



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY
SAFETY**

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2007-08)

Members:

**MRS V DUNNE (The Chair)
MS M PORTER (The Deputy Chair)
MS M HUNTER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2009

**Secretary to the committee:
Mr H Finlay (Ph: 6205 0136)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

APPEARANCES

ACT Policing	105
Department of Justice and Community Safety	105

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 3.00 pm.

Appearances:

Corbell, Mr Simon, Attorney-General, Minister for the Environment, Climate Change and Water, Minister for Energy and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Department of Justice and Community Safety

Manson, Mr Gregor, Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency

ACT Policing

Close, Cmdr Leanne, Acting Chief Police Officer

Williams, Mr Paul, Director, Corporate Services

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon everybody and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety into the annual report of ACT Policing and in relation to emergency services. Are all members familiar with the privileges card?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Have you read the privileges card and do you understand the privilege implications contained in the statement?

Cmdr Close: Yes.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister, do you have an opening statement in relation to ACT Policing matters?

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members. No, I do not have an opening statement but I and the Acting Chief Police Officer will be happy to try and answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: I will begin by going to the audited statement of accounts, the auditor's comments that appear on page 29 and 30 of your report—pages 2 and 3 of the National Audit Office's report—and also the note 1(b) about enabling expenses on page 34. Could somebody explain to me, and presumably to the rest of the committee, what enabling expenses are and what rebasing is, for a start?

Cmdr Close: Certainly. The enabling expenses relate to services that are purchased from the Australian Federal Police such as forensics, training, our IT support, legal support and a range of other support type services that the Australian Federal Police provide to ACT Policing by nature of the role that we have. Rebasing relates to a review that was done to quantify the amount and quality of service provided by the AFP to ACT Policing, and ACT government obviously, so that we can ensure that the costs are appropriate for the services received. An initial rebasing exercise was conducted several years ago and this was a review of that costing process that was undertaken in line with the purchase agreement requirements.

THE CHAIR: And what did that rebasing exercise reveal?

Cmdr Close: That there was an increase of approximately \$1.4 million that was required to be paid to the AFP for the total provision of enabling services to ACT Policing.

THE CHAIR: So that upped the bill to the territory by \$1.4 million?

Cmdr Close: Yes.

THE CHAIR: And is that over and above what was already in the purchase agreement?

Cmdr Close: Yes, it was; that is right. It had been previously agreed when the initial enabling review took place several years ago. That increase related primarily to forensic services, so some of the areas were increased, service provision, and some decreased, such as IT.

THE CHAIR: But the overall effect was a cost?

Cmdr Close: Of \$1.4 million, yes.

THE CHAIR: It is hard to tell with auditors' reports because they are cast around in fairly careful words, but are you comfortable with the amount? Are you comfortable with the assessment the auditor has made in his report about the appropriateness of that amount?

Cmdr Close: Yes, the review was quite comprehensive and undertaken over a period of at least six months. We looked at marginal costs only that were required to be paid. There were set terms of reference in terms of the enabling review and what was to be looked at and how the costings were calculated. There is still ongoing discussion now with ACT Treasury and the AFP in relation to finalising that.

THE CHAIR: So we have not actually agreed on a figure, on an ongoing basis?

Cmdr Close: No, and that is still being worked through as we speak.

THE CHAIR: Just for clarity's sake—for my sake—can you expand a bit on what the items are in those enabling expenses? Correct me if I am wrong: these are services which are provided by AFP national but they are there for ACT police, the ACT Policing component?

Cmdr Close: Exactly, in support of our activities. So that includes forensic services—because we do not have our own forensic facility, that is purchased from AFP national—training components, the AFP training college and the significant amount of training activities undertaken there; IT support, so the provision of equipment, the development of new applications of IT systems; as well as legal support services and professional standard investigations. There are funds appropriated within the enabling services component to support professional standard investigations on behalf of ACT

Policing.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

MS PORTER: My question relates to page 98 of the report which talks about the new Belconnen police station and that forward designs were being undertaken at that point. I am just wondering where that is up to. Also, while we are on that subject, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the 24-hour, seven-day week service that has been established in Gungahlin and what impact that has had on not only the Gungahlin community but also the relationship between the Gungahlin and the Belconnen community? Previously some work, I think, was being done out at Belconnen.

Mr Corbell: Thank you, Ms Porter. The government has provided funding for the construction of the Belconnen police station, a new Belconnen police station, which will replace the existing station which is now a very out-of-date building and certainly not suitable for the purpose. Members may be familiar with that; it is part of the remand centre complex and it is very much a rabbit warren of facilities now, with many police operating out of demountables attached to that building.

A new building has been funded. The site is immediately adjacent to the Winchester Police Centre on Benjamin Way, so the building will have a street address to Benjamin Way. At this point in time the architects—Bligh Voller Nield are the architects that have been engaged to do the design work—have lodged a development application with the planning authority. I am advised that the planning authority's processes will be completed shortly in relation to that development application and it is the expectation that DA approval will be granted shortly. That will allow the project to move forward to final sketch plan status and then tender for construction. At this stage I am advised that the new station should be able to be occupied in early 2011. That is a very important project and one that will provide a state-of-the-art police station for the Belconnen district.

In relation to Gungahlin, the government has implemented its election commitment to provide a 24-hour police presence in Gungahlin. That commenced at the beginning of February this year and as part of that work some additional capital work is required at the Gungahlin police station. That was dealt with yesterday in public hearings before the public accounts committee; some additional funding has been made available to ACT Policing to cover the costs of those capital works at the Gungahlin station. About \$180,000 worth of funding has been made available there, but that is on top of the additional funding that has been provided to recruit additional police to staff the Gungahlin station on a 24-hour basis.

That is a very important initiative because it provides a full-time police presence in the Gungahlin area for residents in that area and it also takes pressure off the Belconnen patrols who previously were required to also cover Gungahlin when the Gungahlin station itself was closed. If I recall correctly, there are an additional two patrol cars operating—

Cmdr Close: That is correct, minister.

Mr Corbell: from Gungahlin now that the station is operating 24 hours a day, and that is a very important improvement in policing services in that district.

MS PORTER: Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Just on this subject: when the block of land which is now occupied by the police station and the remand centre is vacated, what will happen to that?

Mr Corbell: No decision has been taken yet in relation to that site. The government will need to assess possible future uses for that site, or indeed whether or not the site should remain in government ownership, but no decision has been taken at this time in relation to that site.

THE CHAIR: This is a crossover to what we will be discussing later: has there been any discussion about the suitability of the site that is currently occupied by the fire station and the ambulance station and whether they may be relocated as well?

Mr Corbell: Yes, the future of that site is subject to the ESA station relocation study. It is one of the sites that are in consideration in that study for possible relocation of fire and ambulance services across the territory to provide better response times across the territory, but no decision has been taken in relation to that site at this time. The station relocation study is currently before me for consideration. I will need to make some recommendations to cabinet and then commence a public consultation process in relation to options for the future possible locations of fire and ambulance services.

MS HUNTER: The auditor disclaims any responsibility, on page 37, for any reliance on the auditor's report but expresses no such reservations about the audit of the AFP's annual report. Why is this?

Cmdr Close: Sorry, which page?

MS HUNTER: It is page 37, down the bottom:

I disclaim any assumption of responsibility for any reliance on this report to any person other than the Chief Police Officer of the A.C.T. and the A.C.T. government.

That same qualification is not in the AFP's audited statements. I am wondering why it is showing up in ACT Policing's.

Mr Williams: The annual performance audit of ACT Policing is actually commissioned by the Chief Police Officer with the Australian National Audit Office—so in essence he is the customer—and does so on behalf of the ACT government. My understanding is that that is an expression of the professional relationship between the auditor and the Chief Police Officer who signs the agreement prior to the audit and then signs off on the audit at the end. So it essentially quarantines this audit as being one of ACT Policing as compared to the remainder of the AFP. In terms of the terminology, I cannot comment on why there would be a difference, if there is, between the commonwealth audit of AFP national and that of

ACT Policing.

THE CHAIR: I thank Ms Hunter for the question because it was a question that I was going to raise. That same terminology appears on page 29 as well in relation to the financial statements. Could you take on notice, Mr Williams, and come back and advise the committee, why there might be the difference in the terminology between that used in the AFP national report and this report?

Mr Williams: Yes, certainly, chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: I would appreciate that. I have a follow-up question to Mr Corbell. On that same page, one of the last sentences in the second paragraph—

MS PORTER: Excuse me; which page are we referring to now?

MS HUNTER: Page 37.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: The auditor expresses no opinion on the appropriateness or effectiveness of the reporting measures in meeting the aims of the ACT AFP Policing agreement, so I was just wondering whether an independent auditor or consultant has examined the agreement with a view to assessing its effectiveness in delivering the ACT government's stated aims.

Mr Corbell: The government reports regularly, Ms Hunter, on the performance of ACT Policing against the performance measures in the relevant agreements. ACT Policing report to me quarterly on their performance against those measures. I report annually to the Assembly on the performance of ACT Policing against those measures, and ultimately performance measures are a matter for the government to determine. They are subject to scrutiny through both this process and the estimates process, and that generally has been the way that all performance measures are dealt with. They are subject to scrutiny as to their suitability or otherwise by this place and also reviewed regularly by government. Indeed, in the latest agreement a number of measures have been modified or changed in response to our analysis of the appropriateness or otherwise of those measures.

THE CHAIR: Ms Hunter, your question was: has there been any sort of independent assessment of those performance agreements?

MS HUNTER: I was just wondering about an independent assessment.

Mr Corbell: These are policy matters so they are not matters that are subject to audit per se. The auditor measures whether how measures are reported on is done in a robust and reasonable way. But the nature of the measure itself is a policy matter for government. The government, in this case ACT Policing, is purchasing services from the Australian Federal Police, so we specify how we wish to measure performance and those are matters that are done in consultation with ACT Policing. But ultimately

these are matters for government to determine.

I am advised by Ms Leon that in 2005 there was a study commissioned by the government, conducted by KPMG, which considered the measures and found them to be robust and effective.

THE CHAIR: This is not quite a performance measure but I will use this as a jumping-off point. The purchase agreement, the schedules attached to it, uses—I presume it is an indicative number—866 full-time equivalent employees. There is discussion there that that, in a shorthand way, is an indicative number. The annual report states on page 89—presumably at the end of the financial year and this is a snapshot—that we had 692.1 sworn and 242 unsworn officers, which gives us 935. Can somebody give me a breakdown of how we get from 866 indicative to 935 or 692? I am not quite sure what we are counting in that 866.

Mr Corbell: I will ask Commander Close or Mr Williams to give you some more detail, but generally speaking, Madam Chair, the reason is that the government has significantly increased recruitment in terms of police numbers. We have added over 100 police to ACT Policing's ranks over the last few years. What that has meant—and I am happy to stand corrected by officials but this is my understanding—is that, because we have recruited a significant number of additional police, they have come in at relatively junior ranks, at entry level rank. Obviously entry level rank is paid less than more senior or experienced police and, because there has been a large influx of new but lower paid police, the total amount of money available to ACT Policing to employ staff has therefore made it possible for them to employ more police, both sworn and unsworn personnel. So that is essentially the reason, as I understand it, but I am happy to stand corrected.

THE CHAIR: What I want to know is: are the 866 in the purchase agreement sworn and unsworn; that is total?

Mr Corbell: That is total.

THE CHAIR: So what we should be comparing it with is the figure of 935 in the annual report?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How is it that at the same time the Productivity Commission reports that there are 882 total AFP staff?

Mr Corbell: That report is for a period—

THE CHAIR: It is 2007-08.

Mr Corbell: two years ago.

THE CHAIR: No, it says 2007-08.

Mr Williams: They are staff counts at two different moments in time and using two

different methodologies. ACT Policing's staff count for the annual report is as of 30 June of the year of the annual report. The report on government services FTE calculation is calculated using a different formula which essentially takes the start of the financial year and the end of the financial year and averages that figure out. So it is very difficult to compare the ROGS figure with the annual report figure—two different counting methodologies.

THE CHAIR: So what you are doing is, as I expected, as at 30 June—

Mr Williams: That is correct.

THE CHAIR: and the review of government services figure is an average over the period. Is it possible for you to do that, to see whether we come up with the same figure?

Mr Williams: I am not a statistician. I suspect that there are other weighting factors and other issues with ROGS. I am assuming this rather than stating it. The easiest way that we can do it is to do a head count, and that details the people that we have on the ground at the time that we are required to report, which is at the end of the financial year. It is, according to the guidance we have, the most accurate way to report according to our responsibilities.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So if I go back to the previous annual report I should be able to get a figure for the—

Mr Williams: Comparison.

THE CHAIR: I can do a comparison that way, okay.

MS PORTER: Minister, page 17 of the ACT Policing annual report 2007-08, in the second last paragraph, talks about the suburban policing strategy being reviewed. My question goes to what you believe is the effectiveness of the community reporting incidents via Crime Stoppers as part of that overall strategy of engaging the community in identifying and reporting crime?

Mr Corbell: There is no doubt that Crime Stoppers are a very valuable source of intelligence for police. They do get many worthy reports that add to their understanding and picture of crime and have been used to assist in resolving matters that are under investigation. Crime Stoppers have upped their presence, developed a strong website presence, in the last 12 to 18 months, and that has proven to be very effective in that I think people can now report online as well as through the telephone line. That has proven to be very effective. I might ask Commander Close for some further information on that.

Cmdr Close: Certainly. It is difficult to link the improvements or otherwise of any increase in Crime Stoppers calls directly to the suburban policing strategy, because the nature of the marketing and media undertaken for Crime Stoppers is not simply attributed to the work that we undertake in the suburban policing strategy. However, the Crime Stoppers number is obviously marketed through the suburban policing strategy when our officers are out talking to members of the community, undertaking

their patrols, particularly in school precincts, shopping precincts, things of that nature. So it is a key part of our customer service focus and ability for people to call into policing to report crimes.

MS PORTER: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: I want to ask a question, again on page 17, about the responsibility for the operation of the regional watch-house being transferred from the north district to the prosecution and judicial support. What is being done around the cultural problems that were identified in the north district which led to the sorts of behaviours that were outlined in the Ombudsman's report?

Cmdr Close: The move across into prosecution and judicial support allowed us to have a more independent focus of the watch-house management, away from the districts where the staff are primarily sourced. There is also a good link there between prosecutions and the DPP and other judicial processes. That was why the move from north district took place.

In terms of what has changed in relation to the culture, all of the recommendations arising from the watch-house review undertaken jointly by the Australian Federal Police and the Commonwealth Ombudsman have been implemented. That includes significant training, a watch-house manual that is quite comprehensive in its detail in relation to obligations on police officers in looking after prisoners, management of prisoner services and people in custody in the watch-house. Those are just two of the aspects but, as I said, all of the other recommendations have been implemented as well.

MS HUNTER: Just picking up on the watch-house, there were another couple of incidents. I am just wondering whether it has been captured by this training and by this manual being put in place and being implemented. One of those was around the traumatised sexual assault victim who was placed, or locked, in close proximity to her alleged attacker. That happened in the watch-house. Were the officers counselled on the appropriateness or the inappropriateness of this practice, and is this now being covered by training and does the manual go some way to addressing an issue like that?

Cmdr Close: I am not exactly sure which particular incident you are referring to.

MS HUNTER: It was quite a high profile one. It was mentioned in the media.

Cmdr Close: Is that one of the ones that is still currently before court?

MS HUNTER: I am not sure. Mrs Dunne might know.

THE CHAIR: I do not know whether it is before the court at the moment.

MS HUNTER: I am not sure if it is currently before court or not.

Cmdr Close: Okay. I will have to take it on notice in terms of the actual outcomes of any investigation, because we will have to follow through exactly which incident that

relates to.

MS HUNTER: Thank you. That would be good.

Mr Corbell: May I, with your permission, Madam Chair, follow up on that answer from Commander Close about the watch-house review. It is important to stress that the review of the watch-house was initiated jointly between ACT Policing and the Commonwealth Ombudsman. Implementation of the review of watch-house operations has also been oversights jointly by the Commonwealth Ombudsman and ACT Policing, so there has been joint supervision and auditing of whether or not those recommendations have been implemented.

I am confident that those recommendations have been implemented; that is certainly the advice that the Ombudsman has provided—that they are satisfied that the issues identified in their joint audit have been addressed. Certainly the training procedures and the level of supervision now in place in the watch-house do address those concerns, and I feel confident that that gives us a robust base to avoid the sorts of abuses we did see. Obviously, those particular abuses have also been the subject of court proceedings, and a number of those matters have been finalised.

MR HANSON: My question relates to page 63 about operation raid, nowhere to hide, but more generally about people driving under the impairment of drugs or alcohol. It talks about a cooperative arrangement with Victoria Police. In terms of drug-affected drivers, people impaired by drugs, we do not have random drug testing at the moment. How are we dealing with that and would the police be calling for measures to, I guess, enhance the ability to target drug-affected drivers?

Mr Corbell: I should say that random drug testing is a matter which is currently being assessed by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. They are responsible for all road transport legislation, including legislation that deals with people driving whilst under the influence of various substances. For example, for drink-driving legislation, the policy responsibility rests with the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. The previous minister commenced a consultation process on that and I understand that that process is ongoing. In relation to the current state of play, I will ask Commander Close to deal with that.

MR HANSON: I think Victoria have got RDT. I am imagining that there are experiences that you have gained from working with them and so on. What is the police force's view of that?

Cmdr Close: We have been monitoring the implementation of drug testing in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia and work closely with those agencies, assessing how their different legislation was introduced and what the longer term benefits have been. And we work closely with the Department of Territory and Municipal Services in relation to recommendations we see arising. Really, we have been more in a watching-brief mode for the last few years to see what the implications have been, and we have been working closely, as I said, to identify perhaps some of the ways to implement that legislation within the ACT.

MR HANSON: In terms of that consultation process that is occurring with TAMS, do

you put in a formal submission or how does that work?

Cmdr Close: It will depend on how they seek the information. There has been an initial overview policy approach that has been undertaken by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services seeking opinions from a range of key stakeholders, including the Privacy Commissioner, the human rights commissioner, ACT Policing. So we have contributed to that and that was in a very early phase. Now we continue to work with them on some of the more detailed arrangements that might be able to be considered.

MR HANSON: Are you able to provide that opinion that you provided to TAMS to this committee? Is that possible?

Mr Corbell: I think it is better to ask the area responsible for the policy development, which is the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. They are responsible for policy development in this area. I think it probably would be more appropriate to ask the question of them, given that they have carriage of that.

MR HANSON: I am happy to do that.

THE CHAIR: Could I follow up on the watch-house question. I may have been not entirely attentive. What is the status of the four outstanding recommendations that are listed in the annual report?

Cmdr Close: They have now been completed, at the end of the annual report. That was primarily on changes to the actual facility which took some time to negotiate and have builders and contractors come in to make those changes. And that has occurred.

THE CHAIR: That also required enhancement to PROMIS?

Cmdr Close: That is right, and that has occurred.

THE CHAIR: I just realised I may not have been attentive enough on that.

MS HUNTER: I wanted to go to page 44. It was talking about the number of offences against the person. I guess I was wondering whether you have an explanation as to why there has been an increase in the reported figures for both assaults and sexual assaults.

Cmdr Close: Generally, it is a difficult one in terms of why there is a reported increase. There are more instances certainly of assaults in the community. Sexual assault reporting has traditionally been low over a long period of time and there has been a lot of work done not just in policing but with health, education and other strategies in the general community to encourage people to come forward, make the reporting as stress free as you possibly can in that circumstance. So when there is an increase it is difficult to attribute it to whether there is an increase in the number of offences or that people are actually feeling more comfortable with coming forward to police and reporting.

Mr Corbell: In relation to assault more generally—this is a matter that I have been

keeping an eye on as well because we have seen an increase in those figures over a period of time—certainly, in my most recent discussions with the Chief Police Officer, he has indicated to me that he believes certainly where we are seeing an increase in the number of assaults in public places it could very much be driven by an increased police presence in those locations and the ability for police to apprehend and deal with those matters on site. For example, we have seen a very significant increase in police presence in our entertainment and nightspot districts over the past 12 months or so. That would appear to correlate with an increase in the number of offences being reported. But as Commander Close says, it is difficult to directly draw a cause and it is something that we continue to keep under review.

MS HUNTER: I was just wondering, in that area of assaults, whether ACT Policing keeps statistics on various factors relating to assaults such as the relationship with the attacker, intoxication, those sorts of things, to get some deeper understanding beyond just the assault itself, I guess.

Cmdr Close: In relation to each incident we actually have quite detailed information on those factors: whether it is an assault within the home or in a public place; whether it is an intoxicated-related incident or not. Sometimes that is difficult to actually draw down for every single incident, depending on how it is recorded, but we certainly have that sort of information and make those analyses in terms of whether it is a hot spot that we need to patrol or a particular incident or some sort of intervention for family violence.

THE CHAIR: On the subject of the incidence of crime, I notice a little later in the piece, at appendix 6, pages 128 and 129, it has got the various offences and the clear-up rates. I was wondering whether you could give the committee an explanation of what the clear-up rate is. The clear-up rates vary from quite low, around 10 per cent, up to extraordinarily successful, 200 per cent. I was wondering whether you could give a description of what a clear-up rate is and whether it is a meaningful statistic.

Cmdr Close: It is. For example, if you look at murder alone, obviously 200 per cent relates to a very low number of crime types; therefore the percentage clear-up rate is significantly different to a high-volume crime. In relation to our clear-up rates, though, we take into account offences reported, offences cleared. Offences cleared can include whether it is cleared because there has been a successful prosecution, someone has been arrested, or whether there is some other sort of action, some other sort of diversion action like a drug diversion perhaps. That includes a cleared action.

THE CHAIR: But does the clear-up rate also include other reasons for taking it off the books, like you might decide there is not enough evidence to pursue or—

Cmdr Close: No, that is not classified as a cleared matter for ACT Policing.

THE CHAIR: Something where there might be no further action for want of evidence or whatever, how is that described?

Cmdr Close: It is described as a finalised case. However, it is not a cleared offence type. So it still remains—

THE CHAIR: A cleared offence is where there is a prosecution or related event?

Cmdr Close: Action, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thanks. Presumably the clearing up may not occur in the same reporting period as the event, which is where you get your 200 per cent for murder.

Mr Corbell: That is correct.

Cmdr Close: That is exactly right, yes.

THE CHAIR: Likewise, when you go to high-volume crimes, it seems to be—generally speaking; it is not absolutely the case—that the higher the volume, the lower the clear-up rate. But it also occurs that the clear-up does not actually relate to the reporting period. Has there been any study of or consideration given to being able to delineate that? For the purpose of reporting, you are reporting, “We had a clear-up of x. Some of the offences occurred outside the reporting period. But for the bits where the clear-up occurred in the reporting period, this is the clear-up rate.” I am not sure that may be altogether a useful statistic but, when you look at a clear-up rate of 200 per cent or 155 per cent or something like that, it is not a particularly useful statistic either.

Cmdr Close: Sure. I think the useful statistic there, though, is doing a comparison across the years of offences reported or becoming known. And we focus on that in terms of trying to work out then what is cleared this financial year compared to last financial year. We actually take a much longer term view and look at the trends. Individual areas obviously look at, particularly for the more violent crimes, ensuring that there is a high focus on investigation in relation to those matters.

THE CHAIR: So you would see that the figures about offences becoming known are, in a sense, more important than the clear-up rates?

Cmdr Close: No. Obviously the quality of our investigations and the amount of clear-up are extremely important. What is quite difficult, though, with the volume crimes, as you have indicated, with a burglary or a stolen motor vehicle, is that it tends to be a crime that may be committed by a smaller group of people and they commit a large volume of crimes but actually then being able to identify which persons committed which crime becomes quite difficult. We are only able to then charge them with those crimes on which we believe we have sufficient evidence to put before the court. So there is always going to be that outstanding amount that are not cleared up, unfortunately, but we do not then attribute it—

THE CHAIR: You may have already got the perpetrator, though.

Cmdr Close: That is exactly right.

MS PORTER: I was looking at page 62. It is reporting on the RAPID program and it says that there is a link between the injury and fatality rates and unregistered and uninsured vehicles. I notice, from the statistics, there seemed to be a reduction in collisions and collisions with injuries and some reduction in fatal collisions. Are we

continuing that RAPID program? Are we increasing it and do you think you are going to continue to see a lowering of these rates? That is a hypothetical question; probably I should not ask that.

THE CHAIR: You can ask hypothetical questions here, I think.

MS PORTER: The success of the RAPID program, your estimation of its usefulness.

Cmdr Close: It has been a highly successful program. It is going to be a continued focus for us. The utilisation of the technology and the statistics alone identify that when we are able to use the RAPID system we are identifying a significant number of uninsured, unregistered and unlicensed drivers as well. Whether it has a major impact is difficult to know. We have been quite disappointed to see such high levels of crimes of this nature but we do believe there is a high correlation between unregistered and unlicensed drivers and fatalities and injuries; so it is going to continue to be a high focus. Again, we work with the Department of Territory and Municipal Services in relation to this strategy and the overall road safety strategy. This is just one component.

THE CHAIR: It says here that there is clear evidence, and you said, “We think there is evidence.” Is there literature that points to suspensions and the like as resulting in dangerous behaviour as well?

Cmdr Close: Yes, we have that data, and not just within the ACT but across the nation, and other comparative studies.

THE CHAIR: Could you let the committee know what that is?

Mr Corbell: The advice I have in my brief is that a third of all persons who were unlicensed drivers and/or driving unregistered vehicles have had a previous criminal history across a diverse range of offences. The majority were recidivist traffic offenders. However, a significant proportion had an offending history involving persons and property offences. That is based on ACT Policing’s own analysis of their incidents.

MS HUNTER: I had a question on this particularly—some of it you have already answered. It seems to be a highly successful system. Am I to understand that you are saying it will be deployed on a permanent basis?

Cmdr Close: That is correct.

MS HUNTER: The other thing I wanted to know was: how were the people wanted on warrants identified? Was it from their vehicles or from photographs? How was that—

Cmdr Close: From a names check. The RAPID system works on number plate recognition initially and, if it becomes a vehicle of interest which is in our computer system and which is linked to that vehicle, where we have got an interest in it—perhaps it might be a stolen one—or the information from the department of transport is that it is uninsured or unregistered, that gets given to the officers almost in real time.

They then do a check of the name of the person that is driving the vehicle and that is how we identify whether they have outstanding warrants.

MS HUNTER: How do they find that name?

Mr Corbell: The ACT is unique in that the ACT links, if I recall correctly, the drivers licence with a registered vehicle. We just do not know to whom a vehicle is registered; we know what their drivers licence is. So there is a link between the identity of the driver and the ownership of the vehicle.

THE CHAIR: It cannot be a perfect link. Vehicles change hands; vehicles have more than one driver.

Mr Corbell: I do not have the exact detail but it is something that the territory has. Other jurisdictions do not link drivers licence and vehicle registration together.

THE CHAIR: For instance, the machine can pick up my rego number and then come up with my drivers licence number because I am the registered owner of the vehicle.

Mr Corbell: Yes, that is right.

THE CHAIR: The registered owner of the vehicle also has to have a drivers licence, presumably?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But that will only get the registered owner; usually it is one person who owns the vehicle.

Mr Corbell: That is right.

Cmdr Close: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There might be more than one. It is not a perfect system but it—

Mr Corbell: No.

Cmdr Close: And it is not necessarily always the driver, obviously. In terms of the warrant information, that is held on an AFP database; so the information is obtained generally over the radio. However, we have got a trial of one in-car computer at the moment and we are looking to trial a further 20 in-car computers over the next 12 months. Then police officers will have that information at their fingertips.

MS HUNTER: Page 69 talks about diversionary programs and recidivism rates. There appears to be quite a high level of ACT Policing involvement in programs aimed at at-risk groups of children and young people. Are you happy with the results you are seeing from these preventative programs and do you think there are cost-benefit arguments in favour of deploying greater resources to these programs?

Cmdr Close: We have a range of programs, as we have outlined, in relation to

working with juveniles or children at risk. We also have good, strong relationships with the Police and Citizens Youth Club. We have a link, through SupportLink, where we refer children to different support counselling services as required and in a negotiated way when we attend a particular incident. We have got quite a lot of good systems in place. How much is enough? You could always do more but, for the programs that we have, I think they are targeted in the right spot at this point and police are providing a lot of support and service to working with youth at risk.

Mr Corbell: The government also requires, in its purchase agreement, a measure that requires ACT Policing to report on the level of referrals they make for diversionary conferencing for young people and they are required to meet a minimum number of referrals and that is—

THE CHAIR: Why is that a number rather than a proportion? You might say a proportion of young people who are arrested doing particular things. Why is it a number rather than a proportion?

Mr Corbell: I could not tell you that. I would have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Corbell: It has been developed over a period of time. I just cannot recall the rationale for it at this time.

MS HUNTER: And you are happy with the results from these programs?

Cmdr Close: Yes, we are seeing some positive results. Another program is linked into the Canberra Institute of Technology, for example, and is looking for educational pathways for some of the children. The results are quite positive if we can intervene at an appropriate point for each individual child or juvenile.

MR HANSON: On page 53, there are five KPIs, I believe, which deal with perception issues. I want to get across that issue. All the others, I guess, are quantifiable. Perception is a matter of, in some ways, opinion and so on. I have got some questions about how you measure that, who measures it, why you measure it and then what resources we are actually putting in to target those KPIs. Are they just, I guess, incidental to the normal business of policing or are we actually going about the business of trying to lift those perceptions? And if that is the case, why is that, what is the reason behind it?

Mr Corbell: From the government's perspective, perceptions of crime, perceptions of personal safety and so on are very important because, if people do not feel safe, it does not actually matter how safe the place is; if people do not feel safe, they are not going to feel that they are able to engage fully as a citizen in the community. For example, they may feel so unsafe that they will not go to certain places; they will not travel in certain ways; they will not be able to move about the community as freely as we would otherwise like them to. Unfortunately, perceptions are very important in terms of community safety.

We do have an interesting situation in the ACT where actual levels of crime compared

to perceptions of levels of crime are quite different. Levels of crime generally are low but the perceptions of crime are higher than the actual levels. So it is an important challenge for policing to increase community confidence that this is a safe community to live in. All of the actual data on levels of crime confirm that it is a safe place to live in but people do not always feel that it is a safe place to live in. And that is what these perception measures indicate.

ACT Policing are working with the government on ways to better communicate that police are present, that police are dealing with these matters and that people do not need to be as concerned as some of these measures would indicate. There are a range of ways that is being dealt with. The suburban policing strategy is one measure that is designed to improve community confidence in safety in their neighbourhood, by reinforcing that there are dedicated police patrols looking after designated areas right across the city.

There are other ways of improving perceptions of crime and dealing with perceptions of safety. The CCTV network, for example, is another measure. One of its benefits will be to hopefully improve the level of perception of safety that people have in nightspot districts late at night, for example. So there are a range of things that are being done to try to address issues on perceptions.

Nationally, we have very low levels of crime but we also have higher than average levels of perceptions of safety. We have got this disconnect that we need to try to address. In terms of the way that these measures are done, they are done, I think, on a national basis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, are they not?

Cmdr Close: That is correct.

Mr Corbell: And they are used as indicators of, I guess, broader community wellbeing nationally and reported on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis.

MR HANSON: But when you are doing your policing strategy, though, do you actually say, “We are going to expend this amount of resources,” or, “We are going to target against those KPIs,” or are they incidental? I do not want this language to be too aggressive but there is the whole thing of spin: “We are doing a great job,” and so on, as opposed to the actual business of getting out on the ground and achieving the results.

I accept the point that there might be a difference between community perceptions and so on but I am concerned that—I saw a lot of TV ads; I know that we are setting up community engagement consultation and so on—we are not spending too much time on trying to lift perceptions rather than actually working on some of the tangible outcomes, which might be lower but still are the main, I would have thought, core business of policing.

Cmdr Close: In our strategic plan we certainly looked at a holistic approach to all of the KPIs but also not just focusing on, as we talked earlier about, maybe just achieving a clear-up rate; we are actually wanting a quality prosecution, for example. It is a comprehensive strategy that does take into account the community’s perceptions of crime, because a vast majority of the community probably do not have

any interaction with the police; so part of the strategy is our high visibility, the suburban policing strategy, as the minister has already pointed out.

The community consultative forums will also give us another way to understand from the community where their real concerns are and give them information back about what we are actually doing and that we do have strategies in place to deal with their concerns. Often it is more from the fact that they actually do not know what the police are doing because they have not had that contact but they still might have that fear of being subjected to some sort of crime or be a victim of a burglary because they read about it in the papers perhaps as opposed to actually being a victim of crime. Another strategy that we are also looking at is a victim of crime survey.

We have got a whole range of factors that we are looking at through our strategic plan and our business planning processes, not just focusing on one set of KPIs or another or not just trying to achieve the list of KPIs; we look at a range of strategies for all the different facets and groups within the Canberra society, the ACT.

Mr Corbell: The performance indicators too indicate that Canberrans have a lower than average level of concern about being a victim of violent crime. They perceive the city as safe in that context. Indeed, people's concern about being a victim of sexual assault or being a victim of physical assault in a public place is lower than the national average, which is a good thing.

THE CHAIR: But there have been increases in those crimes over the same period.

Mr Corbell: Yes, that is right, but equally—

THE CHAIR: There is that disconnect in both directions.

Mr Corbell: That is right but, equally, more Canberrans than the national average are concerned about being a victim of property crime, even though property crime is at an all-time low, a record low. For the past decade, we have had record low levels of motor vehicle theft and other property crime. There is this disconnect in public perception versus reality and, as Madam Chair indicates, it is in both directions.

The challenge is to reinforce to the community that there is a strong and active police presence in the city, that there are strong and active strategies to maintain public safety and community safety and to tackle crime in the community. That is one of the reasons why, as minister, I have issued directions to the Chief Police Officer to make sure that there is a higher visibility presence of police in the community.

As Commander Close says, many people do not interact with police; they just go on "Do I see police around or not?" Most people, fortunately, do not have to deal with police; they do not have to report a crime; they do not become a victim of crime; and so they do not have a direct interaction with police. The perception of whether police are present in the community, whether they are active and are seen out and about in the community can greatly affect whether or not people perceive the place as a safe place. And that is why high visibility policing has been one of the key directives that I have been giving as minister to the Chief Police Officer.

MS HUNTER: My question was on page 96, AFP lost working days. The number of lost working days has declined dramatically. Can you outline the reasons behind this development and perhaps give us an idea of what caused the high number of lost working days in the past?

Cmdr Close: Certainly. There have been, again, several strategies that we have looked at. One of them has been direct intervention at the time that an officer is injured to ensure that they have the appropriate support as soon as possible after that injury, a lot of follow-up. We have a lot of support services within the Australian Federal Police as well for people, whether it is physical injuries or perhaps an emotional or mental incapacity.

There has been a strong focus on that, a strong focus on getting the person back into the workplace as quickly as we can as well. That might be to their previous duties or it might be a transition through some other sort of work. And that seems to be the main factor: better education of our supervisors about how to reintegrate those officers back into the workplace as well.

THE CHAIR: I notice that Mr Manson is not here. We were going to move on to Emergency Services at some stage in the near future.

Mr Corbell: He may just be outside.

THE CHAIR: With members' indulgence, we might continue until Mr Manson turns up.

MS PORTER: On page 15, it talks about KPIs. Going back to KPIs very briefly, a large number of the KPIs were achieved in this particular period. How do the results of this reporting period compare with the last reporting period? It is on page 15. It does not actually talk about the last; it obviously talks about this reporting period. I wondered whether there has been an increase in the achievements over those two years.

Mr Corbell: Obviously all the KPIs are relevant and important, but the one that we have sought to place greatest emphasis on in the last two years or so has been the performance of ACT Policing in meeting its KPI on response times for different categories of incidents. I am pleased to say that, because of the additional police numbers the government has put in place—we have funded an additional 127 police over the last couple of terms, and the large bulk of those police have been in the last term of the government—that is now making a significant difference in police meeting their response times, not just for category 1 and category 2 but for the lower category matters where response times are obviously longer but in many instances were not being met.

People were reporting matters to police. It may be a less urgent matter that required police attendance within, for example, a number of hours or within a 24-hour period. We were not previously meeting those times. I am pleased to say that now the regular reporting I am receiving does indicate that police are meeting those times and meeting those times consistently. And that is very encouraging because it helps with that whole perception of whether or not the police service is able to respond to people

when they need them and is present and available to the community.

The fact that those response times are now being met consistently across all categories of response type means that we are helping to build further confidence in the community about the police's capability and the police's timeliness in responding to matters. That helps also with reporting of matters as well. If people know that police are going to get back within a particular period of time, it helps build confidence in their willingness to report matters as well.

MS HUNTER: I have one final question on complaints. This is on page 60. The number of substantiated complaints against police is reported at 65. This figure is obviously quite a bit higher than the number of substantiated complaints reported in the past. Most of all, I wanted to know where the new definition of substantiated complaint was, where I might be able to get hold of that. I also accept that this figure represents a new system of reporting complaints but do you have any feeling as to whether this figure represents an increase or a decrease in actual, substantiated complaints?

Cmdr Close: We can certainly obtain a copy of the definitions for you; we can do that out of session if that is suitable. It is difficult to compare because the systems are quite different in terms of the way that we capture complaints and incidents now compared to before the complaints regime was implemented. I have had discussions with Professional Standards in relation to this issue and their advice to me is that they are quite comfortable that, no, there has not been a significant increase in the numbers of complaints or the numbers of substantiated complaints; it is actually quite consistent; it is just this different method of capturing the data.

THE CHAIR: It being 5 past 4—and this is slightly more than the time allocated—I thank ACT Policing, Commander Close and Mr Williams, for your attendance and we will move on to Emergency Services. There will be questions, I am sure, that members have on notice. I will be asking members to get to the committee questions on notice within five days of receiving the transcript and we ask you to get those answers back to us in 10 working days. Thank you.

Cmdr Close: Certainly. Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the hearings in relation to ACT Emergency Services Agency, as they appear in the Department of Justice and Community Safety annual reports. Welcome, Mr Manson and Ms Leon. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement in relation to emergency services?

Mr Corbell: No, thank you, Madam Chair, I am happy to try and answer your questions.

THE CHAIR: All right, fantastic. I will start with a somewhat contentious issue. In 2003 the McLeod report made recommendations relating to access to remote areas of ACT parks, particularly Namadgi national park, and made comment about the network of fire trails. What is the current status of the recommendations concerning access to bushland through fire trails and what is the involvement of ACT emergency services in ensuring that access?

Mr Corbell: The government responded to that recommendation, if I recall correctly, by agreeing to it and has since undertaken a significant program of fire trail access upgrade and improvement throughout the ACT, including in Namadgi national park. A very large part of the work in Namadgi has been completed. These are fundamentally matters of responsibility for the land manager; it is not a matter that is operationally under the control of the ACT Emergency Services Agency. The work and the maintenance of fire trails is the responsibility of Parks, Conservation and Lands as the land manager. Nevertheless, ACTESA have a responsibility to audit performance and ensure that performance is at the level we would expect to ensure that access can be achieved by, in the case of Namadgi, fire-fighting and other personnel in the event of a fire in those locations. Mr Manson might be in a position to give you some more detail as to what the process is there.

Mr Manson: The minister's view is quite correct. We do an audit process in relation to the strategic bushfire plan and the bushfire operational plan provided by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services which cover the area of Namadgi national park. The current situation is that a review is done by the Bushfire Council independently each year to advise the minister and me and the chief officer of the Rural Fire Service, Mr Parry.

That review provided us with just one concern in relation to fire trails in that area, which was the sort of slight delay, if you like, in upgrading one fire trail to a higher standard to carry large bulldozers. Territory and Municipal Services have been progressing that through the approval process, assessment for environmental factors. However, the Bushfire Council and I are not concerned in any particular way that that work has not occurred to date, because it still carries smaller bulldozers that are likely to be used in that area and there is a range of other measures in place which give us alternatives for that particular activity.

THE CHAIR: So is that the upgrade of the Mount Franklin road?

Mr Manson: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Okay, so that was a direct recommendation of—

Mr Manson: I understand it was not a direct recommendation. The first strategic bushfire management plan and Territory and Municipal Services' own internal plan for those areas included a recommendation for the upgrade of that road and a number of other roads. The review occurred almost 18 months ago of some of those works. A number of trails were decided not to be upgraded because we had alternative strategies in place to deal with those issues.

THE CHAIR: Could you give the committee a breakdown, Mr Manson, of where alternative strategies were decided upon—so where there was a strategy to upgrade and now there is an alternative strategy—and what those strategies are?

Mr Manson: I would have to take that on notice—

THE CHAIR: Yes, sure; I understand that.

Mr Manson: to provide you with something which is essentially a map-based explanation of what was originally proposed and what the current situation is.

THE CHAIR: And why.

Mr Manson: And why.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On that, it has been reported to me—and this may be a matter for the land manager—that there is a fire trail between Uriarra and Piccadilly Circus that has been blocked off. Do you know whether that is the case and, if it is, why it has been blocked off?

Mr Manson: I am not aware of all of the particular tracks in that area or which one you may be talking about. But, if a fire trail is locked, it may be locked for public access for land management reasons; it does not mean—

THE CHAIR: I understand it is not locked; boulders have been put on the road.

Mr Corbell: I think you would need to ask the land manager.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Just on the question of land management, who is responsible for Namadgi national park? Is it you, minister, under environment, climate change and water, or is it TAMS?

Mr Corbell: No, the land manager is Parks, Conservation and Lands, part of the Territory and Municipal Services portfolio.

THE CHAIR: So that is in TAMS, okay.

MR SMYTH: Can I just clarify something you asked. A number of volunteers have mentioned to me that between the Uriarra settlement and Piccadilly Circus, the main road itself, you can face one of the big yellow gates, for which you have a key, but all the other tracks seemed to have been blocked off some time recently. A number of the brigades, particularly the two or three local brigades, are concerned that their ability to get at areas quickly is now lessened by the fact that just about every track is now blocked off?

Mr Corbell: That is a fairly sweeping statement, Mr Smyth. I do not think we could confirm that—

MR SMYTH: Well, I have driven up, and you have two choices: there are mounds of earth and rocks across the tracks.

Mr Corbell: It does not mean, though, that every access point is blocked off. Access is determined consistent with the bushfire operational plan for that area. We can certainly give you advice as to whether or not the bushfire operational plan is being adhered to in that area. In relation to specific land management decisions in that area, it is probably best to direct your questions to the land manager. But I am very happy to provide you with an answer in terms of compliance with the bushfire operational

plan.

MR SMYTH: In relation to the plan, would we still fight fires there? Having these mounds and the rocks in the way would indicate a desire by somebody not to have access. But we would still fight fires up there? We would not fight them further back down, closer to the city?

Mr Corbell: Again it is a fairly broad question. I think it is best to address it in terms of the particulars of the bushfire operational plan for that area. There is a detailed bushfire operation plan that outlines how response to fire will be dealt with in those particular locations. If you have a question about a particular location, we can give you advice in terms of what the bushfire operational plan is for that area and how fire will be dealt with in that area. We can certainly provide that information to you.

MR SMYTH: The road between Uriarra and Piccadilly Circus—what is the plan for there?

Mr Corbell: We can provide you with that information.

THE CHAIR: In general terms though, minister and Mr Manson, what is the general response to the outbreak of fire in the nature reserve? Is it to put it out or to—

Mr Corbell: It is rapid attack.

THE CHAIR: Rapid attack is the general—

Mr Corbell: Generally speaking—certainly on days of higher fire danger—it is rapid attack. The only potential period where a fire may be permitted to burn would be if it ignites at a time when prescribed burning may actually be needed, would otherwise occur, and it is occurring in an area where a prescribed burn may be desirable. So, generally speaking, bush—

THE CHAIR: In all other circumstances, rapid attack.

Mr Corbell: The Bushfire Council's advice to me is that there may be circumstances where it is appropriate to permit a fire to burn, if you like, as an unplanned hazard reduction burn. But those circumstances are extremely limited and would obviously be dictated by the weather conditions. At all other times—

THE CHAIR: And you would not be doing that during the bushfire season?

Mr Corbell: No, the policy would be rapid attack.

MS PORTER: Minister, page 57 of the report talks about emerging challenges, managing emergency services, including predictions of continued severe weather conditions across south-eastern Australia. I was wondering if you could give the committee some information about what is being done in regard to those predictions.

Mr Manson: That issue relates to some fairly strong evidence around Australia for the last four or five years, perhaps consistent with the drought, that our bushfire

seasons, even in Queensland right around the coast to Western Australia, have been extended by something up to a month, sometimes six weeks, in terms of the weather pattern that you might class as a bushfire risk. So that comment relates to the potential for climate change and the potential for these extra long seasons until we go back to what might be a normal weather pattern in this part of Australia, which is not foreseeable at the moment.

The reason for putting the comment there is to alert us and the community to a need to budget slightly differently for more aircraft, budget for a longer stand up and to alert our volunteers and other people to the fact that we are planning for at least six weeks longer, perhaps two months in some parts of south-east Australia.

MS PORTER: And you would expect, therefore, to have people—say, volunteers—trained up or on call for a longer period of time in that particular season, and also the paid staff? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Manson: Certainly the trend, as I said, right across Australia is that volunteers who might feel that they have got a two or three-month season are all well aware now that they probably have a four-month or five-month season. For our paid staff that means a change in rostering and a change in budgeting to cover some of those extra shifts, if you like, which might be needed on high fire danger days.

MS PORTER: I note also you have got some cost pressures here—an expectation maybe about increased costs associated with technologies and also the changing demographics around Canberra. So these are just budgetary—I should not say “just”—concerns for you at the moment? This is why you have listed these here in this report?

Mr Manson: We try to give some forward forecast of the issues that may arise and impact on our budget. The changing demographic in Canberra to a higher proportion of older persons may affect their ability to protect their own properties, may impact on the number of volunteers we have and the capability, and if that is the case we need to change our bushfire strategies to perhaps more technology which might assist firefighters by being more efficient.

MS PORTER: I remember some years ago being in an emergency services conference where they talked about—this is just a comment—people moving into the rural areas who are not farmers and who do not want to physically fight fires; their expertise was in a different area and this was causing some stress for the volunteer teams in those particular areas. They were people who were operating, maybe, IT from their homes—not property owners or people experienced in that kind of thing.

Mr Manson: There is some comfort that the Australian Emergency Management Committee, and the ministerial council that our minister attends, has received a number of reports in relation to volunteerism, a major report in 2007, and it is still a major theme for that national group to be looking at issues that relate to volunteer retention—how technology might assist and then how, in particular in the rural communities in New South Wales where it is a particular issue, the number of volunteers available for emergency services is dwindling quite dramatically. That means that emergency services need to change their strategy, and that may be to build

slightly better houses in some areas, with automatic sprinkler systems that can be activated remotely, for example. They are the sorts of technologies that the fire authorities in Australia are looking to, to try and manage the change in volunteer numbers and the change in the climate.

MS PORTER: It is pleasing to see, minister, on page 110 of the report, talk about the increase in the number of fire units and I just wondered if you have a plan to continue to expand on the CFUs as we go forward.

Mr Corbell: Yes, Ms Porter, the CFU program has been a very successful program and has a high level of support from the communities where they are located. The government has expanded the number of CFUs in the last 12 months or so by 10, and the establishment of those units has been well supported in the communities where they have been placed. The government has made an election commitment to provide an additional 12 units to bring the total number of CFUs up to the optimum level identified by the Fire Brigade as being necessary to provide protection to the most vulnerable areas on the urban interface. That election commitment is now obviously subject to the government's budget processes, but it is out intention over this term to fulfil that commitment.

The CFUs have proved very valuable not just in terms of providing practical training to community members in defensive firefighting of structures but also extremely valuable in building social capital amongst the communities where they are placed. So the recurring theme I get when I visit CFU units and speak to their members is that they love the fact that they now know everybody in their street; they know who is vulnerable and they know who is not vulnerable; and they have got networks in their street again, which are just so important in the event of an emergency. They are able to make sure that people who are potentially vulnerable because of their age or some other infirmity are able to be looked after and protected. I think that is just as valuable as the fire-fighting techniques that they learn.

MS PORTER: That is certainly my experience in the Hawker one, minister. You will have to come and visit our Hawker one. We have got two now.

Mr Corbell: I would be delighted, Ms Porter.

MS HUNTER: Just building on that, obviously it is important with CFUs and that urban-bush interface but also around the ACT rural leaseholders. In October 2007, you launched the farm firewise program.

Mr Corbell: Yes.

MS HUNTER: This annual report mentions that there are about 30 rural properties that participated in the program. I am just wondering how that is going. I think we have something like 150 rural leaseholders across the ACT. How is that going? Is that continuing to be rolled out?

Mr Corbell: Commissioner Manson can give you some more information, but essentially it is important to stress that the farm firewise program is a voluntary program, so it requires rural lessees to be willing to engage in the program.

To achieve a good level of involvement, the Rural Fire Service appointed a person with a strong level of credibility with rural lessees, someone who understands rural lessees and has good knowledge of their circumstances and the issues that concern and affect them. That is very important in engaging with rural lessees.

Obviously people who manage their land and run their land for commercial purposes have a strong sense of knowledge and ownership and they do not take well to being lectured at. So you really have to work with them and show that you are there to give them extra skills, extra knowledge and extra assistance that they might not otherwise have, or perhaps where they just need a refresher in some things. So engaging a credible person has been important and we have that in the form of Arthur Sayer, who has a very strong level of standing and credibility with people in the rural sector of the ACT.

The total number of lessees engaged in the program—I think Mr Manson might be able to provide some more detail on that and how it is progressing generally.

Mr Manson: Unfortunately I do not have the exact number here but we have had contact with all leaseholders. A very minor few have not engaged with us or do not wish to engage with us, and that may continue for a variety of their own personal reasons. I can say that the program is progressing; we expect to get through to about 85 per cent by next summer, on the current prediction. I will provide you with the exact number, if you wish to have that. I am very happy with the program.

I think what we saw in Victoria in the last month is a prudent reminder of how carefully we need to facilitate and manage people in the rural community in particular. I think that will give added impetus to the RFS and to me personally to make sure that that program continues and is championed strongly over the next 12 months.

THE CHAIR: Could I go back to the future directions part on page 57 and ask about progress in relation to the relocation to a new emergency services headquarters at Fairbairn. Where are we with that?

Mr Corbell: That project is now proceeding well. Work is well advanced on detailed plans for a variety of buildings at Fairbairn. The scope of the project has been now well refined and the Emergency Services Agency has a clear understanding of the number of buildings it requires and how they will be utilised. Essentially there will be the establishment of a new workshops facility at Fairbairn. A purpose-built, undercover workshops building will be established to maintain the ESA's fleet and other equipment. There will be the refurbishment —

THE CHAIR: Purpose-built, not refurbishment?

Mr Corbell: Purpose-built, yes. There will be a refurbishment of an existing building at the Fairbairn site which would be utilised for stores and a range of other personnel. Then there will be a purpose-built headquarters building that will accommodate the headquarters personnel of the ESA, the comcen and other incident management facilities and services. That is well advanced.

THE CHAIR: What is the time frame for that?

Mr Corbell: There are a number of time frames, depending on which elements of the project we are dealing with. There is a time frame both for the refurbishment and for the construction of the new buildings. Can you provide that?

Mr Manson: At this stage we are essentially moving into construction drawing. We have a detailed design for each building and we are actually getting to the stage of final drawings in the next couple of weeks. For building 183, which is the refurbishment for our logistics store, work has already begun by the airport to do the works required by them to establish the building and we anticipate that, as soon as their work is complete, our work will begin in that building. That could be as early as December this year, for occupation. That is our optimistic view on that building. Both buildings are new buildings; so they need to go through the internal processes of Canberra airport to have approval. Our time frame from the airport is 18 months to full occupation.

THE CHAIR: Beyond the next fire season?

Mr Corbell: Yes. We anticipate full occupation at Fairbairn by the end of next year.

THE CHAIR: Before the fire season after next?

Mr Corbell: The fire season commences in October. The exact time frame is not definitive at this stage but the advice I have is that the time frame that we are working to is full transfer of all ESA functions from existing accommodation to Fairbairn by the end of next calendar year.

THE CHAIR: There are some disadvantages in the current site at Curtin but my recollection is that one of the reasons that Curtin was selected was the building redundancy of electricity and telephone lines in the suburb because a whole lot of things cross and re-cross in the suburb. What work will be done to ensure that there is substantial building redundancy at Fairbairn and what is the cost of the project?

Mr Manson: The building design that we have undertaken had a quality assurance process, with some independent consultants go through it, and incorporates dual feed for 000; so there is full redundancy for 000 incoming calls. Our radio system will operate from the airport. We have not finally decided whether it will have a separate redundancy through the optic fibre cable. It is not really required but we may be able to do that if it is not very expensive to do so. The building itself is purpose designed for the ACT to run integrated operations from that building, in support of all operations that we are likely to foresee in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Are we still paying rent on buildings and space at Fairbairn?

Mr Manson: Yes, we are. I think the total amount that we pay at the moment, GST inclusive, is \$173,000. We occupy one building out there.

THE CHAIR: Over what period?

Mr Manson: That has been staged since 2006. The exact total figure I would have to get back to you on. Some of the rents were staged in the original arrangement.

THE CHAIR: I would like that, thanks.

Mr Manson: And there are some opportunities for us to get a rebate on the buildings that were not used if the airport has a lease on those buildings now that we have a new arrangement with just three buildings.

THE CHAIR: Roughly, in December 2006, it was announced that we were going to take over a number of buildings at the Fairbairn site. We have now decided we will only take over one building and build two of our own.

Mr Corbell: They are not our buildings; actually they are the airport's buildings.

THE CHAIR: Sorry, two for our purposes.

Mr Corbell: And we will lease them from the airport.

THE CHAIR: The airport is going to build them for you and you will lease them?

Mr Corbell: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But in the period between December, 2006 and whenever you decided that you would only take over one of those buildings, how many buildings were we renting?

Mr Manson: My understanding was a total of six structures and there were a range of terms in those buildings.

THE CHAIR: Could you provide the committee with a breakdown on what was rented when and over what period?

Mr Manson: Yes.

Mr Corbell: The government has previously answered these questions and has provided them on notice previously but we are happy to do so again.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MR SMYTH: In the paragraph below it, if I may, there is mention that the ESA station relocation feasibility study report will be finalised early in the new financial year. Has that been finalised?

Mr Corbell: Yes, that report has been finalised and it is currently with me for consideration.

MR SMYTH: Is the committee allowed a copy of that report?

Mr Corbell: Not at this time. The reason for that is that there are a number of issues

from that station relocation study that will need to be put to cabinet for its consideration. As I indicated to the committee earlier in the hearing today—I think just before you came in Mr Smyth—the station relocation feasibility study looks at a range of options for providing optimal coverage for response and response and by all of our emergency services, but particularly our fire and ambulance services.

As the city continues to grow and develop, there are a range of issues associated with the location of existing facilities, in terms of both their age and location, that warrant consideration about whether or not those stations should be located in new locations. It is my intention to make a recommendation to the cabinet on how the government should proceed with this study and to then, pending cabinet's consideration, undertake a detailed community consultation on the issues associated with that study and the options that that study presents, to inform the government as to how it should proceed with any actual station relocation.

This is obviously a matter that will be one of significant interest to communities. The location of fire and ambulance stations is important to communities, and the government wants to engage in a detailed way with the community about what the options are before making any decisions about any potential station relocation.

MR SMYTH: That did not include the RFS stations?

Mr Corbell: It does include the RFS stations. The station relocation study looked at all of the ESA's stations and sheds but the focus on relocation and the recommendations in the report deal with fire brigade and ambulance. The location of existing RFS and SES units is largely unchanged. There are a number of issues with a small number of RFS and SES stations and sheds, mostly relating to where SES units wish to be located separately from RFS units. Also I think there is one instance in relation to the Molonglo Rural Fire Service Brigade where its location may need to be reconsidered, given the development of the Molonglo urban area.

MR SMYTH: Tidbinbilla was not mentioned in that report?

Mr Corbell: I think it was covered in that report.

Mr Manson: Tidbinbilla is mentioned in the report as a rebuild and new location in the same area. The reason for that is that there are potential ongoing issues with the private land that it sits on. That shed is in not the best condition and really needs, for the next 20 to 30 years, to be completely re-established in a modern style, with the appropriate health and safety and building standards. Tidbinbilla is certainly one of them. Majura SES was another, which has already moved. Molonglo SES may move into another location with a joint facility. That is one of the things we have been thinking about which will allow Molonglo to expand into that shed that is existing.

MR SMYTH: The service received a report in 2006 by Noel Arnold and Associates about the state of all the RFS and SES stations. There are a list of faults mentioned. Geyser's Creek has four, Rivers has five, Hall has six, Molonglo has five, Southern has five. Tidbinbilla has a list of 10 and is clearly the station in the worst repair. Can you tell the committee whether all the known faults have been corrected since 2006 and, if not, why not?

Mr Corbell: As we discussed at the hearing the other day, the government has provided funding to undertake a very wide range of minor works in existing stations and sheds in response to those asset management assessments, and that includes the issues that you have identified in relation to Tidbinbilla and others. As I indicated at the public accounts committee hearing yesterday, the government will be providing you with a detailed list of all the works which are occurring at each of those sheds and which are being funded through the third appropriation bill.

MR SMYTH: That may well be a different list and a different issue. I am now asking about the Arnold report from 2006 that lists—

Mr Corbell: That was the audit of issues.

MR SMYTH: That is fine but I am asking whether the things that the ESA identified some months after that, the outstanding works that had to be done, have actually been done.

Mr Corbell: A large number of them have been done and the remainder are effectively being funded by this third appropriation, as I understand it.

MR SMYTH: Except for Tidbinbilla?

Mr Manson: We have been able to—

Mr Corbell: As I said to you the other day, the issue with Tidbinbilla is that the government is not going to spend large amounts of money on facilities that may have to be demolished and relocated. But that does not preclude us from undertaking some minor works that are appropriate and essential. Those are things that are under consideration.

Mr Manson: I might add that there have been some capital upgrade funds in recent budgets that the ESA has been able to apply directly to that list that was prepared. I would say that probably 80 per cent or 90 per cent of the health and safety and significant or priority compliance issues have been dealt with. There was a 10-year backlog of works which had not been undertaken and the funding that is in the third appropriation will pretty much bring all of what I would call high-risk or risky activities in the health and safety and building compliance up to scratch. I am quite happy to travel to Tidbinbilla myself in the next week and have a look at whether Tidbinbilla, for some reason, has missed out.

The list is prioritised by our facilities people from those lists and then those lists are signed off by the chief officers of the services as an agreed set of priorities. If Tidbinbilla has missed out, then I would be surprised but I am happy to chase up Tidbinbilla station myself.

MR SMYTH: As one example, my understanding is that the erection of road signs was suggested because the shed is on one side of a hump and access and egress, particularly for the tanker which is slow off the mark, does create traffic problems there. But almost three years later no such signs are there.

Mr Manson: That was certainly brought to my attention yesterday. I asked for some advice on the access and egress to Tidbinbilla. Road warning signs are a possibility. So I have asked for that to be investigated. It is primarily a responsibility of TAMS, but I am sure between them and ourselves we can correct that potential risk to volunteers going in and out of that station.

MR SMYTH: To finish that, since 2006, has ESA written to TAMS to alert them of the problem at the Tidbinbilla station?

Mr Manson: I cannot say for certain but certainly not to my knowledge.

MR SMYTH: For 2½ years, there has been no communication that there is a road problem?

Mr Manson: It was only raised with me in particular very recently and we have undertaken to investigate what is appropriate there. I cannot say whether that has been investigated in the last two years by others. I would have to check whether the Rural Fire Service and the captain of that brigade have made their own requests and whether those requests have been considered from a road engineering point of view and may have been either accepted or discounted.

THE CHAIR: Before I go to Ms Hunter, could I go back to Fairbairn. I asked for a breakdown of the rents until now. Could I also ask on notice for a breakdown of the project expenditure for the refurb and the buildings and how that is dealt with in the budget. We are not actually building the buildings; we are leasing them from the airport. How will that be dealt with? I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr Corbell: Yes, we can provide you with details on that. It is important to stress that the cost to the government involves some capital cost in that the territory is responsible for elements of the fit-out or refurbishment of buildings; so some is the responsibility of the airport group; some is the responsibility of the territory; and then obviously the territory also has the costs associated with leasing buildings as well. We can provide that detail to you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS HUNTER: I have some questions on training. On page 53, it talks about the amalgamation of the ESA-registered training organisations into a single entity. First of all, I wanted to get an understanding of what that meant.

Mr Manson: The ESA had a registered training organisation for the Fire Brigade and for the rest of the organisation. There are some administration and other costs in running two RTOs. It was obviously more efficient to have one single RTO managed by our training section; so we have amalgamated those two RTOs formally into one; and we now have one formally registered training organisation.

MS HUNTER: And does that mean training for the ACT Fire Brigade and the RFS is integrated? If not, what opportunities to do training do the RFS volunteers get?

Mr Manson: The ACT Fire Brigade training manual, if you like, and the individual course units meet the Australian public standards for training. There are some crossovers between the Rural Fire Service, SES and the Fire Brigade and indeed Ambulance in some areas. For example, USARB training, urban search and rescue basic training, is very similar across all similar units. The RFS, over many years, has developed its basic and advanced modules, and then modules for incident management teams are in various stages of development. There are some units which cross all and can be used as competencies for each organisation but, in the main, those units are pretty well identified within each agency.

The area for integration is certainly in the training, where fire brigade staff undertake training for the Rural Fire Service in particular activities, such as defensive structural firefighting, which rural firefighters often has a competency. As we move to our new training centre as part of the Fairbairn move, all of the training people will be in one location and I expect there will be a high level of integration of trainers who train a variety of our service staff. Some of our office staff, for example, have particular competencies and that might come from training by Fire Brigade, Rural Fire Service permanent staff or outside contractors or from volunteer trainers within the system.

MS HUNTER: A final training question: the report indicates that the ACT RFS training is not compatible with that in other Australian states. I think it is at the top of page 56. Why is that the case? Are there not already established training packages that are widely used nationally and that have national accreditation?

Mr Manson: The history to that is that the Australian fire authorities have recognised, over the last 10 years, pretty much a basic set of training manuals and modules. The ACT, for reasons of which I am not entirely aware, had very similar modules that had a fair bit of ACT-specific material in them. We made a decision internally to pretty much adopt the New South Wales Rural Fire Service modules, which are based on the national modules. As a result, we have been able to access all of their up-to-date material under licence from them, in effect, and then just change the logo. That is very efficient for us. The main reason for doing that is the interoperability of our volunteers working across the border. Obviously there are always some legislative and other particular parts of some modules which need to be specifically ACT based.

MS PORTER: I was wondering how the public consultation on the finalisation of the revised strategic bushfire management plan was going.

Mr Manson: The government provided us with some special initiative funding to progress the review of the strategic bushfire plan. The written part of that document will be on my desk on Friday, the final version, which I plan to provide to the minister for a review so that I can put it out as a public exposure draft. We have had strong public consultation; we have worked through with a number of key stakeholder groups the key issues which have gone into that document; but those groups have not seen the final text.

We expect, in the next two weeks, to have a public exposure draft out there and we will try to make sure the message gets out for people to look at that. It provides the criteria and context for the second part of the exercise, which is the maps. On the maps are fire trails, power lines, assets at risk, heritage assets, nature conservation

type assets, fire advantages and our fuel mosaic plan.

I have been reviewing the first two maps, which are essentially the bottom half of the ACT, with the Department of Territory and Municipal Services. We have been doing a little quality assurance on the information in there. I expect that we will start talking to stakeholders in the middle of next month at the latest and get around the table and try to get full agreement on those, again, exposure drafts, working documents.

There are 10 maps at the moment to cover the whole of the ACT. Namadgi and that area, obviously the mountains, are a particularly important area for the fuel mosaic management; so there will be some issues there, no doubt, as we go out to talk to stakeholders. The rest of the ACT is a little more straightforward but still very complex because you are dealing with grasslands and rural communities, particularly on the north side of Canberra. I am very pleased with the quality of the work that has gone into the mapping that I have seen. We hope to get that out in the next few weeks to start that process. It may be timely, people having had a strong reminder from the Victorian fires, that we actually go out now, while the public has that high level of attention to these matters.

MS PORTER: Do we stop at the border or do we not stop at the border? What agreements have we got with New South Wales?

Mr Manson: We have formal agreements at ministerial level and with the New South Wales Fire Service on our cooperative arrangements, as required by the act. It is at a ministerial level if significant resources are involved. We have MOUs with all the other services, the New South Wales Fire Brigade, New South Wales Ambulance Service, Department of Environment and Climate Change. All of our MOUs are current and up to date. Some of those are reviewed annually; some are signed but the schedules on the back are simply reviewed every year. So I am confident that all of our MOUs are in place and are being exercised very strongly at the moment.

MS HUNTER: I was wondering about the figures for the callouts for the ACT Fire Brigade. We have got the figures on the Fire Brigade callouts but I am wondering about the number of callouts for the Rural Fire Service.

Mr Manson: I thought they were in there.

THE CHAIR: Nor the SES.

Mr Manson: I can provide those. The Rural Fire Service, fortunately, did not have very many in the preceding year—it was a relatively quiet year—and that is somewhat a reflection of their proactive attitude in the community to reducing accidental fires and arson. I am very happy that the Rural Fire Service is able to keep the pressure on industry and the community to minimise the number of fires. We certainly did not have any excessive lightning activity in that year either.

For the SES, on page 56, we did not provide a table, for some reason, but they had 401 incidents. An incident can be one or two crews or 10 or 12 crews working all night. The 401 incidents is a heavy load. You may recall that we did have a fairly busy storm season which went right through the fire season. It sort of started early and

finished late.

MS HUNTER: It will show up on the chart next year if a tree came down. But I was wondering whether the RFS is sometimes not called; it goes through; and the Fire Brigade have already responded in many cases. The RFS is not called upon?

Mr Manson: The arrangements for call-out of fire brigade and volunteers were reviewed last year, with the volunteers and the fire brigade, and we have reached agreement on changing the boundary to essentially the inner edge of the city for urban brigades. Their functions primarily are structural fires and road rescue and we wanted to focus their attention in the city area.

The rural fire brigades, in consultation with the chief officer, were keen to, if you like, have more activity and more opportunity for activity. So their area was slightly increased, particularly in the areas where we get a lot of smaller fires starting in and around the urban area. The principal rule is the closest and most appropriate resource will be applied to whichever fire. That is the principal rule.

During the summer, on high-fire days, the Rural Fire Service may have volunteer brigades stood up in their sheds. They are available on the screen in front of the operators in the control room. Now we also have, on high-fire danger days, a Rural Fire Service incident controller who is actually in that same room. On any smoke call, the Rural Fire Service is there and decisions can be made about quickly dispatching the closest resource. There are always times when Fire Brigade and Rural Fire Service will both be dispatched, and sometimes one will get there before the other.

There have been issues in the past, anecdotal stories, about people being dispatched before other people. When you look at the facts in relation to those matters, when the computer screen is in front of you, they generally dispatch the closest resource. There have been stories but I think there is not a lot of substance to those stories.

Mr Corbell: This has been a matter of concern, by volunteer brigades in particular, for an extended period of time and it was a matter that I was pleased to see that the commissioner and Mr Parry, as the chief officers of both services, looked at very closely and did a lot of work on with volunteers and the career fire-fighting service in the last 12 months. The arrangements came into place, as Mr Manson indicated, around the beginning of this fire season and I guess in many respects, given that it has been a relatively quiet season, it has been difficult to determine how successful they have been.

The very clear commitment on the part of the ESA as an organisation is to provide volunteers with a greater opportunity to respond to incidents. That is important in terms of ongoing training and readiness and morale in organisations, and that is something that we acknowledge as important. The principal rule must always be that the most appropriate resources are deployed to an incident. But there are other parameters that are put in place to try and encourage and make available opportunities to volunteer brigades that previously perhaps were not always there.

MR SMYTH: About current activity, has the government calculated the cost of the deployments to Victoria?

Mr Corbell: All those costs will be met by the Victorian or commonwealth governments under the relevant arrangements that are in place for assistance at those times. So the government will not be out of pocket in relation to any of those costs and the community will not be either. In terms of what we will be billing the Victorian or commonwealth authorities, I do not know; maybe Mr Manson can get that.

Mr Manson: The billing arrangements are essentially well established under the various disaster funding arrangements with the commonwealth and states, and that rule principally is that any extra costs that you would not have normally borne yourself—so all of the fuel, transport costs, any overtime costs which you would not normally have borne—will be reimbursed by Victoria. Most equipment—damaged equipment or lost equipment—is covered by insurance either in Victoria or here.

The other cost, which I guess is the opportunity cost of not having our staff in the ACT, is that we do not generally add that up except to count the number of volunteer hours that we put in, by service, and also our professional staff time. We will be adding all of those up so that we have some concept of how many hours people were actually on the job, as opposed to resting. We can then use those figures to understand the human impact on our community of those sorts of activities. So we do keep those records very accurately and we can certainly make them available when we have collated them. We still have volunteers in Victoria at this time.

MR SMYTH: So have we got a figure to date or not?

Mr Corbell: We will have to take it on notice.

Mr Manson: We will take it on notice. The rough figure would be \$500,000.

Mr Corbell: \$400,000.

Mr Manson: Sorry, \$400,000.

MR SMYTH: If you are going to take it on notice, it would be wonderful if we could have a breakdown by service and labour, plus consumables, on the cost.

Mr Manson: I think we have got a time limit to get our request into Victoria, so we are working hard on those figures as we speak.

MS PORTER: I realise that we should be finished now, but, as a follow-up, I think the committee would be very grateful, minister, to receive some kind of final report on the commitment of the ACT, both in terms of ACT Policing and the ESA. I am sure that we want to add to that our congratulations to everyone for all the commitment and the work that has been put in. At some stage when it is finalised, if we could get a report on that, that would be really good. Thank you very much for all the effort you have put in.

Mr Corbell: Yes, thank you, Ms Porter. Obviously the deployments were marred by the tragic and awful death of David Balfour, but the overall opportunity that the

deployments provided to both our career and our volunteer firefighters and other personnel was outstanding. I think it has achieved a level of training and readiness that we would not otherwise have been able to achieve. So it has been very effective in that regard, though obviously not without some costs.

THE CHAIR: Could I just go back to the ACT Ambulance Service. I just want to pursue a couple of things in relation to SouthCare. There are no figures in the annual report in relation to the number of deployments, the number of missions, and what the missions were for. Could you provide that to the committee—probably on notice. I am sure Mr Foot has it on the top of his head.

Mr Manson: We do make mention of SouthCare in the third paragraph.

THE CHAIR: Yes, I know, but there are no figures that I can see. There is the ambulance service operation about lights and sirens. But how many missions in the financial year?

Mr Manson: I will make available a copy of our SouthCare company annual report, which I am sure has all of those figures in, and I am sure that we can provide you with an updated current list of deployment by type.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you for that. The other thing, minister: is the location of the SouthCare base likely to be affected by the ESA station review?

Mr Corbell: No. The Snowy Hydro base will stay at that location, and in fact planning at this stage is that the facility will be enhanced. There are enhancements occurring now to provide better accommodation for both paramedic and medical staff who need to be based there. The government is also currently looking at—and indeed the recommendations before me are that—the other aerial appliances that ESA engages for the bushfire season should be also located at that same point. Work is underway to identify ways of achieving that.

THE CHAIR: So that means you could not put any fixed-wing appliances there?

Mr Corbell: No, just the helicopter appliances.

THE CHAIR: So that would be the sky crane type—

Mr Corbell: Yes. The sky crane may be a different matter, given the size of that appliance and the logistical support that goes with it. But, generally speaking, the ESA is anticipating locating the helicopters that we contract ourselves and which we also receive support for through the aerial fire-fighting agreement at Symonston, rather than at the airport.

THE CHAIR: And why is that?

Mr Corbell: I think the reasoning is that it is cheaper to locate those appliances on our own turf, rather than pay the airport a rental to sit on their tarmac.

THE CHAIR: But what would happen if you have fixed-wing—

Mr Corbell: We do not engage fixed-wing aircraft. I do not believe we have ever engaged fixed-wing aircraft?

Mr Manson: If we use what are generally called ag tractors, the small, fixed wing for fire-retardant dropping, we usually base those down at Tumut. The New South Wales Rural Fire Service air desk coordinates those particular aircraft for us. We would probably operate out of small local strips close to the event. There are a number of farm strips around the ACT which we would identify.

The other reason is that I think the airport is for smaller aircraft such as our fire-fighting rotary-winged aircraft, the small helicopters. There is a general conflict with those larger 737s. To operate off the airport is not entirely desirable, particularly as our business often operates early in the morning and later in the afternoon, and that is when we get the load on the airport for large aircraft. So part of the reason is to get rid of that natural conflict. We already have a proper fuelling station at the SouthCare base, which is a key issue for safety and safely refuelling the aircraft.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that.

MS HUNTER: This is probably a very quick question and it was under the Ambulance Service. In the outlook section, the second dot point mentions risk-based resource allocation. I am just trying to get an understanding of what that means.

Mr Manson: One of the issues facing all ambulance services around Australia is the increasing public expectation for an ambulance to arrive. If you look at the figures across Australia, you will discover that people often call an ambulance when they have a headache, when they need to go to the shops. While there are some strong anecdotal stories there, there is quite a lot of evidence that ambulances can be called and misused. So allocating to a risk base is trying to triage those calls when they come in; trying to get a bit more out of people, with expert managers listening to those calls and trying to divert acute care and a paramedic ambulance from being applied to a non-urgent case.

So it is really about understanding the risk as we go forward and identifying ways we can allocate a paramedic to a critical case so that we have very little of our expertise in that area going to what could be a taxi or bus ride or a family member taking someone to hospital. Again, that is just about applying a very expensive, highly trained resource only to acute cases and allowing other means for people to get to medical centres. As the government's medical reforms look at medical centres and all of those reforms in that area, we hope to take advantage of being able to get people to go to those centres under their own steam, if they are capable, rather than using our ambulance.

MS HUNTER: And are you basing that triage system on the sorts of systems that are used in other states, tried and tested systems, or are we developing our own?

Mr Manson: We do it to some degree now. What we are proposing is to look carefully over the next six to 12 months at opportunities to do it better. We will be looking at how people do it in other states and around the world, to see if we can use

that as a mechanism for best applying our precious resources to the most needy cases.

THE CHAIR: It being 10 past 5, we might have to pull up stumps. I thank members of the Emergency Services Agency, Ms Leon and the minister for their attendance this afternoon. As with police, we will ask members to provide any questions on notice that may be outstanding within five days of receiving the transcript, and ask the department to get those back in 10 working days. Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 5.10 pm.