now? For example, when I was at a community meeting in Eildon that town was under some form of threat — a threat which was unclear, I should say, because of poor passage of information from the combat authorities to the community — one of the very simple questions that was asked was, ‘Why don’t you ring the fire bell’? There might be an operational decision as to why you do not ring the fire bell, but surely there should be leadership guidance coming from government saying, ‘Use the current technology until we get something better in place’, and if they need funding to get their fire bell greased or oiled, then that should be available.

Mr CAMERON — They are operational decisions, and they will be made by the appropriate operational unit.

Dr SYKES — But is there a commitment by the government to ensure that the operational arms of the CFA, the police and the SES use existing technology to the full extent, pending the development of improved technology?

Mr WELLS — The answer is no.

Mr CAMERON — Our commitment is to assist them where we have to. For example, with the paging system, we fully supported that.

Dr SYKES — Then there is a funding issue.

Mr CAMERON — It is a little bit like the issues around warnings — the Monday night: the fear of the fire, the fire in the night. Funding had to be provided so there could be extensive radio advertising so we could alert people to ring the bushfire information line, which we called at the time the bushfire and wind information line, and those funds were made available.

Dr SYKES — So you are saying there is a commitment?

Mr CAMERON — Yes, but we are not going to dictate how they may choose to do it, because operationally they will make their own decisions around those things, as you would expect.

The CHAIR — Minister, can I refer you to page 33 of budget paper 3, which details initiatives in regard to road safety, and also to page 333, which provides the actual figures for road safety initiatives in the next financial year and the following three out-years. I am just wondering what this is going to cover, particularly in regard to roadside drug testing, in which this committee has had an interest in the past.

Mr CAMERON — Obviously road safety and reducing the road toll are something that we all have an interest in.

The CHAIR — We need to go to the next level.

Mr CAMERON — Trying to push that further is something that has to occur. You raised the issue of drugs. Drugs are involved in quite a proportion of collisions; maybe around 20 per cent, maybe more. Alcohol, of course, is the biggest issue on the drug front. Speed is obviously the biggest issue when it comes to what kills

people on the roads, but drugs are a significant proportion. In the past the ability to be detected has been very limited because of the lack of technology around this area. This is a space where we have been a leader. Victoria over the years with successive governments has been a leader in different safety measures, and one of the things Victorians are proud of is that we have successively gone down that path.

In relation to drugs, random drug testing started in late 2004. That was the first of its type in the world, and it put drug drivers on notice that this behaviour is not going to be tolerated. In this budget we have funded an expansion of the drug-driving program from the current 22 000 tests a year to 42 000 tests a year. We have allocated \$10 million to fund this expansion. The drug tests are not cheap. They are not like the .05 tests; there is more of an expense. Ten million dollars might seem a lot, but that is the reason why.

From the start of this program until the end of 2008 Victoria Police had tested 72 000 drivers, and they caught 1257 drug drivers. Police are also — and I might get the chief commissioner to talk about this — targeting areas and learning to target areas better. The reason they want to do that is that people need to recognise that if you want to go out to areas where there may be drugs, the prospects of being caught are all the higher. Chief Commissioner, I might get you to expand on the reasons why you do that and how you determine them.

The CHAIR — That would be useful, particularly in respect of some of these party drugs like ecstasy and those sorts of things.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you very much, Chair, and just to make it clear, driving while impaired by drugs is a factor in around 30 per cent of road deaths in Victoria, so it is significant. The drugs that we test for are cannabis, methamphetamine — commonly known as speed — and ecstasy, and of course there is no legal use for those drugs in Victoria. The minister is right: we have used intelligence to target the drug testing more. With alcohol testing it is much more random, but with the drug testing, I guess really because of the cost of the test and the significance of the problem, we have been more intelligence-driven. We use intelligence to help us to determine where it is best to place the tests.

Interestingly, in the first full year of the program, in 2005, 1 in 44 drivers tested positive to drugs, which is much, much higher than the ratios we see when testing for alcohol. That is reflective of the targeted nature of the activity we are undertaking. The average rate of drivers testing positive over the entire program is 1 in 57, but statistics from January to October 2008 indicate that 1 in 88 is now testing positive. We actually think that is a good thing, because we think the message is starting to get through that if you drive while drug impaired there is a risk that you will be caught.

We are continuing to use targeting. You often hear suggestions that it is mainly in the transport industry. We have targeted the transport industry and we do detect some level of drug driving, but I have to say that we see it across the general population; it is not just the truckies, it is actually people driving cars. Recently I had a personal experience of it when coming home late one night through the Burnley Tunnel and seeing a car literally bounce off the wall — not just changing lanes but actually bouncing off the wall.

Mr WELLS — Did you book him?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Yes.

Mr WELLS — Good.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — We pulled him over. I then had to get a TMU unit down there because they actually knew what they were doing with traffic matters. That fellow is now charged and before the court. Again, I expected him to be drunk. He was clearly not alcohol-affected but under the effect of some sort of substance, and he is now charged and before the court.

It is a very significant issue for us. We are very pleased to get the additional money to increase the number of tests that we can conduct. We are very serious about further reductions in the road toll. We have a commitment to reducing deaths on the road to 237. We had a record low last year of 303, and that is cause, I think, for some pleasure on our part but no sense of complacency. It is really important that we continue to focus on this issue; it is really important that we continue to receive support, as we have through things like the drug-testing program, to enable us to keep Victoria's roads as safe as we can.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — What is the significance of the 237?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — That is the target that has actually been set in the next Arrive Alive 10-year strategy around road toll.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Based on?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — We have just found it really, really important to set hard targets that we aim for.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I am just wondering where the number comes from, though. Why not 238 or 235? Do you know what the basis of it is?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Look, it could be any number, but the point is that there is a number that we are now aiming at, and it is a significant reduction from where we are. We had 303 deaths on Victorian roads last year, which is a record low. We are very pleased on that.

Mr CAMERON — It was basically seen as a reduction over a period of time. Like the first time it was 20 per cent.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — We know it is really important to have hard targets for us to aim for. It is a way of focusing the organisation, it is a way of focusing our partners, and we have been able to make, I think, really significant gains in this area. But we need to continue to try to drive road toll and road trauma down. We know it is still the most significant risk to our community — it is when you get behind the wheel of your car and go for a drive. That is the most risky thing that you can actually do.

Mr CAMERON — That was a 30 per cent reduction over 10 years. You will remember in the first Arrive Alive it was 20 per cent over 5 years; that was exceeded. But then the next one was 30 per cent over the 10 years. Having a target helps drive whoever the people are out there. And that is not only the police, it is the police and the TAC and VicRoads — all of the road safety agencies — and bringing the public along as well.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Minister, before I start, on behalf of this side of the table I would like to congratulate Chief Commissioner Overland on his promotion, and indeed on his first PAEC presentation.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — One of the things that I am always aware of when I am in Parliament is that when we ask questions about police matters we are ruled out of order if the question relates to operational matters, because we are told: 'That is an operational matter'. I am one of four upper house members in the hearing today, and I am curious because currently the Police Regulation Amendment Bill is before the chamber, and I have carriage of the bill in that house. I have noted some of the comments made by senior police — the commissioner, an assistant commissioner and a former commissioner — and I understand there has been a suggestion in one of the papers that you are about to undertake a campaign to get this bill put through. Given we are not allowed to mention operational matters in the chamber, I am curious about how you can comment on bills that are before the Parliament for discussion by members who are elected by the people of Victoria. The minister may wish to comment on that, given — —

Mr CAMERON — I do not want to go into the rules of your house, but if the Chief Commissioner — —

The CHAIR — I am not sure that is — —

Mr DALLA-RIVA — Just to clarify, it relates to page 145 of budget paper 3 dealing with corruption prevention initiatives. I wonder about the initiative in relation to making comments on legislation in the upper house?

Ms MUNT — It is a very long bow to draw.

The CHAIR — Just because we can pick a number out of the air. The minister can comment on it, but I really think this is not a matter for this particular forum.

Mr CAMERON — Just a quick comment, police often make comments on things. Indeed, Mr Dalla-Riva, the rules in your house — that is the business of your house as far as I am concerned. But in relation to police, they make comments, and you will remember not three-quarters of an hour ago Mr Wells asked the chief commissioner, and the chief commissioner answered, about whether there was a need for a particular type of legislation and what was his particular view about it.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — That is in his house. We have legislation before us. I don't know the rules in your house!

Mr CAMERON — Then we're square!

Ms MUNT — I would like to continue the discussion on road safety. I have a personal interest in road safety, having been seriously injured by a drunk driver on my way home from Parliament. In budget paper 3, page 33, under the Arrive Alive 2 strategy, it says:

The 2009–10 budget provides additional funding of \$127 million over four years and \$28 million TEI to support the fight against the road toll through a range of road safety initiatives.

Could you detail for me that range of road safety initiatives, particularly in regard to the prevention of deaths and serious injuries on our roads?

Mr CAMERON — Thank you, Ms Munt. I will not refer to the drug arrangements because we have already canvassed that bit, but I will just go to the issue more broadly. As part of the Arrive Alive 2008–17 — that is 30 per cent one that we discussed previously, Mr Rich-Phillips, with the 30 per cent target — there are a range of initiatives that are designed to assist in this area. I will just start where we were. In fact I have a slide. I will show you the road toll over time, if you do not mind.

Overhead shown.

Mr CAMERON — If you go back to the early 1970s, see the early 1970s, in 1970 there, 1061 deaths on the road. You see that successive governments have pushed the issue of the road toll. We see compulsory seatbelts being introduced; that was an issue with a lot of deaths back then. We see a reduction. Alcohol breath testing; we see the reduction there. The introduction of speed cameras; we have seen a halving of the road toll since then. And then increased camera hours, and we have seen since 2004 the drug initiatives. Obviously the further down you go, the harder it gets. The low-hanging fruit is successively taken away.

I might also show a country-city one, because I know Dr Sykes always has an interest in that. Can we just go back, Roslyn, just in relation to per head of population?

Overhead shown.

Mr CAMERON — You can see the deaths decreasing as a proportion of the population, but if we go back to the 10 000 cars, you will see a greater decrease. You have got to remember that while we have gone from 1061 in 1970 to 303 last year, there are actually a whole lot more cars on the road. Households normally had one car back then; households these days have — depending on how many kids you have and what age they are — a lot more. So really that is the challenge, and having initiatives in this area becomes extremely important.

Dr SYKES — Can you just go back to that country — —

Overhead shown.

Mr CAMERON — Sorry, the country. There are the country-city figures, and you can see it has jumped around a little bit. But you can see there that there has actually been an increase in the country in the last couple of years. If you go back to 2002 — 186; it has come down. It has gone up and down. I know you have an interest there. But the issue of speed in the country does not penetrate as much as in the city, because the perception of the risk of being caught is not as great in the country as in the city. You will appreciate that, just with the multiplicity of roads that are there.

Dr SYKES — So what are the explanations for the difference between the country and city? You are saying speed still remains a significant factor in country vehicle deaths?

Mr CAMERON — Speed. I will just put the risk of detection in general, because you know if someone is belting along a B road or a C road and they think the risk of being caught is not high, if they see a car stationary on the side of the road, they will slow down anyway. Whereas if you are in a more highly populated area, cars park along the side of the road.

Dr SYKES — That is a general sin. But in terms of the explanations, when you do the analysis of the deaths, what are the — —

Mr CAMERON — Because you are talking about these numbers, they will move up and down statistically. But the chief commissioner might like to make some comments about that soon, or make them now and then we will get to the initiatives.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — In terms of the country road toll, it is the same issues: it is speed, it is alcohol, it is fatigue and it is failure to wear seatbelts. The same issues that were killing people 30 years ago are still killing people today, obviously at reduced levels. We see a lot of single-vehicle accidents in the country, normally off road into trees. It is why we have been working with VicRoads. You see a lot of the safety wire now along the side of country roads; it is to prevent cars running off roads into the trees. That is a big issue for us. Motorcycle deaths is another big issue for us in the country, particularly recreational riders on the weekend, normally middle-aged men in their middle-aged crises getting very big bikes, taking them for a spin at speed and just losing it. Again, you see them off road, either into oncoming vehicles or into trees. So they are the sorts of factors that are continuing to kill people on country roads.

Mr CAMERON — And one of the issues that we will see in the country is more moving mobile radar this year. So you have got a police vehicle driving along and just by driving along it will be able to detect the speed of a vehicle that is coming towards it. Normally you do not know what the vehicle is coming towards you from a distance, so that will also help detect. If that makes people think, 'Oh, my prospects of being caught are higher', and they slow down, then that is exactly what we want to have, because — you know the Wipe Off 5 campaign — slowing down actually brings about a large reduction.

The CHAIR — Minister, since we have had quite a considerable discussion on road safety — you have got your slide there, \$22.4 million, but also in the output initiatives, on page 333, and the asset initiatives, on page 337, there are significantly more funds detailed there. If you could provide for us, on notice if you like, more detailed information in regard to road safety output and asset initiatives for both next financial year and going into the future, because we would like to obviously focus on that in terms of our analysis and reporting later on.

Mr CAMERON — Yes. So we will correspond with you about those things?

The CHAIR — That would be the best.

Mr CAMERON — That would be the best thing. Everyone is agreed? Yes.

Mr WELLS — I refer to your slide about police numbers and once again reiterate it is disappointing you do not have a graph showing the number of actual operational police. However, given the situation at Hastings police station today, that things are so bad down in Hastings they are actually having a public protest. The reason they are having a public protest is that they are cutting back the hours from 24 hours to 16 hours. I thought that this was about improving police services. Further, given Assistant Commissioner Paul Evans saying that this is a political beat-up, on radio this morning, is it clear that there are simply not enough police available and in particular available in Hastings, and why are all of a sudden senior Victorian police officers making excuses on behalf of the government?

The CHAIR — All right, Minister, so far as it relates to the estimates, please.

Mr CAMERON — Well, I do not think they are, quite frankly. Police make their own operational decisions — —

Mr WELLS — So why are they making political comment?

The CHAIR — The minister is answering.

Mr CAMERON — Police make their own decisions — —

Mr WELLS — Is this the new direction that Victoria Police are going to take?

The CHAIR — Can you not interrupt the minister. The minister to answer, please.

Mr CAMERON — Police make up their own mind about the allocation, and since we have been in government we have seen a decrease in crime in Hastings and we have seen an increase in police resources. But it is up to police to determine how those police resources are allocated. I understand this is an issue. The chief commissioner's office advised me that there were some police down there who wanted to change so that there would be more active patrols — the chief commissioner will be aware of these details more than me, because this is only hearsay — and as a consequence police have made those changes. This relates to the service delivery. But I will hand over to the chief commissioner because he will have more details about Hastings.

The CHAIR — Chief Commissioner, relating to the estimates.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Hastings will continue to provide a 24-hour police service. The initiative that seems to have caused the concern in the community has come from the staff themselves at Hastings. They have determined that, particularly during the winter months, when it is much quieter down at Hastings, it does not make a lot of sense to them to have resources sitting in the police station essentially with nothing to do. So it is at their suggestion that we will close the police station at night, but we will still have patrols out, so there will still be a van — —

Mr WELLS — So the police station will be shut?

Ms MUNT — But they will be on the beat.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — The police station will be shut but there still will be a patrol out to respond to calls. In doing that, it will allow us to run additional patrols at other times when they say, or they believe, that the resources are more needed, so, for instance, afternoon shifts. So it is a reshaping of service delivery and it has come at the suggestion of our staff. I think it is a very good suggestion. I guess the point I make is that people are not safe because of police stations. I often get asked about this. I then ask people, 'How often have you been to a police station?'. A lot of people have never been to a police station at all in their life. If they need police services, they ring 000 and if it is an emergency, then we will provide a response. They can still make calls that will be answered more generally and, if it requires a police response, the police response will still come. So there is still a 24-hour service being provided in the area.

I think it is a very sensible initiative that has come from the staff who are working in the area, and I think that we will continue to look at how we refine the service. I think there is too much attention paid to police stations and whether a police station continues to be open or not open or the hours that it operates. The point is that we will continue to provide a 24-hour response right across the state, seven days a week, 365 days of the year. We have a real commitment to doing that.

We have put the vast majority of the additional resources that have come into the organisation into operational roles. I have a real commitment to doing everything I can to increase the number of police who are available for operational roles, but not all operational roles are in police stations. Some operational roles are in task forces that have actually lead to the very significant reductions we have seen around things like theft of motor vehicles. So it is a difficult issue for us because it is about continuing to move resources to change on shifting priorities. That is what we are seeing happening in the local area in Hastings and we will continue to do that right across the state as the issues that we deal with continue to shift.

Mr WELLS — So do you stand by your assistant commissioner, Paul Evans, when he says that this is a political beat-up?

The CHAIR — I do not think this is an issue for this particular hearing.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — I have not heard those comments so I cannot answer that.

The CHAIR — I think it is something for outside this particular hearing.

Mr CAMERON — I certainly would not think he was referring to party politics — that is, not Assistant Commissioner Evans. My advice is, on the increase in police in the Mornington PSA, police service area, is that there has been a 43 per cent increase since we came to government.

Mr WELLS — I know, but where are they?

Mr CAMERON — And there has been a 20 per cent decrease in the rate of crime.

Mr WELLS — If you are shutting down a police station, where are they? Where are the operational police?

Mr CAMERON — Out on the — —

The CHAIR — I think we have had the answers to those questions.

Mr WELLS — But you promised a 24-hour police station at Hastings and it is down to 16 hours.

Mr CAMERON — That is the very point that the chief commissioner is trying to say. It is about police actually being out on the beat. Police make those determinations and police command has accepted the advice of some of the active police in Hastings who believe it is better to be out on the beat, where people want to see them and where they are needed.

Mr NOONAN — I wanted to ask about hoon driving. I will say that I have some experience in my local electorate of Williamstown with this, and, Chief Commissioner, I want to commend Inspector Mick Grainger and his team for the very pro-active and effective work they have done.

My observation with this problem in my local area is that it is a seasonal problem, hoon driving, particularly around the Williamstown beach area, seasonal in the summer. So in relation to hoon driving, I wanted to understand the government's hoon driving initiative and proposed extension announced in the budget, which is outlined on page 34 of budget paper 3, in relation to the vehicle impoundment scheme and any other initiatives in this area.

Mr CAMERON — Thank you very much, Mr Noonan, and thank you for your ongoing interest with hoons and the problems they cause. Obviously hoons have the ability not only to kill themselves and to kill other people, but they also cause a list of disquiet in neighbourhoods in terms of the nuisance value of them, the disruption to people's normal running of their households and the way people feel about their neighbourhood.

Up on the screen there is a just little bit of what hoon drivers are picked up for at the present time, so improper use, 41 per cent. That is doing a burn-out. They are the sort of classics. Excessive speed, and then you see the lesser things in terms of percentage, but certainly what we have flagged and what has been flagged in the budget is that we would like to expand the hoon driving scheme this financial year. We want to develop legislation during the course of the financial year, hopefully for early next year. Under those first-time offenders going more than 70 kilometres an hour, we will have the vehicle immediately impounded for three months.

The new laws will also target repeat drink, drug and unauthorised drivers and drivers who speed excessively. Repeat drivers under the influence of alcohol or drugs or who drive while disqualified will now face having their vehicle impounded more broadly under the new regime. Also those who are suspended from driving face the risk of impoundment by a court for up to three months. This legislation, as I say, is being developed. We believe the legislation has been successful. There has been very broad support for the hoon legislation, and we want to see it continue.

Can I just say that with a lot of essentially young blokes — there are a few hoonettes, but they do not come in big numbers. Essentially — —

The CHAIR — We call them hoonees.

Mr CAMERON — The fact that the vehicle is taken immediately has an enormous effect because it is a here-and-now thing; it is not something which occurs down the track. Did you want to make any comments?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Perhaps just to elaborate on those last couple of points. The data shows that 97.2 per cent of the offenders are male and 2.8 per cent are female. As of 30 April 2009, there were 7662 vehicles impounded. Of those, 7186 were first-time offenders, 413 were second-time offenders and only 63 were third-time offenders. So I think again it does make the point that this seems to drive home the message about this style of driving.

The CHAIR — Do they lose the car the third time?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — On the third occasion they can lose the car. We can apply to the court to have the car forfeited, and we have done that on a number of occasions. I think it actually brings the accountability back where it belongs — to the driver. We know that fines and other things, demerit points, just do not seem to have the sort of impact. Even with demerit points and loss of licence, we know that people continue to drive. The unlicensed driving is a significant issue for us, but the car impoundment really does seem to drive the message home and we think it is a very good initiative.

Mr NOONAN — Are there statistics on probationary drivers as well, because if there are many young men, are we seeing a disproportionate number of those who are on probationary licences?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — I can tell you that of the total, that was the 7662, 44.1 per cent held a full licence, 43 per cent held a probationary licence and 7.3 per cent were either unlicensed or disqualified, so that is the data that we have.

Mr WELLS — So it is a good policy, Chief Commissioner?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — I think it is a very good policy.

The CHAIR — The issue of improper use, could we have a bit more definition of improper use that is 41 per cent?

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Improper use really relates to driving in a way that is dangerous and likely to lead to loss of control of the vehicle, so it is classic burn-outs, so spinning the wheels.

Mr CAMERON — Loss of traction.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Or the other sort of — —

Mr NOONAN — Doughnut.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Is a doughnut, basically going round and round in circles with your tyres smoking.

Mr NOONAN — It is a technical term.

The CHAIR — You can have your conversations outside. Dr Sykes has the call.

Dr SYKES — With your assistance, Chair.

The CHAIR — I am trying to assist you as much as I can.

Dr SYKES — This question follows on from the discussion I had with the secretary over a cup of coffee. It relates to the issue of domestic violence and the apparent increase in the occurrence of domestic violence in rural Victoria. I say ‘apparent’ because it is anecdotal as provided to me but a lot of it is related to the drought or the 10 or 12 tough years we have been experiencing.

I have had some discussions at a local level with the police and the drought outreach workers. It seems to come down to two aspects. First of all, it is trying to prevent the situation getting to the point of domestic violence, and the second issue is the response. If we can just look at the prevention side for a moment, that is probably outside your area. But given that we do have — —

Mr CAMERON — The fact that you have said ‘probably’ means, I suspect, ‘definitely’ — but continue.

Dr SYKES — Given that we have a coordinated whole-of-government approach to issues, I would ask that you take on board that the provision of mental health services and the provision of outreach workers to connect people to appropriate services is fundamental, and the funding for that stops on 30 June.

If we go to the response, the issues that have been put to me that do relate to the budget are, first of all, the adequacy of police training to handle people who either have mental health illnesses or are under severe stress. I understand there is a differentiation there. Part of that is a police equivalent of mental health first aid. I understand that goes on, but there is a question about whether it is done often enough and well enough.

The second is the issue of professional backup for the on-the-ground police officers when a situation arises. That is about being able to call out the mental health professionals and get them there and help defuse a situation before you get to unpleasant or disastrous situations where you can have deaths. My question is: are you aware of the situation? What are you doing about it in this budget year?

Mr CAMERON — Essentially you raise an issue about the ability to detect issues and the training that goes with that. I might ask the chief commissioner to address those things.

The CHAIR — And also to manage the issue.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you for your question. It is an important issue. It is one I am aware of. When I go out into the country, invariably this is an issue that is raised with me by my staff. To go to the second part of your question first, I think the issue around support services in the country is an issue. We struggle to find appropriate support services. We either refer people on or have to respond to a particular incident.

There are a variety of reasons for that. I guess it is a challenge for most rural remote communities. It is a challenge for a lot of country communities around access to those types of services. I do not think it is different from the general issue that people face.

In relation to my staff, it actually goes to a much broader issue, which is around how we appropriately train and support our staff to deal with the range of issues they face. We have developed a mental health first aid program that we do deliver. I agree with your point: we need to deliver it more broadly and we need to deliver it more regularly. It actually forms part of some broader work that I am having done around the whole issue of use of force — I guess, in a sense, operational training and tactics.

That is driven by a number of issues, both the review work that we have done around police shootings, around current debates and issues around tasers and availability of tasers. I am not satisfied with our training and support for members around that issue. There is a whole series of quite complex issues that we need to think through. There is work happening at the moment, but I envisage that as part of a program that will roll out — it is broader than just the defensive tactics; it is around the whole issue of how we police and how we engage with the community and the sorts of strategies that we use. But I see as integral to that this whole issue of mental health first aid training.

It is a very difficult area for us, though. There are clinicians who struggle to determine whether someone is mentally ill or not. For our people, it is incredibly difficult to know whether someone is just behaving badly or whether they actually have a mental illness. But it is a very significant issue for us right across the board — in the metropolitan area as much as in the country.

But in the country it is a little bit more difficult for us for a couple of reasons. Our members tend to be more isolated, so they tend to be one or two out when responding. The point that you made about the lack of service is definitely an issue for us in particularly rural and remote areas.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that.

Ms HUPPERT — Minister, I want to return to the topic of police stations. I note that on page 336 in budget paper 3 there is a discussion about the program for upgrading physical assets. I wonder if you could outline for the committee some of the work that is going to be done in this area in the forward estimates period.

Mr CAMERON — As you are aware, we have had a big program in relation to police stations — the biggest program in the state's history during the course of the Bracks and Brumby governments. This budget

also builds on that with the rebuilding of 10 new police stations and also the work around the World Trade Centre. If I can just go back to those 10, I will give you their locations this year. They will be in Korumburra —

The CHAIR — Try to get onto next year as well.

Mr CAMERON — They are in the forward estimates period: Korumburra, Lara, Castlemaine, Mortlake, Axedale, Balmoral, Buninyong, Koo Wee Rup, Pyalong and Riddells Creek. Obviously that is important in relation to those communities, in improving those facilities. It is good for the police members. It is also good for the confidence in those areas, particularly with the present economic circumstances. Obviously there will be jobs coming out of the building program which also occurs. If we just go back, it is a very large program. If you go around the state, there are an enormous number of new police stations in every area.

Mr WELLS — Pity there are no police in the police stations.

The CHAIR — Without the commentary, thank you.

Dr SYKES — It reduces the maintenance cost.

Mr WELLS — What, not having police in them?

Mr CAMERON — Sometimes police are not in the station because they are actually out on the beat.

Mr WELLS — Because there are not enough police to go around.

The CHAIR — To answer the question, please.

Mr CAMERON — There are more front-line police than ever before. Certainly on that front, the Ombudsman had a look around this issue at the invitation of the opposition.

Mr WELLS — Tell us about the Ombudsman report on crime stats.

Mr CAMERON — What the Ombudsman had to say in relation to crime stats was that Victoria was a very low crime state — that is what the Ombudsman had to say.

Mr WELLS — What else did he say about the reliability of those crime stats?

The CHAIR — The question is about the — —

Mr WELLS — What else did he say about the reliability of the crime stats?

Mr CAMERON — You asked me what he also said. I will tell you.

The CHAIR — No, Minister, we are about police stations.

Mr CAMERON — He also said that there were 1627 extra police, and only 24 of those in support roles.

Mr WELLS — Yes, but what did he say about the crime stats?

The CHAIR (to Mr Wells) — Thank you, you are not asking the question.

Mr WELLS — He has referred to the Ombudsman's report. I just wondered what he said about the crime stats.

Mr CAMERON — You ask me when it is your turn next time.

Mr WELLS — That 'they could not be trusted'.

Mr CAMERON — That is what he had to say. So what we have got to make sure — —

Mr WELLS — Crime stats could not be trusted.

The CHAIR — Thank you. You will have your turn.

Mr CAMERON — What our plan has been, and this budget builds upon it, is actually making sure that there are good facilities for the record number of operational police — —

Mr WELLS — Where are they? They are not in Hastings, Rowville, Endeavour Hills, Bellarine and certainly not in Bairnsdale.

Mr CAMERON — Police that are out on the beat, like at Hastings. Certainly police do a tremendous job in this area, but I might get the chief commissioner to make some comments about it.

The CHAIR — About the police stations.

Mr WELLS — Can the chief commissioner comment about the crime stats?

The CHAIR — Mr Wells, could you desist from interfering. You are getting a very bad reputation for this.

Mr WELLS — I was just wondering if the commissioner could make a comment about it.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — We welcome the money that is being spent in this area. I think it has led to very significant upgrading of our facilities. Some 160 police stations have either been constructed or refurbished over the period. It has led to better facilities for our staff, I think particularly in rural and country areas. We know how important it is for local towns to have police stations and to have pride in their police and their police stations, so it has been great that we have been able to have those facilities constructed, that they are new, they are modern, they are appropriate and they accommodate our people appropriately. As I said, I think particularly for country areas it is an important thing for a town to have a police station in it.

The CHAIR — That concludes the presentation on police and emergency services. I thank Chief Commissioner Overland for his attendance.

Chief Comm. OVERLAND — Thank you, Chair.