



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AFFAIRS

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2003-2004)

Members:

MR B STEFANIAK (The Chair)
MS K MACDONALD (The Deputy Chair)
DR D FOSKEY

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2005

Secretary to the committee:
Ms R Jaffray (Ph: 6205 0199)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

The committee met at 9.03 am.

Appearances:

Mr John Hargreaves, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Emergency Services Authority
Mr Peter Dunn, Commissioner

THE CHAIR: Good morning. These hearings are legal proceedings of the Assembly. They are protected by parliamentary privilege. That gives you certain protections and also certain responsibilities. You are protected from certain legal actions like defamation—I certainly hope we don't have anything like that, though—from what you might say at this public hearing. It also means you have a responsibility to tell the committee the truth, because giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter.

We will start with the report of the police and emergency services and the first part of the proceedings will be the Emergency Services Bureau.

In the JACS report, volume 2, page 92, the cost of bushfire prevention litigation has risen from \$23.90 per head to \$31.40 per head, which is a significant increase. That, apparently, is in order to implement the McLeod recommendations. Will the \$31.40 per head now be the norm for this activity?

Mr Hargreaves: With your leave, I would like to make an opening statement before addressing the substance of your question.

THE CHAIR: Yes, as long as it's brief, Mr Hargreaves. We don't have very much time.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much for that. Mr Chairman, as you know, I believe that brevity is beautiful so we will just get on with it. This committee would be aware there is a certain scene-setting that needs to be done.

The committee would also be aware that the Emergency Services Bureau report is contained in the 2003-04 annual report of the Department of Justice and Community Safety. At that time, the Emergency Services Bureau was part of JACS. In 2003-04 we saw an intense focus on emergency services in the wake of the devastating January 2003 bushfires. It was a year of great change and great achievement for emergency services in the ACT, and emergency services staff and volunteers can feel immensely proud of the services they provided to the people of Canberra and the region.

The major achievement for emergency services in 2003-04 was the development and consultation of the Emergencies Act 2004 and, through it, the creation of the ACT Emergency Services Authority. No longer does emergency services report through another government department to the executive; they are now an independent entity reporting directly to me.

The Emergency Services Commissioner, Major General Peter Dunn AO, is responsible

for the overall strategic direction and management of the fire brigade, ambulance service, rural fire service and state emergency service. I would like to thank Commissioner Dunn, the Department of Justice and Community Safety, in particular Mr Tim Keady, and the staff and volunteers of the emergency services for the work they put into the creation of the act and the Emergency Services Authority.

The act is the only one of its type in Australia and is a world leader. It consolidates all emergency legislation into the one act. It also provides for different declarations in an emergency, or impending emergency, and substantially rewrites the provision of the Bushfire Act 1936, including providing for the ACT Bushfire Council as an advisory body.

Much work was put into establishing the vision of the Emergency Services Authority, a safer community through collaboration excellence in emergency services. This means working together to provide the best emergency services possible to people of the ACT—significantly, protecting the environment was added to life and property as an objective.

Other main achievements of the ESB in 2003-04 included the ongoing implementation of the 61 recommendations from the McLeod report into the operational response of the January 2003 ACT bushfires, continued planning for the implementation of a new radio system, design and continued development of the new computer-aided dispatch system for the communication centre, replacement of equipment resources and infrastructure destroyed and/or damaged in the January 2003 bushfires, improvement of education programs for the community, including the successful bushfire wise public education program—one of the significant achievements of the new ESA is its connection with the community, something that has been in the media of late—improvement of the bureau's mapping capability, through a computer-based system, and map books for command and fire-fighting vehicles. A final achievement was the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the ACT and New South Wales rural fire services, to formalise the arrangement of mutual support to protect residents of respective communities.

All of this was nearly two years ago and emergency services in the ACT continue to go from strength to strength in the ACT, and the staff and the volunteers undertaking these activities have my full confidence and support.

Mr Chair, I will now address your question.

THE CHAIR: Would you like me to repeat it?

Mr Hargreaves: No, you don't need to repeat it. I have, as you well know, Mr Chairman, a very long memory. It comes with being a member of the Labor Party. Your question referred to the cost per head of population for prevention litigation and whether we are seeing a new level, from \$23.90 to \$31.40.

One has to understand that the ESA is a new organisation and the extent to which activities are introduced into it must be done on a staged basis, with evaluations along the way. I would expect that the original target of \$23.90 will increase but I wouldn't want to commit to \$31.40. As new capabilities that cost more come on stream, and government agrees to those costs, they will be funded in a recurrent perspective.

I think you will find a comparison in the 2004-05 year. I don't suspect that that particular figure would be the end figure either. I would expect things to evolve over time. It is unlikely it will go down.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that, minister. Interestingly, on the same page, we see the number of emergency management activities conducted in 2003-04 to reduce hazards was 8,108, which was actually 182 fewer than the target of 8,200. So we have got a situation where the number of activities has dropped while the cost per head has increased. This doesn't seem to make much sense. What is the money being spent on, if not on hazard reduction activities?

Mr Hargreaves: Before I ask Commissioner Dunn to respond specifically, I will draw the committee's attention to the one before that—conveniently overlooked at this point—the emergency management activities target, which was 150 and, blow me down, they have achieved almost 500. I am surprised members didn't pick that up and want to go to the good news story first. I will ask Commissioner Dunn to address both of those issues, because I am sure that the curiosity of the committee has been sparked.

Mr Dunn: Significantly, when we commenced the year that the report is covering, we began a period of increases in personal training for the individuals that are in all components of the Emergency Services Authority. The committee will recall that in the McLeod report there was particular reference to the need to ensure that training is lifted, especially in the area of incident management—that is, the application of the Australian integrated incident management system, or AIIMS as it is known.

Over the 12-month period of the report, and particularly in the second six months of that financial year, there was a very significant increase in the amount of training undertaken by the rural fire services. That training included not only classroom-type activities but also a large number of field activities, culminating in a very large field exercise over two days down in the Booth Range area of southern Namadgi National Park.

In that exercise not only were rural firefighters and state emergency services personnel exercised in remote area firefighting techniques, which of course are very apposite to the situations that we face here in the ACT at all times, but also they were put through very extensive helicopter awareness and helicopter operation training. It was the first time that the territory emergency services personnel had had the opportunity to really reach those levels of training. That in part was assisted by the ACT government's decision to join the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, which has been set up as a combined operation between all of the states and territories and the federal government. That gave us access to more helicopters and different types of helicopters.

So you have seen a significant increase in individual and, as I would term it—and a term that you may be familiar with, Chair, and Mr Pratt may be familiar with—collective training as well, representing a significant step forward.

The other areas relate to the training on new equipment that has been provided, the provision of that equipment itself—new tankers—and the commencement of new technologies coming into all parts of the Emergency Services Authority.

MS MacDONALD: Minister, page 62 of volume 1 lists the key achievements for the reporting period, including the ongoing development of the Emergency Services Authority. Could you provide some information about the transition and leadership between the bureau and the authority, please?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. Thanks, Ms MacDonald. As we know, the ESB, prior to its establishment, was actually a collective of loose response agencies. It was a bureaucratic entity within a departmental structure. In that sense, it was somewhat hamstrung because of those normal restraints you have, and it didn't have that independence and structure.

You would remember that not all of the agencies were under the one piece of legislation. We had the fire act and all these things totally independent. What was needed was a revamp of the structure, which you have seen materialise. The other thing that was absolutely needed was the introduction of a stricter, more response-oriented, military-type structure such that had an operational capability not unlike those of other frontline fighting forces, and Commissioner Dunn's appointment started that process. Now, in terms of leadership, we have people who are skilled not only in their particular discipline—and some of them have decades of experience at senior levels—but also in the structured logistical approach to emergency response. I think that has been one of the big moves forward.

MRS DUNNE: Since the establishment of the ESA, how has the establishment changed? There is an obvious increase in staff but can you tell me—if you can tell me off the top of your head, fine, but I think it is probably an on-notice question—how much the establishment has increased? Where are those increases? What sorts of people are in those increases and where have they come from?

Mr Hargreaves: Firstly, I am not reluctant to provide you with statistical information, factual numbers and things like that, but I prelude it by saying that it is not necessarily appropriate to take the staffing structure of the ESB and compare it with the staffing structure of the ESA. We are talking about two entirely different animals.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I understand that.

Mr Hargreaves: As we were talking about the other animal of the collective of them before.

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: I will get you figures, unless of course Commissioner Dunn has them here?

Mr Dunn: I can get most of the figures. The ACT Fire Brigade has increased by 35 firefighters. We had one candidate leave the course. So there is a vacancy in the fire service—an unintended vacancy—we want to fill. These are frontline firefighters. An additional 16 intensive-care paramedics have been recruited into the Ambulance Service and three administrative staff—that is, administering the operational side of the Ambulance Service—have been recruited.

Those 16 paramedics comprise a group of lateral entry, lateral recruits, that have already

qualified, so they have gone straight out on the road. We have also reinstated the student program; where we are recruiting local ACT personnel to go through the three-year intensive-care paramedic course run within the Ambulance Service in conjunction with tertiary institutions.

MRS DUNNE: So all of those 16 are lateral—

Mr Dunn: No. Some of the 16 are laterals. We have increased by 16. The nice thing about that increase is that those people are already on the road, in cars. Of course those that are not fully qualified intensive-care paramedics are under supervision of IC paras at all times, and that is the norm. So we have physically increased the size of the Ambulance Service.

We have commenced recruiting 200 additional rural fire service members. We have about 60 of those in situ and that program is running over two years. We commenced it at the start of this financial year. The preparations were done last financial year—we see that evident in the report. That is in response to lessons learnt from the 2001 fires, which happened in January, of course, when a number of our volunteers were away on holidays. So that increase by 200 is under way.

Similarly, we are increasing the ACT State Emergency Service by some 150 personnel and that again will be over a two-year program. The very large bulk of the increase in size is in front-line operational personnel. There are also staff increases for the rural fire service and state emergency service headquarters. These are operational staff out on the ground, running incidents or undertaking training or logistics to support operations. We have professionalised, if I may use that term, both of those services and they are separating. You will see these increases being reflected in the run-up to this current financial year being reflected in the last financial year's report.

Mr Hargreaves: I think it is appropriate that we address issues that flow from the activities contained in the 2003-04 annual report. I am reluctant to go down a track containing information for the 2004-05 annual report and further in the estimates process, around the supplementary appropriation and of course the 2005-06 budget process. Whilst I am happy to address issues about this report, I will be reluctant to go down the track if it impacts on any of those three reports.

THE CHAIR: No-one expects you to give away what you are doing in the budget deliberations. However, I think it is quite reasonable to ask questions and try to elicit answers from things that flow from this report. A precedent has already been set for this committee in relation to our first hearing where my colleague the deputy chair asked a perfectly reasonable question of the Chief Minister, which he obviously wanted—he asked her to ask it—in relation to the implementation of the Human Rights Act, which started on 1 July 2004, but the spade work and the legislation was passed in the reporting period. I think it is reasonable to allow an amount of latitude there but I don't expect you to divulge what you are doing in budget deliberations; so you might like to make some general comments on that. But I draw that to your attention.

Mr Hargreaves: We will see how we go.

MS MacDONALD: Page 64 refers to the computer-aided dispatch system for the

communications centre. Could you outline the progress of the implementation of the CAD system?

Mr Hargreaves: As you know, the CAD system was one of the big-ticket items the Emergency Services Authority took on as something that seriously needed fixing. Many lessons were learned from the January 2003 bushfires and we got a lot of feedback from the frontline fighters and they said, “We’ve got to do something about this”—and that is exactly what has happened—and the government has invested a fair amount of money in it. I have to say that we are doing very well, and I will get Commissioner Dunn to give you some detail on that. But please understand that, with these sorts of systems, the reasons previous governments have lost the plot with this is that they have put things in too quickly. I am very keen that these things be done in a considered fashion.

MRS DUNNE: You reckon the CAD went in quickly, do you?

Mr Hargreaves: So Commissioner Dunn can give some more information about that. Can I also say, Mr Chairman, I am happy to respond to questions through you or directly to a member asking questions but I will treat snide remarks with the contempt due to them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I don’t think you need to comment on things like that. I have been running an orderly session.

Mr Hargreaves: I am just telling it how it is.

THE CHAIR: I don’t particularly want snide remarks coming from anyone, especially ministers. We have had a bit too much of that lately. I think everyone needs to behave him or herself. We are going quite well so far. Commissioner?

Mr Dunn: The computer-aided dispatch system is fully operational within the Emergency Services Authority. That system has been brought in with an intense involvement of the frontline operators of that system. It is deployed into the ACT Fire Brigade and the ACT Ambulance Service.

It will in due course be deployed in the ACT State Emergency Service and the ACT Rural Fire Service. That will come later. The communications infrastructure for that needs to be built over a number of years. However, we now have, for the first time in Australia, a fully functional computer-aided dispatch system that runs multi-agency response management. In and around the city area, all systems—that is, all operational services—can be recorded on that system itself.

I think the measure of that system is the fact that the community has not heard anything other than good news from the operators of that system. If you introduce a new information technology system to an organisation and it does not work it is usually a very public thing. What we have got is praise from the operators that this has actually improved the way in which they can deliver services to the community.

This system has been built with the first application in Australia of the geo-coded national address file and obviously there is intense interest from other jurisdictions in what has been done here. The G-NAF, as it is called—geo-coded national address file—

allows us to put extensive amounts of data in about particular addresses. So when a response is called to a particular address that address is keyed into the system and it automatically flags on the operator's screen the types of hazardous material that might be stored at an industrial site, for example. As the response vehicles are proceeding to that site, the incident controller, team leader, station officer, whoever it may be, is able to plan the way in which they will attack the issue or attempt to solve the emergency problem, rather than the old system of arriving on site, trying to determine the problem and then determining the plan, thus delaying the response.

It also allows us to dynamically manage our resources—that is, we can have vehicles moving around the city and the system will automatically respond the nearest response vehicle to the incident. We have moved away from the traditional “that's in someone's area, therefore go for that particular response” element.

The work that has been done here in the ACT, with ACT-based technology experts and companies working with us and supporting us, and with work that has been done in the United Kingdom, where the base system comes from, has seen us introduce, commencing with its introduction last financial year and our running it through to this financial year, the leading computer-aided dispatch system in the country.

MS MacDONALD: You said before that it was the first time in Australia that such a system had been introduced. Does that mean you have got other jurisdictions coming into it?

Mr Dunn: Most certainly. We have an intense dialogue with a number of agencies, including Geoscience Australia at the federal level. People are watching how we are benefiting from the application of this G-NAF system. It is obvious that the applications go far and wide when you can, for example, place into your system information about a particular resident who may, if there is an emergency, need priority evacuation—if someone has home dialysis, for example. For an aged care facility we key in the numbers of people who would need stretcher evacuation as opposed to walking or sitting evacuation. All of this material goes in. We also have the locations of fire hydrants. That might seem a simple thing; however, it means that at 3.00 in the morning we are able to direct crews to the nearest hydrant as they are coming into a street. That again saves valuable minutes for those crews.

This system also gives us automatic vehicle location. It allows us to physically track the vehicles and see them in their positions as they move around the ACT. People from other jurisdictions are very interested in how it is working here. I emphasise that the particular work done in the year in question in this report was to build a single system that caters for all four emergency services in the Emergency Services Authority.

In other jurisdictions computer-aided dispatch systems are common. Everyone uses some form of computer-aided dispatch system. None of the four agencies that I am responsible for has all of their emergency services operating off a single system. Quite clearly, then, we can coordinate incidents and manage the response far more effectively with the new CAD system.

DR FOSKEY: There is just one question arising out of that. We have obviously invested rather a large amount of money and thought into our current configuration of personnel

and equipment. Is our equipment and personnel available to other jurisdictions—say, for instance, in the region in times when it is fairly clear that they are in more need than we are?

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much for that question. This is something which is particularly important to both our community and the surrounding New South Wales community. There was a lot of blame, shame and all this sort of stuff—finger pointing about whose fault it was when the McIntyre’s Hut fire started, which started it—and there was a lot of controversy around who should wear the blame. I reckon part of it was because the relationship between ourselves and New South Wales was not firm and not based on the potential for a shared response attack on things like the bushfire.

We are talking about the bushfire particularly, but we also need to understand that we have got ambulance services to the region as well. We have developed a memorandum of understanding with New South Wales which strengthens the relationship; it puts it on a much more professional footing, if you like; it takes a lot of the hit and miss out of it; and it has a guaranteed relationship. I think that is one of the huge steps forward.

The reinvigoration of the bushfire council is another area where we are making sure that we talk to people on both sides of the border. We don’t say, “Okay, if the fire gets to Queanbeyan, we’re right.” We employ a forward defence response. Likewise, we have to understand that people in, for example, Jerrabomberra, Royalla and those sorts of places are almost within the territory, and we need to put our combined responses into fixing their emergencies. That is one of the reasons why that MOU was so absolutely vital. I will ask Commissioner Dunn to give you some detail on the specifics of how we can have that shared response.

Mr Dunn: The memoranda, as the minister says, have opened up a new doorway. What they have done is made sure that the relationships don’t rely on personalities, they will be enduring. With the rural fire service, we train regularly with New South Wales brigades coming into the ACT. We did so most recently two weeks ago. We also have fully compatible communications with the New South Wales emergency services, so that problem has also been resolved.

The relationship with the Rural Fire Service of New South Wales goes further than that. We are routinely invited by Commissioner Koperberg to all of the major planning activities he conducts with the New South Wales Rural Fire Service, so there are no secrets between us. Similarly, we invite Mr Koperberg and his team into the ACT to participate in our planning.

We have close relationships with the fire districts headquarters in Cooma, Yass, Queanbeyan and Goulburn. Earlier this week we attended, and were major participants in, the first meeting of a reinvigorated bushfire committee in Queanbeyan. We provide a huge amount of information in terms of risk assessment to those people, and we consider this to be a region. It is a cliché now, but emergencies don’t know borders and don’t stop at boundaries.

Mr Hargreaves: They don’t give a bugger about the borders!

Mr Dunn: Similarly, with the ambulance service, we routinely assist New South Wales

and they assist us; and likewise with the fire brigade and the State Emergency Service. We have also recognised the service they have given us, through the awarding of the ACT emergency medal to the members of the four emergency services I have just covered those who assisted us during the 2003 fires.

Mr Hargreaves: I want to put on the record another example of the cooperation that has existed for some time—this was instigated by the Liberal government prior to us coming to office; therefore credit needs to be given where it is due—and that is the Snowy Hydro Southcare helicopter service, which is a joint New South Wales approach to our joint problems.

DR FOSKEY: While we are on page 64, a year or two before the 2003 fires, we were hearing, through the firefighters union, about frustration with the radio system that was then in place—there were too many black holes, and firefighters' lives could have been at risk. Can you explain if and how the new system is more robust—and anything that needs to happen now to give emergency services workers the security they need?

Mr Dunn: We have introduced a new digital trunk radio network as it is known—TRN is the acronym. This is a completely new network which is based on the New South Wales government radio network, only it is the modern digital version. They are still on analogue, moving to the digital version in the future. This system has completely replaced the old system, although we still have the Legacy system there for another month or so while we are extracting data records off that. We could use that if need be, but we don't need to.

That is a hugely capable system that gives us interoperability with over 40 New South Wales government entities. It has the capacity for further expansion here in the ACT. Currently we are using about 10 per cent of the capacity of that network. It is designed to be that way so that, should there be a major emergency in the territory, we can bring agencies such as the Australian Defence Force or other emergency services in onto that network to make sure we have interoperability, as it is called, between them.

In relation to the safety of the firefighters, this system is such that you can—I have physically done this on two occasions—drive a vehicle between here and Sydney and talk crystal clearly to single units back in the ACT, fire trucks or ambulances. It is an extraordinarily effective system. I might add that it also gives us interoperability with Victorian and South Australian emergency services.

It is moving us to an area where we are able to provide—and we are using some of this now—additional equipment such as boom microphones and hands-free microphones so that people like firefighters, in an emergency circumstance in the future, will be able to communicate without having their hands tied up with a radio system. We are moving in this direction now. We have gone to a system that is known as APCO 25 compliant. That piece of jargon I only put on the record to note. It is the international standard to which all emergency services are moving as a result of decisions taken post 9/11. It has been decided to put that very high standard in. We have moved there now, and New South Wales is moving there.

We are, I would note, still able to fully interoperate with the New South Wales elements that are on analogue systems. With this technology we are able to run dual

analogue/digital systems. So there has been a huge increase. The black spots have been all but reduced and this system, as it stands in the urban area, also gives us coverage around virtually the entire bushfire abatement zone.

MR PRATT: I notice that, at page 64 of the report, it refers to GRN but I presume that is the same as TRN?

Mr Hargreaves: No.

MR PRATT: There is a difference?

Mr Hargreaves: There is a TRN and a GRN—different letters. If you have a look there, it talks about the government radio network. This is a completely different system.

MR PRATT: Going on from there, I notice in the report that the aims were to try to achieve about 60 per cent coverage in the 2003-04 period. Can you tell us how much coverage the TRN system is giving us in the ACT, with your agencies and units deployed to wherever they need to be deployed? What is the coverage at this stage?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Pratt, just before the commissioner answers, I might ask you to clarify the question a little. In a sense, we have three areas we need to make sure we have got radio coverage for. You have got the urban area and the abatement zone, and you have got the things outside your abatement zone. Which bit of that do you want to target on?

MR PRATT: In terms of the primary command and control nets that we use for all emergency service units operating in all corners of the ACT, what sort of coverage do we have now?

Mr Dunn: We would need to look at two systems there to give us the full coverage, as I am sure you would appreciate. Within the urban area we have close to 100 per cent coverage, as I have just said in reply to Dr Foskey's question, with very minor black spots compared to the previous situation we had. The same digital trunk network, which is an ultra high-frequency network, covers virtually the entire bushfire abatement zone. We believed it would but were not prepared to commit to that until such time as we had done ground truthing of that communications footprint. That represented quite an extraordinary coverage for ultra high-frequency radio, as I am sure you will appreciate. The coverage in the bushfire abatement zone is excellent and, therefore, the standard operating procedure is for all units operating within the bushfire abatement zone to converse on the digital trunk network. That is working exceptionally well.

Outside of that, as you can imagine, there are also areas—this is again illustrated by the example I gave of driving to Sydney—going south which are covered by that trunk network. However, that coverage is not adequate to allow us to conduct operations. To that end we are going to have a system of systems in place. That would be expected, as we have to communicate not only in urban areas but in remote areas as well. We have upgraded the existing very high-frequency link, the VHF network, that exists within the territory. So that has been substantially upgraded, with improvements to the repeater stations, power supplies, equipment and the like—modernising that.

More importantly, perhaps, is that we have completed a contract and are deploying a system known as FireLink, which is produced by an ACT company, Australian Technology Industries. FireLink is a VHF system which gives us excellent communications throughout the remote areas and also allows us to monitor right down to, if we wanted to, fuel levels in vehicles, water levels in tanks or logistic vehicles taking water forward. That system also contains within it automatic vehicle location. So we can physically track our vehicles through that VHF network.

The other key feature of the ATI system is that every vehicle fitted with an ATI FireLink box, if I may call it that, is automatically a rebroadcast station for the network. It is what is known as a mesh network. A call from a firefighting crew from a vehicle back to their incident controller, for example, will automatically be routed through other vehicles, helicopters, or whatever other activities are going on, without any human interference. It is an automatic system and thus gives us extraordinary coverage out in the remote areas without the need for infrastructure.

MR PRATT: I presume that the ESA, ComCen and the various service chiefs can communicate 100 per cent with all their agencies in the urban area and the BAS through TRN, but how far does that communication reach agencies operating in the remote areas? Is it true that we have had to maintain the old VHF system to ensure an overlap while you are still sorting out the communications difficulties with this new system?

Mr Dunn: Yes. As I said, we will have to have two systems until such time as we build UHF infrastructure to cover the southern reaches of the ACT. Even when that is in, we will retain the VHF network so that we have redundancy—that is essential. That is not a failing of the system. It is a reality of voice communications that you have to run both UHF and VHF to ensure that you get coverage.

We have chosen to upgrade parts of the existing VHF network and also to introduce a completely new system to that network called FireLink. I think this has to be seen; in fact, we are seeing it. The communications network for emergency services in the ACT is becoming very sophisticated because it includes three key elements. The first, of course, is the computer-aided dispatch system. That is in itself a communications system. If you listen on the ambulance networks you will find that there is barely a voice transmission because the nature of the business is that it is all done on mobile data terminals and the like.

Within the urban area, for commanders to talk to their personnel on the ground, to give advice or leadership and control incidents, we have the digital trunk network, and it is working exceptionally well. As people move out of that and are trying to make these changes, they will probably need to operate on the VHF system. That has to be robust. It is a perfectly normal operational procedure.

I like to think that, assuming the radio project continues over the next few years as planned—and given that they have certainly already achieved a much better coverage than anticipated—in due time we will have infrastructure, towers and the like, combined with New South Wales, giving us coverage of the entire ACT. But we will still have a VHF network there to use, and we will also use high-frequency communications when necessary. We already have agreement from the Department of Defence to use receiving stations in Darwin, which will allow us to pipe the information back to *Harman* and

thence to us for HF communications, if need be. The secretary to the Department of Defence has already agreed to our doing that.

MR PRATT: With the FireLink VHF system—that extra layer—are you satisfied that we have got broad coverage in the more remote areas of the ACT? What coverage do we currently have? Is there a problem with relay towers in relation to making sure that that reach gets out there?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, with respect, I thought Mr Dunn had answered that question pretty comprehensively.

MR PRATT: Not in terms of the coverage—

MRS DUNNE: I was going to ask the same question.

Mr Hargreaves: He has indicated to you twice that we have two systems in place.

MR PRATT: I have a point of order, chair.

THE CHAIR: He has, but I think it is a reasonable question and I will allow it. I am sure the commissioner is more than capable of answering it.

Mr Dunn: We do have good coverage but I will never claim 100 per cent coverage. Voice communications are subject to too many variations, not the least of which is the weather—and smoke and all sorts of things.

Mr Hargreaves: Laryngitis!

Mr Dunn: The old VHF system was inadequate for the modern and contemporary—we learnt those lessons during the fires—and had to be improved. I have said that we have taken a two-pronged approach to that: one is to upgrade the existing system. We can replace parts, change power supplies and things of that nature; and we can improve the towers—the infrastructure that is there. In introducing FireLink we have also introduced a system—this is one of the reasons we introduced this particular system—which is brilliant technology. We are the first jurisdiction to do so. As a result of that decision a number of overseas countries, including China and the United States, are taking a very close look at FireLink.

MR PRATT: Perhaps export dollars!

Mr Dunn: Yes, absolutely. That system does not rely on infrastructure; this is the key with FireLink. A black box, if I may use that term, goes into each vehicle. That black box is, as I said before, a rebroadcast unit in itself. It is also a transmitter and receiver. It will take a signal that is searching to get to a particular location and automatically rebroadcast it. That will be picked up by other black boxes until it is picked up by the home station.

That is absolutely state-of-the-art technology. We have done that because we can quickly introduce that system without the need to build a whole series of towers in Namadgi National Park down in the south of the ACT, which happens to be one of our most

precious areas, and therefore immediately move us into a situation where we have very serious environmental issues to contend with. We have been able to very significantly improve their communications without the need for those towers.

It is our intention to proceed, in collaboration with New South Wales, down the path of building a series of towers that go down into the south-eastern corner of the ACT and New South Wales. We don't know as yet where it will be best to site those. We have indications already that a number of those towers would be in New South Wales. This is the advantage of the collaboration, coming back to the memoranda of understanding that we have formally signed between the two governments. We can do that with confidence, but we will always have the backup of this new system called FireLink. When I say backup, it will run in parallel. I shouldn't infer that it is of lesser importance, both are important.

MRS DUNNE: You have raised a number of things that are pertinent to the questions I wanted to ask. My recollection is that during estimates last year you gave the budget estimates committee an exposition on the roll-out of towers, repeaters and things like that. How many have you rolled out?

Mr Dunn: I didn't give the numbers. I said that phases 2 and 3 of the radio project would include the infrastructure, which included towers, to give us coverage of the entire ACT.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, I understand that, but how many towers do we currently have in the new TRN system? The towers that are there service the old VHS system and some also service the new TRN system. Is that right?

Mr Dunn: Yes, that is correct.

MRS DUNNE: So how many towers do we have rolled out to service the TRN system?

Mr Dunn: We have used the existing system. We haven't built any new towers to serve the system; there hasn't been a need to. As an additional tower we have included the Jerrabomberra tower, which is a New South Wales site—again coming back to the point I made earlier about collaboration. So most of the towers we are running at the moment will have both VHF and UHF communications. We are now going through the process of proving the coverage of the digital network to then determine where best to site the towers that will allow us to extend that coverage down into the southern reaches of the ACT. We don't have a figure yet as to how many towers we will need. I would expect that we will be moving towards those sorts of decisions, in a planning sense, over the next three to six months.

MRS DUNNE: Do you have the money for those towers?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, before Commissioner Dunn answers this question—

THE CHAIR: I thought he just said yes.

Mr Hargreaves: Before he answers this question—

THE CHAIR: He has just answered it.

Mr Hargreaves: He may have, but I want clarification on this. I am addressing the chair. I maintain my prerogative to answer the questions on behalf of the government, Mr Chairman. I reiterate what I said about straying into what is going to be in the budget processes. I will just stop it dead.

THE CHAIR: I thought the commissioner said yes.

MRS DUNNE: I thought there had been money appropriated to roll out the TRN system.

THE CHAIR: That is what I thought, too.

MRS DUNNE: But what you were saying, Mr Dunn, is that there are still decisions to be made about the location of some towers. Do you have the money in the kitty, or is that going to require an appropriation?

Mr Dunn: There is an appropriation for the capital that has been made for the radio project.

MRS DUNNE: Thank you. On the question of FireLink, when did you start the implementation of FireLink?

Mr Dunn: We began looking at FireLink in the emergency services area of the bureau in January 2003. That company came to the assistance of the ACT voluntarily because it felt that it could assist with command and control during an emergency. No doubt that also gave them a commercial opportunity to demonstrate a Canberra-based system. Shortly after I took over—I commenced operation as the commissioner in the December—probably in the January we had discussions with ATI to see whether or not this should be considered to be part of the radio project and what role it could play overall.

We have been working with that company for some time. In May of last year we had funding to conduct a trial to look at that system. As it happened, there was a fire at Lone Pine in southern Namadgi and we used it operationally during that trial. So we went through an extensive process, which is outlined in the current economic white paper, of engaging the local company, looking nationally and internationally, running a trial, coincidentally seeing it used again on operations but under a different command and control concept that we have introduced to push that command and control forward and out onto the fire ground. After that, we were satisfied that we should go out to tender, and subsequently entered negotiations with them.

MRS DUNNE: So what you are saying, Mr Dunn, is that a private company came to you and said, “I have got a system that will work for you.” When that happened, did you actually look around to see whether there were other comparable systems, or have we got ourselves locked into a system because this person came to us and it looked convenient? How did the tendering go, and how did you determine that FireLink was the organisation for you?

Mr Dunn: We were looking internationally. We had lengthy discussions with

US companies, for example, about what they could and could not provide.

MRS DUNNE: So what were you looking for when you were having discussions with American companies?

Mr Dunn: We have a whole list of requirements that we were after but I can summarise them by saying we were looking for coverage, we were looking for interoperability and we were looking for the capacity for data transmission, and all the systems had to have automatic vehicle location, AVL. In essence, they were the four key elements. There were pages of other things that we were after. I do not resile from the fact that, if there is a local company that has got a world-beating product and no-one else can even compete in that field—as has been witnessed by the intense interest in this product from the Department of Defence now here in Australia and also, as I mentioned, from China and the United States—it gives the ACT a particular boost. It also is a system, therefore, that can be readily maintained by local people. However, they still have to jump the same hurdles in terms of a procurement process as anyone else does. The full procurement process was gone through with that.

The thing that I think needs to be recorded in relation to the radio project, which is of course much bigger than just a single digital network, is that this had to be done with urgency. The system that was in place was no longer supportable. Emergency services cannot operate, and the community is in grave danger, if the communication system is not robust. We were fortunate in that we had sitting right here in the ACT technology that has been able to propel us into the 21st century—22nd century perhaps. It has gone through all the hurdles. I would say that we will be discussing—I know the minister is expecting me to discuss with him in the future—all sorts of issues relating to communications and there will be myriad issues about other things that we need to do to communication systems to constantly improve our response for safety.

MRS DUNNE: A couple of questions—

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, just on that one—this will be of interest to Mrs Dunne, I am sure—the system that we have got in place, as the commissioner has indicated, is very, very extensive and it has wide applications. I have been the minister for just some months and on two occasions I have had visits from people—one national company and one international company—seeking to sell a product to us to enhance the system that we have. We have not said, “Okay, you beauty, let’s go and do it.” But it just shows that we are aware of what is out there in the market. The market in fact is coming to ESA, and to our police officers, saying, “Look, we’ve got these products which can enhance what you are doing”—not replace it but enhance it, so offering add-ons and stuff like that. What we do then is have them do demonstrations down at ESA and all of this sort of stuff. If a product is efficacious at first pass, of course we would start the contemplative part of the procurement process. If not, we say, “Thank you very much for your interest,” and we note the interest of these companies. These are significant companies, too, can I say.

MRS DUNNE: I have just a couple of quick follow-up questions on FireLink. How much has it cost and how much will it cost, and is it the case that the navy had a system like this and has decommissioned it?

Mr Hargreaves: Firstly, I am quite prepared to take on notice how much FireLink has

cost so far. I do not think it appropriate that I provide you with a guesstimation of how much it will cost. I do not propose to do that. Furthermore, I am not going to hypothesise on what the United States or the Australian or the Taiwanese navy might do with their systems.

MRS DUNNE: I did not—

Mr Hargreaves: I challenge you to look at the *Hansard*. You asked, “How much will it cost”—I am quoting you—and I am not prepared to provide that information to you.

THE CHAIR: Just ask the question again, Mrs Dunne.

MRS DUNNE: I will ask the question: how much has it cost so far, and how much do you envisage that it will cost? That is reasonable, because you surely must have some idea how much it is going to cost before you implement the program. And the other question was: has the Australian navy used a system, which has a similar name and is a similar structure, and decommissioned it because it did not work?

Mr Hargreaves: The three elements I am—

MRS DUNNE: Put my mind at rest, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: I would like to do that, believe me, Mrs Dunne. I would be delighted to put your mind at rest for a long time.

MRS DUNNE: Well, just try.

THE CHAIR: I understand you provided the cost for the first question.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, I am prepared to provide how much the system has cost so far. I am not prepared to put on the record what we estimate something to cost. That is a sort of issue that invites commercial competitors to have a judge on how much we are prepared to spend on things. I am not prepared to do that, Mr Chairman. I am sure you appreciate that. Furthermore, Mr Chairman, it is not my responsibility, nor the responsibility of the government, nor indeed the Assembly, to tell members what the Australian navy does or does not or has or has not done. If Mrs Dunne wants to find out whether the navy had a similar system, I invite her to write to the Department of Defence. I do not propose to answer the question.

THE CHAIR: I am not going to worry too much about your second answer, Mr Hargreaves, but with respect to the third question, however, I think it was quite clear she was talking about effectively the same system or a similar system that the navy had actually got rid of or did no longer operate. I would have thought that was a reasonable question to ask and for you to be able to answer. I do not make any point in relation to your second question. I note Mrs Dunne does not like the answer there and she has made a comment which may well be reasonable, but the third question I thought you could answer at least.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, I repeat the point: what the Australian navy has, is currently using or was previously using by way of its material is something that I invite

members to talk to the navy about. I am not going to go down that track.

THE CHAIR: We will go back to the other two members of the committee and then I will come back to Mr Pratt, who, I think, was about to ask further questions as the relevant shadow—10 minutes each. I understand you have got some more questions, Karin?

MS MacDONALD: Yes. So you do not have any more questions at the moment, chair?

THE CHAIR: I will give the relevant shadow the chance to ask where I would have a chance to ask. I think that is only reasonable. But you have some more; go for it.

MS MacDONALD: Minister, on page 76 of volume 1, there is discussion about the bushfire wise public education program. Can you or the commissioner elaborate on the success or otherwise of that program?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. We, as members who were around at the fires, talk about media. It is two things; it is whether or not people are fire aware in their homes. A lot of people were and a lot of people were not. One of the big lessons that came out of that was that, like people in the Blue Mountains of New South Wales, people in the ACT ought to be automatic in their preparations and in their understanding of what may or may not occur, what they can do to protect their own homes, what they can do to be involved in such things as community fire units, how they can protect their own home, gutters and all—those sorts of things that we all know now.

What we have to make sure is that the information is not delivered in one intense hit for a couple of years after a major disaster like this. It has to be ongoing, it has to be cultural, it has to get into the kids' heads and so it needs to be a sustained program of media information, with education programs for the kids. We need to be looking at how older people can or cannot prepare themselves for a disaster, and its effect on their homes, on themselves and on their families.

We need to pick things right out of the blue, like: are people aware of what massive smoke through a place like this will do to pets? The short answer is that nobody was prepared for that. We are now, and we have to have a structured and ongoing education program out there in the community to make sure that when something like this happens—and it will happen—our response is automatic and covers everything. At the moment I would say we are a decent way down the track, because a lot of the horror has not dissipated yet. The challenge for us will be to put through education programs, media programs, liaison between the community and the ESA, to make sure that our preparedness is a cultural preparedness, not a knee-jerk one which we did before.

There are certain elements to this particular media program and the education program that will have a greater or lesser effect and of course we need to then do evaluations on it. I will ask Commissioner Dunn if he would be good enough to pick out two or three of those educational/media type activities and expound on just how we propose to pull it off.

MS MacDONALD: That would be good, because I was going to ask about other community education programs.

Mr Dunn: Bushfire wise, just to finish that off, has now also moved into the schools, with programs for over 300 students now, which is a new dimension, emphasising the minister's point that this is a cultural change and it is going to be long lasting. In terms of community education in other areas, we are currently running—and I would hope members of the committee have seen—a series of community service announcements that are being run by all of the media stations here in the ACT. We are particularly proud of those because when we moved down this path we were aware that other jurisdictions were having great difficulty in even approaching how they would, for example, broadcast in an educative way the standard emergency warning signal, SEWS, and had felt that it was too difficult.

We engaged with the executives of the media outlets here in the ACT, gave them the basic product and then they modified that product to suit their particular target audiences. Also, before they did that, they gave us extensive feedback as to how best we could ensure that people would not be alarmed but rather would be educated by these community service announcements, which are running at the moment. That is a product that is unique to the ACT and has been raised as such in the Australian Emergency Management Committee, the body that is chaired by the federal government and that we attend.

Further to that, we have produced a number of publications, the most obvious of which is the magazine *Bushfires and the bush capital*. That is continuing to be distributed. A very large quantity of these will be distributed at the show today and over the next three days. We also have included information in the Yellow Pages in particular. We are now actively promoting what we call a handy map and we are educating the community, and you will see this over a period of time, to refer to that map. A copy of that is also in *Bushfires and the bush capital*, the magazine I referred to, and that gives a simple grid index as to where an event might be occurring.

Of course, we will use this also if, for example, Environment ACT or Forests ACT are conducting a hazard reduction burn. We will use that ready reference map to indicate to the community where it is occurring and where smoke may be experienced. That is not just a piece of information that a hazard reduction burn is occurring; it is designed as part of an education strategy to get people used to using the ready reference map so that, in the event of a large emergency, we can be reasonably assured that the majority of the community in the ACT will have access to that sort of map. Therefore, through the media outlets, through the memoranda of understanding that we now have not only with the ABC but with all our commercial outlets, we can broadcast that sort of information. So that is a deliberate education-of-the-community step.

The other area of community education that must be mentioned is the work that is going on by the ACT Fire Brigade with community fire units. That in itself is providing an enormous amount of community education and awareness. We of course need to broaden our focus past fires. We obviously addressed fires as the first issue and we are now moving to build the community awareness of other hazards such as flash flooding and storms.

Mr Hargreaves: Ms MacDonald, can I just underscore, for members' benefit, something that has been a significant change, a really significant change. I was involved in the

development of evacuation recovery components of the disaster plan known as displan. I am sure Mr Pratt and the chairman would be aware of that particular activity. What happened in the past was that we actually concentrated very heavily on the response recovery—how to fight things and how to recover from them. What we did never do particularly well was put a communication strategy in, a displan. There were one or two paragraphs saying that you should tell people or words to that effect. What we have done now is include the community education, the community notification, and the community involvement as an integral part of our thinking when we developed the plans and the subplans that make up displan.

The big issue that also needs to be mentioned is the involvement of the media as a stakeholder. In the past when you were talking about displans you talked about the sort of attack arms of the stuff—as you would know, the firefighters, the ambos, the police and those sorts of people. You concentrated on recovery and you talked about the St Johns Ambulance, the Red Cross and all of those sorts of people going to evacuation centres. We have never engaged the media as a stakeholder, and the media after all, when you get to it, are the people that tell us just how we can communicate with people. Now their involvement is an integral part of it.

I think it needs to go on the record that the media have come on board. As well as us recognising the fact that they are needed, they have actually come on board and are now offering us communication solutions to get over that thing that we did not do so well before.

Mr Dunn: I would like to add one further point. We now also have a community member on the Emergency Management Committee, and we will see other community members on other committees in the not too distant future, to ensure that community awareness of the items under discussion is maintained.

MS MacDONALD: Just quickly, on evaluation of the programs: how do you evaluate how successful it is? I know it is a hard thing to do but, obviously, we want to educate the community about potential emergencies that could ruin their properties, kill them—all these sorts of things. How do we evaluate how successful the community education programs are?

Mr Dunn: We will evaluate. We are planning to evaluate. We have not yet done so in the sense that, whilst we have been looking at retention rates in community fire units, whilst we have been looking at penetration and methodologies for getting messages out, we are just approaching the point where next year I would expect to be actually evaluating all of those programs as part of our strategy. So it is on the agenda. We are testing the penetration by physically asking community groups and the like and watching that retention.

Mr Hargreaves: One of the things that—

THE CHAIR: Dr Foskey—

Mr Hargreaves: I have to answer this question for Ms MacDonald.

THE CHAIR: We have a limited amount of time—

MR PRATT: On a point of order, chair—

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, I have been asked a question by a member of the committee. Are you saying that you are going to cut that member off?

MR PRATT: On a point of order, chair.

THE CHAIR: Look, we have a limited amount of time. I am trying to be fair to all members and—

Mr Hargreaves: Maybe you do, but are you cutting the answer to this question off?

MR PRATT: Chair, on a point of order: we have had four or five responses to this one question. It is filibustering and there are many very important questions waiting to be asked—

THE CHAIR: No. I take the point of order about the limited amount of time.

Mr Hargreaves: Let the record show, Mr Chairman, that you have refused to let a question be answered.

THE CHAIR: I think I have been pretty fair, Mr Hargreaves. Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: In the circumstances, and as a member of the committee, I am actually asking to have priority over Mr Pratt, because I believe—

THE CHAIR: That is why you are asking the questions now, Dr Foskey.

DR FOSKEY: And I believe that is why I am on the committee. I have three questions, with two parts to some of them. I just want to get it clear so that I do not get cut off. First of all, I am referring to pages 67 and 71, community involvement and bushfire abatement zones. Some of the bushfire abatement zones on the spatial plan are in areas that form parts of our ecological and wildlife corridors. I just want to make a note here that conservationists and greens—and they are not always the same people—are often unfairly presumed to be against hazard reduction and bushfire management. Work of the ACT Bushfire Council and various inquiries in the 1990s demonstrate that they can and do work together and it is not helpful to set them up against each other. What I want to know is: can you explain if and how you work with conservationists and ecologists in negotiating the dual use and management of these spaces?

Mr Hargreaves: Dr Foskey, thanks for that. When we talk about bushfire operational plans, that is around our preparedness both in the urban area and outside but particularly in the bushfire abatement zone. I am aware that some people are a bit afraid that, where the nature reserve will abut an urban area, the way in which we might attack bushfire prevention is to get a grader and do a 50-metre strip right up to the back fence, and that is not necessarily the go.

DR FOSKEY: But it has happened—

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, indeed, and we accept that we need to be conscious that this sort of thing does not occur. We have the involvement of Environment ACT, who have responsibilities to say yes or no to those sorts of things. The bushfire operational plans are now going to be coordinated by ESA, so it is such that all of the areas within the ACT that are required by law to provide a bushfire operational plan must do that through the commissioner's office. He will give the approval or not for that, and I can assure you that, before those approvals are given, the advice from Environment ACT is included.

I also have to tell you that we try our best to make sure that people on the bushfire council represent sectors; it is not a government agency. It is not just a bunch of do-gooders either. It is people who have expertise and represent sectors. It is vital, as far as we are concerned, to protect the environment. It is not a choice normally between a house and a nature park. We have to do our best to protect them both and that is what we use.

DR FOSKEY: In the case of fire abatement zones that are right up against people's back fences, a lot of people who choose to live, for instance, against the bottom of mountains—Mount Majura, et cetera, et cetera—are actually quite conscious of and quite prepared to manage those areas adjacent to their back fences. I was just wondering if there was any way that the bureau and other land managers can involve those owners in active management, which is both good for the environment and useful in keeping fires at bay?

Mr Hargreaves: The short answer is yes. The longer answer is that the fire services—

MRS DUNNE: And we'll get it.

Mr Hargreaves: You sure as hell will, Mrs Dunne, so get used to it.

THE CHAIR: Would you just stop having a go at each other.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, if someone is going to bait me and go fishing, it is going to happen.

THE CHAIR: Just answer the question, Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Hargreaves: Be it on your own head. Dr Foskey has asked me a question and I will respond to it. The fire fighting services who go around the edges of the urban part of town and say, "Okay, then we need to do X, Y and Z, to protect these homes from fire" do so in consultation with the people who live there. They do not just come and stick a notice in their letterbox saying, "Clean up your back fence." It is the change in the process that there will be community discussion. That is why the CFUs are placed where they are. But also you need to ask that question in terms of some of the nature park area of the Minister for Environment, because I do not have responsibility for them and cannot therefore instruct them to do anything. But I can, in fact, take your point on board with respect to those land managers that do have responsibility to me. That is the ones within DUS and Forests, and I am happy to take it up with those people and make sure that we chat with people and do it in concert.

DR FOSKEY: I really appreciate that. My next two questions are related and there

should be fairly short answers, I believe. They are related to page 65 and the Subaru rally of Canberra. Do the figures—this might not be of concern to you, Mr Dunn; we will not hold you responsible for these—show a cost of ambulance support for the Subaru rally, and was that cost recovered by the ambulance service or just seen as part of its duty?

Mr Hargreaves: The ambulance service is provided to commercial operations like that on a cost-recovery basis.

DR FOSKEY: Good. Secondly, Emergency Services employees assisted the AFP with traffic marshalling. There is a tiny little note, just down the bottom, right-hand column on page 65. Just for interest, did you provide this assistance before or after the uniform code came in? Were the workers wearing police uniforms?

Mr Hargreaves: This is a question regarding ACT policing activity, Mr Chairman. I invite Dr Foskey to repeat it when the police are at the table.

THE CHAIR: I think that is reasonable, minister.

DR FOSKEY: My final question is related to page 77. By the way, I have got many questions for the police, so I may not be able to fit that one in. Was there no strategy for informing the public prior to the McLeod report? I am referring there to the third paragraph in the left-hand column, the strategy in the public education section. The implication is that, prior to the McLeod report, there actually was not a strategy for informing the public. Is that a fair enough thing to say?

Mr Hargreaves: There was a strategy to do communication through the disaster plan, known as displan. As I indicated to you earlier, it was not a particularly well thought-out strategy. The concentration on displan activities from all of our responses has been on the fighting of the incident and the recovery. One of the really big lessons that came out of the fire disaster, and through McLeod, was that we had to have a properly integrated communication strategy with the community. And it has happened. I have to say that it is an evolving thing, but it has happened. We have already described it to you this morning.

DR FOSKEY: I do not think you need to give me any more detail—

Mr Hargreaves: I am not going to give you any more detail.

DR FOSKEY: I really appreciate what I have learned this morning. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Foskey. Mr Pratt, you can use my additional 10 minutes.

MR PRATT: Thank you, chair. Minister, I refer to page 98 of volume 1 of the report, external scrutiny, which lists all those inquiries. I notice that the Auditor-General's report No 3 into the emergency services is not listed there. I know that the Auditor-General's report into the emergency services was published in May 2003 and, I think, tabled in 2003-04. This report does not mention the Auditor-General's report either. But it does say that in 2003-04 there would be a ministerial response to that. Why does this report not detail the Auditor-General's report into the emergency services and the government's response to it, given, too, that this was a performance audit? This annual report is a performance report, so why do not we have those details here in the

2003-04 annual report?

Mr Hargreaves: Correct me if I am wrong: why have we not got information on our performance in 2003-04 in the 2003-04 annual report?

MRS DUNNE: Why have you not got the response to the performance audit for that period?

MR PRATT: Correct.

Mr Hargreaves: That is a very good question, Mr Pratt, deserving of a very good answer, and I do not have one for you.

MR PRATT: Okay. If I can follow that up: given that the Auditor-General's report was a quite critical performance audit of the Emergency Services Bureau—and I do take the point that McLeod did follow up and then, of course, make recommendations—why are we not reporting that? If these reports are more than simply just a glossy report, why are we avoiding the sorts of issues that are in fact quite critical, and where we need to see government action follow-up being also reported? We need to see your reports indicate the action that you are taking to follow up those sorts of inquiries. Fair comment, or would you disagree, minister?

Mr Hargreaves: I refer you to page 283 of this same document. The Auditor-General reported into the activities of the ESB, as it then was. You are saying, as I understand it: why do we not say something more about it in the context of the annual report? I will say two things to you. I think we have had a lot of comment made in the chamber and on the public record about how we picked up the McLeod inquiry report, as you quite rightly point out. We have created an ESA. There is no ESB to report on. To talk about whether or not the Auditor-General said X, Y and Z in the context of the Department of Justice and Community Safety's annual report, I have to say to you, I do not think is necessary. For the record, a government submission was provided to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts on 20 May 2004, and my answer to you, Mr Pratt, is: I refer you to the minutes and/or submission.

MRS DUNNE: Sorry, Mr Chairman, this report is a report on the Emergency Services Bureau. The Emergency Services Authority did not commence until 1 July, so the reporting in this period is for the Emergency Services Bureau, and it says so on page 62. There was a performance audit by the Auditor-General and there does not seem to be—correct me if I am wrong—anything in here that addresses the Auditor-General's report, apart from this paragraph on page 283. Is there anything here that says, "The Auditor-General made these recommendations and we are doing X, Y and Z in response to that"?

Mr Hargreaves: Mrs Dunne, I have to refer you to the submission to the Public Accounts Committee. The government has answered those questions in its submission to the PAC.

MRS DUNNE: But isn't it normal practice that those things are also reported on in the annual reports, in the same way as recommendations of standing committees are reported on in annual reports?

Mr Hargreaves: Mrs Dunne, the government has made its response to the Auditor-General's report to the Assembly. Annual reports are reports to the Assembly. We have made a response to that Auditor-General's report. The committee has considered it and has put its report on that government submission to the Assembly. You can go back and have a look at it, but there is one bottom line here: we don't have an ESB anymore—hello!—we have got an ESA now, and this is history. History has been dealt with through the submission to the PAC. Have a look at those things. Let's get the whole PAC back here and ask them about it. No, Mrs Dunne, we are not going to do it. This is just silly.

MR PRATT: Minister, surely the 2003-04 annual report is a statement of performances and outcomes and therefore an important A-G's report into the performance of our major agencies and should be mentioned there. What happens if the A-G's report recommends something fairly important that perhaps hasn't been followed up? Surely the annual report is a document which records, firstly, the report that comes to you and, secondly, the government's response to that. If you have followed up all of those recommendations and they have been absorbed into the McLeod inquiry recommendations, then say it in this report. Isn't that the purpose of this report?

MS MacDONALD: What is the question?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, we have an annual report here and it says, according to my way of thinking, "The ACT Department of Justice and Community Safety annual report 2003-2004". The ESB was a subset of that department. In there are their activity reports that you have examined in some fine detail. On page 283, it highlights to the public, to the Legislative Assembly—but not clearly enough for Mr Pratt and Mrs Dunne—that the Auditor-General's report was delivered on 20 May 2004; the government submission was considered by the PAC; so any person with any sort of access to the Assembly's proceedings can track that down. I don't think we can do any more than that. Mr Pratt says, "Why don't you put it in the annual report?" Hello, Mr Pratt, at page 283, it says that it is in here. What do you want me to do? Reprint it?

MR PRATT: Thank you for your reaction, minister.

THE CHAIR: Do you have another question, Mr Pratt, on something else?

MS MacDONALD: Mr Chair, I have another question and I am a member of the committee.

MRS DUNNE: Perhaps the Emergency Services Authority can come back, because I think—

Mr Hargreaves: I don't think so.

THE CHAIR: We have got about two minutes. How many more questions have you got, Mr Pratt? You have had about seven minutes.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Pratt is actually not a member of the committee.

THE CHAIR: No, he isn't.

MR PRATT: On a point of order, Mr Chair: didn't you actually give me 10 minutes?

THE CHAIR: I have given you 10 minutes.

MS MacDONALD: Mr Pratt is not a member of the committee. Mrs Dunne did actually take up a few of my minutes before, so I am actually owed.

THE CHAIR: I have actually kept a careful note there.

MS MacDONALD: Yes, and I am asking that I be able to ask other questions, if I may.

THE CHAIR: I think there are probably a lot of people that want to ask other questions. I will allow Mr Pratt one more question, not on that point which the minister has answered. Then I think we are at the stage now where—I know you are probably busy after this—we might need to consider recalling you. Certainly I would want whatever questions we could to be put on notice.

Mr Pratt, you have got one more question and then, Ms MacDonald, if you have got some pressing question, I would be happy for you to ask it after that.

MR PRATT: Thanks, chair; and thanks, members. I refer to page 98 again—

MS MacDONALD: Don't thank me, Mr Pratt, because you are not doing this—

MRS DUNNE: On a point of order, Mr Chair: Ms MacDonald is being disruptive.

THE CHAIR: Just ask the question. Come on.

MS MacDONALD: As have you been, Mrs Dunne and Mr Pratt, and you are not members of this committee, I might actually point out to you.

THE CHAIR: Would everyone settle down. Mr Pratt, ask your one question and, Ms MacDonald, you seem to have a pressing question; you can ask yours after that; and then that will do us. Carry on, Mr Pratt.

MR PRATT: Thank you, chair; thank you, Ms MacDonald. Minister, page 98 again, of course, refers to the McLeod inquiry. Is the government satisfied that the McLeod inquiry in fact, as it states there addressed these suggested systemic weaknesses—and I am quoting here—“in the emergency management arrangements in place in the ACT”? Is the government satisfied that the McLeod inquiry was searching and broad enough, covering all of the circumstances surrounding the approach to that disaster?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

MR PRATT: Minister, in light of the evidence—

MS MacDONALD: That is his question; that is his one question, Mr Chair.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I will hear him on the evidence.

MS MacDONALD: No, chair.

MR PRATT: Minister, in light of the—

MS MacDONALD: On a point of order—

THE CHAIR: Let us hear the question first.

Mr Hargreaves: Could you repeat the question, please, Mr Pratt?

MR PRATT: Thank you, minister.

DR FOSKEY: Are you chair of the committee or a member of the Liberal Party, Mr Stefaniak?

THE CHAIR: I am trying to be fair to everyone, Dr Foskey. This isn't the Soviet Union. Mr Pratt, ask your supplementary. I might rule it out of order if it is not obviously relating—

Mr Hargreaves: No. It is certainly not the United States of America either, good fortune.

MR PRATT: Thank you, chair. Minister, in light of the truckloads of evidence we saw being tabled in late 2004 at the coronial inquest, which is pointing to issues not covered in the McLeod inquiry but which is going to the heart of failures in the system leading up to January 2003, how can you say you are satisfied that the McLeod inquiry covered all of the ACT's inquiry requirements?

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, if Mr Pratt thinks that I am going to address one question with the words "coronial inquest" in it, he is very sadly mistaken. I am not doing it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. That can probably be asked elsewhere, Mr Hargreaves. So we can take that up elsewhere. Ms MacDonald, you have one question; then we will adjourn.

MS MacDONALD: Thank you, chair. Minister, on page 62, listed in the key achievements, there is the issue of mapping capability. Can you outline how the improvement of the bureau's mapping capability has assisted operations?

Mr Hargreaves: Thanks very much, Ms MacDonald. The mapping capability was something which was done particularly well prior to the bushfires. However, it could be done a heck of a lot better than it was. We have produced a whole stack of new technology.

I have to, at this point, say that Rick McRae, who does risk management down at ESA, is a world leader in this sort of thing and I would like to acknowledge Mr McRae's work. But I will ask the commissioner to give you some specific detail on that.

Mr Dunn: Thank you, minister. Last year we issued the first volume of the map atlas,

which is a single set of maps at 1:100,000 scale, for first response, and issued that to the response agencies with a view to having that, what we call, ground truth to make sure that that mapping did include things like fences, gates, fire trails, et cetera, particularly those tracks and trails that change either in our national parks or in rural lessees' areas. We collated a huge amount of data in from that exercise.

We have now issued volume 2 of that map atlas. We have further issued that map atlas now to not only the emergency services response elements but also to rural lessees and, indeed, other members of the community that have an interest in that type of cartographic information.

This now means that we have a consistent set of maps throughout the entire ACT and the region, because we provide them also to our neighbouring fire districts of New South Wales, and we are able to coordinate response on a single set of maps. This is a fundamental for successful response. We have also worked—and you may have seen some announcements on this fact in the press—with Geoscience Australia to provide information from the ESA to Geoscience Australia to allow new topographic maps to be produced of this region.

I am pleased to say that we have some of the best mapping coverage that we could hope to have for emergency response in and around the ACT—or, shall I say, the Canberra region.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, Ms MacDonald; thank you very much, commissioner, for attending. If people do have questions on notice, could we have them? If there are a series of additional people that we haven't finished with, then the committee can entertain that at a later stage. I think a number of people had some more questions.

Just one question you can take on notice, commissioner, from me. You did mention some minor black holes. You may have possibly answered this in some of your responses to Mr Pratt, but if there are very minor black holes in the ACT could you indicate, firstly, where they are and, secondly, just what steps are being taken to close off those black holes? You can take it on notice.

Mr Hargreaves: We will take it on notice, Mr Chair. The commissioner has just—this may be even better information for you—offered to provide a coverage map, which will actually indicate on there where those issues are.

THE CHAIR: That would be good, yes.

Mr Hargreaves: That might be more helpful.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that would be great.

Mr Hargreaves: Also can I advise the committee that I have asked the departments responsible to me to be aware that I require that the answers to questions on notice from the committees be submitted to you in three days.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: And I would just ask that members consider the construct of those questions to enable the work to occur to enable us to satisfy that. We are happy to do it but, if it is not very clear, then it is sometimes more difficult. I would just like to put that on the record.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We will adjourn for 10 minutes. Thank you, commissioner. You and your officials are excused.

Meeting adjourned from 10.40 to 10.50 am.

Appearances:

Mr John Hargreaves, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Urban Services and Minister for Police and Emergency Services

Australian Capital Territory Policing

Mr John Davies, Chief Police Officer

THE CHAIR: Before you do your statement, minister—and thanks for saying you want to do a statement—just for those new people who weren't here before to give evidence: these are legal proceedings of the Assembly, protected by parliamentary privilege. You have got certain protections but also certain responsibilities. It means you are protected from certain legal action such as being sued for defamation for what you say. But you have got a responsibility, too, to tell the committee the truth because giving false or misleading evidence will be treated by the Assembly as a serious matter. Do you all understand that? Thank you. Witnesses nod.

Minister, thank you for attending. You want to give a short statement. Carry on.

Mr Hargreaves: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. I won't take up too much of the committee's time. As you'll be aware, following the October 2004 election, I became Minister for Police and Emergency Services, among other portfolios. I was pleased to be handed the mantle from my predecessor, Bill Wood, as I have always had a keen interest in policing in the ACT, stemming from my time as opposition police spokesperson but also from the fact that policing is an arm of governments that affects all Canberrans.

As in my other portfolios, such as Urban Services, Disability, Housing and Community Services, the police portfolio is at the front line of service provision for the people of Canberra. The ACT is the smallest police jurisdiction in Australia and, as you will be aware, particularly from your own very extensive connection with the police, we have a unique policing system where we contract our police service from the ranks of the highly professional and well-respected AFP.

Although we are a small jurisdiction, we have the added responsibility of being the seat of the federal government, with the national icons and embassies that go with it; so in fact the ACT has got two police forces within one jurisdiction being provided by the one police force. It is also often difficult for the community to split the difference about whether or not this is a federal issue or a community issue. Presidential visits are a very good example where people don't necessarily appreciate whether or not we are talking about a federal thing, where we have the resources to provide to them, et cetera. It is very complicated.

Can I just say, Mr Chairman, some new members may not be aware of that relationship and if some new members would like to be apprised of that relationship I am happy to arrange a briefing for them in my office.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: We are very fortunate that ACT Policing can benefit from the excellent training and professionalism of the AFP and that our police officers are given the

opportunity that other police from small jurisdictions may not have: the added advantage of securing, for the ACT community, police with vast experience in community policing all over the world—the experience that they use to deliver an excellent service to the people of Canberra.

ACT police are community police; they work to create a safer and more secure ACT through partnerships with the community. That partnership system will find its thread all the way through our discussions today. It is a collaborative effort between the police and the community that identifies problems of crime and disorder; it involves all elements of the community in the searches for the solutions of these problems; it is founded on close, mutually beneficial ties between police and community members. Mr Chairman, you have seen reports in the media recently of how that community collaboration engaged with the police, with public service departments and with the community, with particular application to some flats in Northbourne Avenue and in Griffith.

Can I just put on the record my appreciation of the police for the recent attack on people doing burnouts. I know that is a concern for members and has been a concern for some time. Because the ACT police use a system unique to the ACT, that is, intelligence-driven policing, we tend to attack crime by operations, if you like. You will understand this but other members may not, Mr Chairman, because we will actually attack something in a hit.

We have been concerned about road safety issues for some time. Burnouts are a real pain in the suburbs and they are dangerous. We have had this blitz on them recently and you will see in the *Canberra Times* the result. We have actually got vehicles.

There is one case before the courts at the moment where we are hoping the courts will deal severely with this individual. Whether or not the car is retained by the individual or retained by the territory is in the lap of the judiciary but we can but pray, because it is important that we show the community that we mean business on this sort of stuff and that, with their help, this Crimestoppers stuff—and I don't know who actually started it off years ago—is the way to go.

You can see the results by the number of arrests that we have had in those anti-social spots in town—some of the flats are pretty ordinary; the cars that have been impounded; all those sorts of things, Mr Chairman; and of course drag racing and all that, as you know only too well.

So I think we have not only the most dedicated police force, the most integrated police force in our community—they are part of our community—but also the bloody best police force in the country.

THE CHAIR: Thanks, minister. Going to the annual report, especially the executives review—and I refer to page 6: you have got a graph there that indicates that, since the graph started, in the 1989-90 financial year when the figures for offences were somewhat under 20,000, it has grown now to actually over 40,000, in about a 15-year period. It has been fairly static for about the last four years, but still that is more than double over that period. I would image the population—correct me if I am wrong—hasn't actually doubled over that period. Is there any main reason why we have seen that significant increase over that period of time, given that we haven't moved to the same extent?

Mr Hargreaves: Are you talking about 1989-90 to 2003-04?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Hargreaves: I have to confess to you, Mr Chairman, that I believe that what we are seeing in fact is the unfortunate consequence of the maturing of the city, and the amount of crime in a given community is not related to the actual number of people who live in it. There are a whole stack of other variables and vagaries that go with it. So I don't think I can answer your question. I don't think anybody can do anything but speculate on an answer to that question. I don't think it would be particularly fruitful.

What is important is that 2002-03 was a spike, as you can see by that, but in fact we have got a downward trend again. In fact, I can tell you that the latest crime trends for the corresponding period of last year show that motor vehicles thefts are down by 41.3 per cent. Burglary offences compared to the corresponding period last year—and this is the time of year when these things happen—are 13.1 per cent down. The total number of assaults, not including sexual assaults because that is a different category, for the same period last year are down by 18.8 per cent.

So there are two things that we need to actually pick up from that. One is that these are significant double-digit reductions but, secondly, you can see a downward trend. The downward trend from 1999-2000, which, I acknowledge, was when you were Attorney-General, is a change in the way in which we are talking about how we do policing in this town. We have gone from the old style of pure prosecution into prevention and community involvement, intelligence, street policing, and you are seeing the product of that now by the way in which the crime trends are trending downwards even though our population is going up. That is because of the concentration of effort.

THE CHAIR: Thanks for that, minister. Yes, I certainly note the figures over the last four years. Just in terms of my question: I don't know whether Mr Davies, being a very experienced police officer, would be able to add anything to what the minister said in relation to that. Is it because we are a larger city or is there some other factor which is relevant to that significant increase over the 15-year period, noting of course what the minister said about the last four years?

Mr Davies: Obviously, some of those issues are subject to debate but some things I think we can point to. As the minister indicated, an increase in population doesn't necessarily guarantee us an increase or decrease in crime. I think, in part, there is no doubt that there has been an increasing diversity in the population of Canberra. We have moved from being a largely public service town, where many members in this city would have had security clearances, et cetera, to a more diverse and, I guess, more representative city of other locations in Australia. With that diversity, there will be other issues that come into play.

From a policing viewpoint, the factor is very much, as the minister indicated, that there has been a strong change in direction. Volume-crime targeting has become a focus, and continues to be a focus, for ACT Policing. To ensure that we are in many ways looking at the trends, we don't have set strategies, we target the strategies to what the emerging problems are at the time, or what seem to be the issues of most concern to the

government and the community. Operation Halite, which of course is ongoing and is in its third iteration, is a key example of that sort of work—plus we have run a range of other programs in recent times.

THE CHAIR: I note that in the JACS report, volume 2 at page 98, it states that total payment to the AFP for this financial year for provision of police services to Canberra was \$87.8 million. That is up from the original target of \$81.7 million, so there is an extra \$6.1 million there. How many extra police were supplied to the ACT from this additional \$6.1 million expenditure during the financial year we are reporting on?

Mr Hargreaves: That was as a result of increases negotiated under the certified agreement.

THE CHAIR: There were no additional police, but it was a flow-on from the certified agreement?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I take it we didn't lose any police; the figure stayed static, did it?

Mr Hargreaves: The certified agreement just talked about conditions of pay and service for existing members.

THE CHAIR: Congratulations are due where there are decreases, particularly in the car thefts. I think that is an excellent result. However, I note from page 6 of the police report that in some categories rates of household burglary and sexual assault increased by six and seven per cent. In the second column it says:

...the most notable increases occurring in rates of armed and unarmed robbery which both increased by in excess of 20 per cent on the previous reporting period.

Perhaps I should read on, so I can give you my last two questions in relation to that. It continues:

While these results are mixed, I can report that performance in the second half of the financial year considerably improved on early results due in part to an increase in the number of staff available to perform community policing duties and the impact of associated operations referred to above.

Can you offer any explanation as to why we had that increase in armed and unarmed robberies in excess of 20 per cent, which does seem a worrying figure? That is question one. Perhaps I will ask you the second question after that.

Mr Hargreaves: With respect, on this one, we are trying to work out why something happened before. We have addressed the fact that it did spike in that area. There has been a change in approach and into intelligence-driven policing, with the ability to switch attention—for example, between RBTs and assaults against a person—and identify that something is starting to be on the rise, switch the resources, do an operation and kill that off. That sort of thing is reflected in the stats I gave you just a moment ago.

You mentioned assaults, which are down 18.8 per cent from this period last year, and

burglary offences are down 13 per cent. So you are seeing, in the ones you mentioned, firstly, a recognition that those are particularly important things; and when you see a spike like 20 per cent popping up there you ask, “Okay then; what are we going to do about that?”—instead of doing more of the same, which was our approach in the period 1989-90 through to about 1996-97. That is where it starts to taper off.

The particular ones you have mentioned have dropped because of the change in approach and the direction of resources like operation Halite, but you are asking us, “Why is it so? Were there more people coming in from Sydney and knocking over houses?” The point that I think we ought to be discussing with respect to these figures is what we have done about them between now and then; not what started it, because we have fixed it.

THE CHAIR: I will go onto that in my second question. That will probably be raised by someone else.

DR FOSKEY: I hope I am allowed to refer to the Auditor-General’s report 1 of 2004—the administration of policing services—in that it does raise some issues.

Mr Hargreaves: I don’t have a problem; it is at your discretion, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: Are the recommendations of this report that were agreed to by Justice and Community Safety being implemented? How is progress being monitored? For instance, will progress, or the implementation, be reported in this year’s annual report?

Mr Hargreaves: The policing arrangement—the relationship between the ACT and the commonwealth government with respect to AFP services—is currently being negotiated. It is usually a five-year agreement. We are at the point now where we are talking to the AFP about agreed positions. This is the opportunity for us to say to the AFP, “We’d like to see you have these approaches and look at these particular issues from community perspectives” and all that sort of thing, and for the AFP to say to us, “This is what we think we can deliver for you.” We then agree in the middle. I can’t go into too much detail about that because it is currently under negotiation. If you could give us a specific instance out of the report, I think we could use that as an example. I am happy to try, if we can without jeopardising the other stuff, to address it for you specifically.

DR FOSKEY: What are the arrangements by which JACS manages the work of the police? There is something raised in the report but it is also something I would like to know.

Mr Hargreaves: Okay, I can address that.

DR FOSKEY: I would like to know how many staff, and at what level, are allocated to the function.

Mr Hargreaves: I can answer that very quickly. The deputy chief police officer reports directly to me, as minister. I rely on a significant amount of advice from the Department of Justice and Community Safety. However, there is no supervisory role by JACS over the AFP’s operations or policy.

DR FOSKEY: That is one of the recommendations of the Auditor-General—given that the agreements are negotiated between the department and the AFP.

Mr Hargreaves: That relationship is discussed between the AFP, JACS and me on a reasonably regular basis. Whether or not it needs to be picked up as the Auditor-General wanted it, as to whether we are happy with the arrangements the way they are or anything in the middle, can I say to you, at the end of 2003-04, there was no supervisory role, and today the same exists.

DR FOSKEY: How is poor performance—“poor performance” being defined, I guess, by whether it meets the agreement between the two parties—identified? Is it followed by corrective action? Again, I could refer to the report and give you more detail but, as long as you understand my question, I won’t do that.

Mr Hargreaves: I understand that, in respect of poor performance, we set agreed targets and the annual report will report on whether or not those targets have been achieved. I receive regular reports from the AFP on the agreed targets. When we talk about specific incidences—for example, we might talk about the satisfaction level by the community and the AFP—there are mechanisms by which the community can have their issues addressed. The frequency on which they appear can be regarded as an indicator.

I said that motor vehicle thefts have gone down by 40 per cent; burglaries have gone down by 13 per cent; assaults are down 19 per cent—nearly 20 per cent. I have searched long and hard to find something that hasn’t been achieved in terms of effectiveness in the community and, so far, I haven’t found one. I know that there are negotiations between the two of us. I have to say, too, that I meet fairly regularly with the commissioner of the AFP, when there are opportunities for us to talk informally to each other about those sorts of issues. Can I also clarify for you that the chief police officer of the ACT is the officer who reports directly to me—that is, Mr Davies.

DR FOSKEY: Yes, I am aware of that.

Mr Hargreaves: Not the deputy chief police officer.

DR FOSKEY: One of the things the Auditor-General’s report notes is that quarterly reports, for instance on progress of the agreement, were not being delivered in a timely fashion—there are a number of instances here. It is quite glaring; it would be a concern, I would think. I would like to know if that situation has improved since the report was tabled.

Mr Hargreaves: I take the Auditor-General’s point about the quarterly reports. There have been and continue to be times. You have got to remember that the AFP is an incredibly large organisation and has systems designed to provide services to it. The ACT community policing part is a subset of that. There are systemic difficulties in providing us with some day-to-day machinery information.

I don’t look at it and say, “Your quarterly report is late, that’s a bit of a ratbag.” I am not terribly bothered about receiving reports on past actions which only really have machinery information that I get anyway. It is something we work on; we try to get those

things produced in a more timely fashion. I get regular reports on the way in which crimes are trending in this town and on the change of activities of the AFP in approaching a certain type of crime, so I have a reasonable amount of information available to me to test the efficacy of the service.

As we go down the track, those machinery subsystems are refined and we are getting better data and better information, and we will have more timely reporting. Whilst I take the point and acknowledge it readily, I would suggest to you that we should be concerned with the efficacy of the service—a little bit more than just the administrative part of it.

MS MacDONALD: I refer to operation Halite, on page 18. Can you tell us how successful operation Halite has been in targeting recidivist offenders for burglary and motor vehicle theft?

Mr Hargreaves: Thanks very much, Ms MacDonald. Operation Halite is probably the best example you can have of the way in which we have changed the system, hence intelligence-driven police. I will ask Chief Police Officer Davies to give you some more detail on that. Of course, you would understand this, Mr Chairman, because you were behind the change to the presumption regarding bail for recidivist offenders. It has to be a two-pronged approach, doesn't it? There has to be one from the courts, which is what your legislation was intended to do, and the other one was the police targeting recidivists. Operation Halite is the sharp end of that approach.

THE CHAIR: Anchorage as well.

Mr Hargreaves: Anchorage is a very good example; I couldn't agree more. We have to consider it in concert with other things, like the turnaround program for young people with motor vehicle theft histories, and a whole series of others. I will ask the chief police officer to give you detail on operation Halite.

Mr Davies: Operation Halite has been, I think, a very productive style of policing for the ACT. As has been stated, it is a continuation of a style of policing that has been in place, but one that we continually try to improve. As has just been mentioned, in 2002 we had operation Anchorage, when we had the first significant impact on volume crime in this city. When that closed down there was obviously quite a considerable resurgence in burglary. Operation Halite came into place in early 2003.

Operation Halite then had two iterations, and commenced a third iteration on 30 September last year. We have now taken it a step further. Even though we had great results, I think, in the last reporting period of the annual report, we have now added a crime prevention dimension and intelligence officers to this operation, which gives us even greater focus. Again, I think the benefits of that are self-evident.

As the minister alluded to in his opening statement, this is a concept that probably came about at the start of the new millennium, in the sense that crime had been going up throughout the decade. It was clear that what had been tried throughout the 1990s was not working. When policing moved to the view that we had to change the way we attack it, we thought about it; a lot of work went into it; and, as I said, thus we had this series of types of operations. I think it must be said that these have a life. We try to set objectives

for each one of these; we try to improve what we are doing; and, equally, we may even vary what we are targeting.

In its first two iterations operation Halite was meant to be looking at volume crime in total, particularly burglary and car theft. The car theft part really was not done that well, in a sense. It was simply that the team was occupied enough with burglary. The car theft statistics obviously then ballooned, and we would acknowledge that they were too high in this city. Now that Halite is targeting recidivist offenders in its truer sense, I think the crime figures throughout 2003-04 and since that time have indicated that this is an area of success.

That doesn't mean to say that you don't have periods where you get spikes in crime types. We've had spikes in burglary in 2003-04, and since then. We are able, though, to quickly identify those and put the resources out there. It is the same with car theft. A lot of that is because it could be somebody from outside our town, or it may well be simply that people have come from other systems back into the community.

Mr Hargreaves: The criminal justice system—the Goulburn motel.

Mr Davies: What I am saying is that you cannot expect to have a static crime line or a crime line that is continually going down to a zero crime level; that is just not realistic. We believe this gives us the best opportunity to ensure that crime does not escape and start to become a predominant issue.

Mr Hargreaves: Perhaps I can just throw something in, because of operation Halite's effect. I mentioned earlier that, at the corresponding time last year, motor vehicle thefts were down by 41 per cent and burglary offences were down by 13.1 per cent. You need to understand that that was because it was this time of the year. This is when people are doing it. But when we look at the graph on page 6, we are talking about a yearly effect.

I can report to you that in this financial year to date—from 1 July last year to 14 February this year—burglary offences are down by 21 per cent, in the whole year. To take that one as an example, this time last year they were down by 13 per cent but over the seven, almost eight, months to date it is down by 21 per cent. So you are seeing the perspective starting to pop down. Motor vehicle thefts were down by 41 per cent for the time when people were nicking the cars at this time last year. Over the eight months, we are down by 35 per cent. I think that shows, again, the continuing effect of operations like Halite and Anchorage.

MS MacDONALD: Following on from the issue of burglary and theft: I was talking with my husband the other day about the advent of immobilisers. It is my understanding—I told him that this was the case, and I hope I am right—that immobilisers are much more effective than car alarms and have reduced the number of thefts as well. Is that right?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, it is. In fact, we had the LockOut program just the other day. The government, with bipartisan support—I have to acknowledge that—provided a number of them for free, \$200 worth. It is a fact that vehicles over 10 years old are easily knocked off. You can have as many alarms on them as you like. These people are really good at getting off down the road and all that. If you have an engine immobiliser on the

vehicle, on the other hand, it is not going to work.

We have introduced this LockOut program so that people who are carers, for example, who are totally dependent on a car for a disabled person in their charge, have their cars protected. It is usually people who are on low incomes or disability pensions who have to buy a car that is over 10 years old. We are providing a number of those, hoping to use that as an advertising campaign to tell people like your good husband that, if they have got a car that is 10 years old or older, it is a good idea to go and invest \$200, stick an engine immobiliser in it and they won't be reduced to a zero car family.

MS MacDONALD: I would be happy if he would just get his drivers licence!

Mr Hargreaves: You can go home to your good husband and say that you were right.

MR PRATT: Thank you, chair.

Mr Hargreaves: Sorry about that, Mr Chairman. I am receiving instructions from some thugs in the background!

THE CHAIR: All right. Carry on.

MR PRATT: Minister, maybe this question will go to the CPO, but I will judge that.

Mr Hargreaves: I will judge that one.

MR PRATT: The burglary rates detailed on page 18 of the report indicate a drop. It is pleasing to see that all of the major crime activities in 2003-04 dropped versus 2002-03. That represents about a two or four per cent drop—I'm not quite sure on that number. Can you tell me what the drop in burglaries over that period, or into 2003-04, was compared against the drop in burglaries against the national average? Do you have that handy?

Mr Hargreaves: That information is normally contained in the Productivity Commission's report. Quite frankly, while our crime stats are trending down at the pace they are, I can assure you that, when we compare our crime rates with other jurisdictions for those particular things—burglaries are a good example—they are nowhere near ours. Perhaps I could invite you to wait for the 2004-05 annual report, where you will see the trend coming out, and to add to that the information I have just provided to you—the burglary figures for this time last year and the current one. You will see that they are down by 21 per cent in the financial year so far. Whilst you saw a reasonably slow movement from 2002-03 to 2003-04, you will see another movement from 2003-04 into 2004-05. Then you are going to see a real plummet for the 2004-05 year.

THE CHAIR: I think you guys have had access to them. Could you just provide them for the committee. That would be helpful.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes. I don't know how much use they will be. We will dig them out for you, Mr Pratt. And I look forward to your press release congratulating the police on their achievement.

MR PRATT: In fact I was going to congratulate you and the police on what is not a bad annual report, unlike the other reports I have seen so far this week. But that doesn't mean I haven't got some issues with it. And I am going to address those now. Page 14 of the report indicates a very high increase in ambulance attendances at heroin-related overdoses—I think, a 24 per cent increase.

Mr Hargreaves: Whereabouts is that, Mr Pratt? I am having industrial blindness.

DR FOSKEY: Page 24.

Mr Hargreaves: I have got the wrong page.

THE CHAIR: Page 24 or 14?

MR PRATT: I am sorry, page 24.

Mr Hargreaves: No wonder I couldn't see it.

MR PRATT: Additionally the report, under the title “illicit drug offences”, muses, “Increases in drug offences can, however, be more indicative of changes in police enforcement activities ...” While I understand the logic of that, how do you justify that statement? How do we know that that drop is not necessarily a consequence of a drying-up in the provision, a decrease in demand or even possibly a decline in police presence?

Mr Hargreaves: What is happening is that—remembering that we changed the method of attacking this sort of thing—there are a whole range of drug offences. What we are having with the Crimestoppers approach is two levels that I can tell you about. We are acting on information received in a considerably more scientific approach, and it is actually having its effect. The relationship that we have with interstate police jurisdictions actually has an information-sharing exercise; so we know about that.

We are also seeing the targeting of recidivist drug offenders. We are not talking about the bloke that has got three plants of cannabis in his backyard; we are talking about significant importers of coke, MDMA, MDMA, those sorts of high-level drugs. There are operations that have been introduced which have taken these people out of the game. There was one not too long ago, you might recall. Two people, I think, had their liberty removed recently over that sort of thing. You have that particular approach. The change in police activities includes the concentration on the intelligence that we have received and of course the concentration of the squads of police that are doing that sort of stuff.

The other thing that we have is a completely different relationship with the community than existed in 1989-90. The community out there is more prepared, in fact, to talk to the police about issues and build up that body of evidence. You will also notice that there is a significant increase in the amount of media that we are putting out about these sorts of things.

One of the drug offences that give us a real good dose of concern is drink spiking. Perhaps Mr Smyth and Mr Seselja reported to you the other day that we launched the DVD about having community and police partnerships.

Those sorts of things are actually paying off. To try to quantify those in statistical terms and attribute them to a drop is often difficult, and it is difficult at this early stage. But let me tell you: the way in which we deliver the police services is why you are seeing that drop.

DR FOSKEY: I have got a supplementary question on that topic.

THE CHAIR: On that point, yes, certainly.

DR FOSKEY: My information indicates that the decrease in heroin use, which may be related to a decrease in supply, has actually been accompanied by an increase in amphetamines and related substances, which are increasingly more available and also reasonably affordable, I think. Is this the observation of police, and are they trained to deal with the very different behaviour that is manifest in people who use those drugs, for instance, compared to a person who uses heroin—a different kettle of fish?

Mr Hargreaves: The answers to the question in the short term are yes and yes. One of the issues for the police of course is keeping touch with the drug of choice. That is always a big problem for police enforcement, keeping track—which is the drug of choice; is it cocaine; is it amphetamines; is it heroin; is it cannabis?—and seeing the actual relationship with the illegal distribution of that particular substance.

The AFP particularly concentrate on that approach. They have particularly concentrated on that. For example, if there is a drop in the availability of heroin, what you see, Dr Foskey, is actually an increase in the amount of additive that goes into the stuff which makes it even more dangerous. And so you have to keep on top of that sort of stuff.

We do train the police officers constantly, but also the AFP—how can you put this?—actually puts on this sort of thing officers whose instincts are well honed as well. When you couple that with the relationship of the police with the community, that is when the information comes forward. Remember in the old days the police used to just have a couple of really good informants. We have got a whole community of them now. So they are very well aware of it.

DR FOSKEY: I guess the point of the question is: it is a much more aggressive manifestation by a person who is using amphetamines. For instance, youth workers or people who work with drug users have had to learn different ways of approaching people; otherwise it could be quite a violent interaction. So that is a question.

Mr Hargreaves: We actually do that. The training that our police officers receive is at all ends of the spectrum. It is not just a case of being able to identify whether we have got an amphetamine production factory sitting up in one of the suburbs. It is all about how we deal with the person who has ingested the substance.

Ambulance officers are trained in all of that. They have updated their training on that sort of thing. The police are—yes, indeed, they are—and in fact they have gone one step further than that. They are actually teaching people in the schools how to deal with somebody who they discover is having an overdose situation.

Mr Davies: Dr Foskey, can I just add to that very comprehensive answer?

DR FOSKEY: Thank you.

Mr Davies: Just in regard to your opening suggestion: I would like to make it clear that there isn't a suggestion that amphetamine-type substances are increasing in supply and use within the ACT community because of a heroin shortage. I think it is common sense to say that long-term heroin users, if there is a shortage, will use other things. Yes, that is one issue, but I think one needs to recognise that the use of amphetamines and amphetamine-type substances has become, quite frankly, a plague upon the planet.

I don't think there is a country in the world that isn't experiencing problems in this particular arena. It is the subject of a lot of debate about how we tackle that. A lot of things are changing about the way that police, customs and other agencies are dealing with it from the law enforcement angle. As you correctly say, from a health and another angle, there are issues.

But I make the point that amphetamine-type substances happen to be some new style, I guess, that has come into play for people. It is a trend that, obviously, we don't like. And you are quite correct. I can't point to medical advice that points it out but, anecdotally, there is an issue that some people taking these substances do become violent or behave aggressively. Yes, we do alert our people to that and train them, as the minister said, as do other agencies.

We in the AFP presently are targeting particularly amphetamine-type substances. Whilst we are not forgetting any drug type, our drug work right at this moment is aimed particularly at ATS. We are working with the Australian Crime Commission, who has a major project going on this. So we are linking in, I guess, in a national sense to what is happening nationally and what that means for us here. As the minister says, it fits our targeting issues.

Recently we dealt with—and I think in an outstandingly successful manner—the hydroponic/cannabis events that we are having here in Canberra. We actually had an organised crime crew move into Canberra where we were fortunate enough, through our intelligence people, to be on top of that at a very early stage. We were able to move in. We worked over beyond 20 houses. Unfortunately, I don't have the stats with me. I thought I did but I don't actually have the full scope. But quite a few people have ended up in court. There were large seizures. Assets were seized. A number of people are waiting to meet the justice system as a result of that. The rest of the crime group has moved on because the environment became too tough.

As a result of that we have had a real win, in the sense that we had a major problem on our doorstep; we have dealt with it; we are not going to forget that now, in the sense you can't walk away and say, "Well, that's dealt with forever." But what I'm saying is that our major emphasis has now moved on to ATS.

MR PRATT: Minister, looking at page 14: the key performance indicators overall for 2003-04 are fairly impressive, but there is one that does stand out, which I think is alarming, and that is the percentage of people who are concerned about housebreaking—this is a perception of how people feel about community safety—and car theft. It sits at

about 7.5 per cent and 1.6 per cent, respectively—housebreaking and car theft—above the national average. You may tell me whether that trend is improving as we go into 2004-05. What is being done to allay people’s fears particularly about housebreaking?

I know that Anchorage and Halite are policing operations which have been quite successful. What else are you able to do and what is being done?

Mr Hargreaves: I am happy to do that, Mr Pratt. Can I also draw your attention, on the same page, to indicator 10, the percentage of persons who feel safe at home alone during the day. It is 93.3 per cent. The next one is the percentage of persons who feel safe at home alone after dark. It is 84 per cent. So I just make the point that we need to take all of this into consideration. Without suggesting for a second that some people are reporting something that they don’t really feel—without suggesting that at all—we need to have a perspective here, and I just invite you to have that perspective.

One of the things that we have been doing to allay people’s fears about that includes a number of community-type activities. You would be aware of CLASP, the program where elderly people are being assisted in making sure that the security of their homes are correct.

We have, in that DVD that was launched just the other day, a big hit about what to do if you find someone in your house; what do you do if you find someone trying to break into your house—that is in there and is going to all the schools—in terms of helping people feel safe in that sort of place.

We have in fact got a property crime reduction strategy in place; it is a three-year strategy, 2004 to 2007. Ordinarily I would suggest to you, if I wanted to get in one of my difficult moods, “Wait for the 2004-05 annual report and I will find out.” However, I won’t do that. I will ask the chief police officer to give you some specific detail about the 2004-07 property crime reduction strategy which we hope will address that particular one.

Mr Davies: Mr Chair, through you: we are obviously a key component of the property crime reduction strategy of the current government in this city. The first six monthly reporting period concluded on 31 December 2004 in regard to that strategy. Obviously all stakeholders are required to report back through the Department of Justice and Community Safety. We are achieving most of the stated objectives from our particular point of view, recognising this is a whole-of-government approach, to reducing property crime and, as has already been pointed out today, burglary offences and motor vehicle offences are down considerably, which we put down to Halite.

We are also working in a number of other ways, not the least of which is that we are trying to work towards the drug diversions as required under the purchase agreement. So the issue becomes one of recognition of the importance of integrated approaches across government and community in trying to deal with these types of complex social issues which underlie these sort of crimes.

I think in some of the recent operations, from a policing perspective—and I can’t speak for other departments—which we have done with other groups such as the Department of Urban Services and others where we have gone into multi-agency operations at Stuart

Flats, Owen Flats, Currong Flats, there has been a degree of success, in the sense of arrests, recovered property, drugs, et cetera. That has also a positive impact in influencing the community, because those operations are actually mounted out of concerns of people who are living in those flats or in those areas. It is they that bring that to the attention of government, and policing in particular.

We are also trying to monitor juvenile recidivist offenders and then try to deal with that in a way that we can divert them if possible. As mentioned, the CPTED and the CLASP reviews are a part of this program. We have links through schools, as well as housing. So there are a number of issues here which are about trying to engender the fact that we are working, through a number of departments, with the community, which at the end of the day we hope will bolster the community.

In fact, as you say, the percentage of people who have concerns about perceptions of burglary operating in a town where burglary has been coming down now for close on 18 months is interesting, but I think there is a lot to be said for those other statistics alluded to by the minister in the sense of those that feel safe at home, those that feel safe after dark. We are extremely under the national average. We are performing better than everyone, I think, in areas such as people's concern about gangs, those sorts of issues. It doesn't sort of indicate that there is a general view in the Canberra community that people feel unsafe in going onto the streets of Canberra; nor should they.

If we realistically look at crime in Canberra, I think we do extraordinarily well. I certainly know I would like to live in Canberra more than in a lot of other places in Australia.

Mr Hargreaves: Can I just say also that the chief police officer talked about the community thing and that operation down at the flats there, the multi-unit developments. That is, I am sure you will agree, where we are getting a lot of expression of concern for safety—in multi-unit developments. The feedback I have had from the Department of Urban Services and the community themselves there is that their perception of safety is on the increase, very significantly on the increase.

I also point out to you items 6 and 7 in this particular chart, where the AFP have achieved significantly greater than the national average in terms of people's perceptions of their safety with regard to physical assault and sexual assault. These are significant. You wouldn't have this feeling of safety if you walked down the road in some of the inner suburbs of Sydney or Melbourne; you just wouldn't get it. For example, feeling 20 per cent safer than the national average about not being assaulted, I think, is a significant achievement on the AFP's part.

THE CHAIR: Mr Pratt, one more from you; then I'll go back to the committee, because Dr Foskey has some questions.

MR PRATT: Yes, this is a safer community than many others. But, clearly, rates of crime are still much higher than what we would want them to be. Sometimes they are moving in accordance with national negative trends as well. It is a nationwide problem. But clearly the feedback that I am getting from constituents—and I am sure you are too—is that people are still concerned about these burglary rates. Surely, part of that anxiety is that our citizens simply don't see enough of a police presence in suburbia.

Don't we have a problem in terms of preventative community policing and the presence not being seen?

Mr Hargreaves: Actually, that is one of the furphies of all time being perpetrated by people who love to see their name in the media. What, in fact, we see is an absolute furphy of all time. People do not come to me and say, "I wish I had a policeman standing on my street corner." They don't. They talk to me about burglary rates or that somebody they know has had an attack. They don't say that, not at all. I think it is a sensational story in the media and will always get a run.

The fact is that a moving police car through a suburb is going to respond to a problem much quicker than a police officer standing still in either a police station or on a street corner. That is a fact. When it comes to police visibility, I would suggest to you that, if we put in a police station and we fill it full of coppers, then nobody in the suburb is going to see the police officers at all unless they go down to that station. The police officers can't stop something happening when they are sitting in a police station.

What happens, Mr Pratt, is that they are in a police car and are travelling through the suburbs and they will respond considerably quicker. Have a look at the response rates—the percentage of times that they can respond to a particular incident inside 12 minutes. I believe we ought to get away from this scare-mongering attitude of saying, "There are not enough police officers on the streets" and start talking about the effect that a different type of police process is having.

I invite you, in fact, to critically examine—and we will receive those criticisms quite positively—the way in which police service is delivering or isn't delivering. For example, we have proven the efficacy of the change in approach to the RBTs. I can stick a big RBT just outside your place if you like and fill it full of coppers. What we will do, Mr Pratt, is: we will test hundreds of people, and people will say, "What a good job they are doing." We will get one person, maybe. That was the old way. Now, what is happening is that they are targeted, and we are picking up people. Of course, after the first time they are hit, they change their ways predominantly. We have got the big booze bus that we stick on the side of the road as a deterrent. We don't employ a whole tribe of police officers to do that anymore.

I am not interested in workload statistics; I am interested in whether or not the service is being delivered out there. So I invite you to examine our processes and critique that. I would be delighted to see it. But to have police numbers at 50 paces isn't helpful. I have to remind you it is our responsibility, as elected representatives, not to make people feel unsafe in their home but to assure them that they are safe.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr Hargreaves: It is a pleasure.

THE CHAIR: It leads me to a question I am going to ask as a member of the committee. I note, looking at page 14—

Mr Hargreaves: Page 14 again?

THE CHAIR: Yes. The percentage of persons satisfied or very satisfied with police services—and we are slightly below the national average—is 70.6 per cent. It leads me into my question, which is: I really would never expect to get complaints about police being difficult to deal with; I think we have a history of being the best in the country there. But I did get a lot of complaints, just as a local member, about police simply either turning up very, very late after an incident occurred or, indeed, in some instances police not being able to attend at all because they often say they are short staffed and they simply can't get police over there. That might have something to do with that slightly below average figure.

I note also on page 6 that you mention, when you did manage to decrease armed robberies and robberies in the second half of this financial year, it was due in part to an increase in the number of staff available. So quite clearly, if you have enough staff it would help us greatly in terms of servicing the public and allowing police to do their job. I note also your point—

Mr Hargreaves: Do you have a question in there, Mr Chairman?

THE CHAIR: Yes, I do.

Mr Hargreaves: I have grown noticeably old waiting for it.

THE CHAIR: I also note your point about some significant extra money but no extra police. Minister and also chief police officer, we certainly hear that we are well below the national average, I think, for this reporting period, in terms of police per 100,000 of population.

I have a question. You can take this one on notice. I also get complaints about police having to do a lot of overtime because there are simply not enough people to go around. Could you provide, for this reported financial year, 2003-04, the percentage of uniform police who had to do overtime and—maybe you can do it on average—the average extra amount of overtime which was performed by uniformed police officers, and similarly for plainclothes police officers? I think the two figures might be different, but I would like a percentage.

Mr Hargreaves: In what period, Mr Chairman?

THE CHAIR: The reporting period, 2003-04.

Mr Davies: We will certainly do our best to answer that. I am not sure whether the systems would identify individual officers, but we will take that on notice and we will give you an answer.

THE CHAIR: Yes, you can take that on notice.

Mr Hargreaves: Mr Chairman, I just want to put a caveat on it. We will do the best we can of course, but I just put a caveat on it—and you would know, from your experience—that sometimes it is really difficult to look at the police personnel statistics and work out which ones have got uniforms and which ones have got plainclothes. I just warn the committee, with the best of endeavour, it may be that we can only give you

police overtime figures as a whole.

THE CHAIR: I certainly want sworn in police officers and not civilian staff. Do the best you can.

Mr Hargreaves: We are happy to do you sworn officers.

THE CHAIR: And, if you could, certainly the uniform ones. I would be interested in that because I have had a number of complaints that police have been called back on shifts on a regular basis. That obviously isn't an optimum situation, which then brings me to my next question on that. What steps are being taken, if any, to increase the number of police available for duties within the ACT?

Mr Hargreaves: I can answer that question in two ways. Firstly, we are constantly looking at the amount of resources we have within the police force, as you well know, to attack certain operations, if you like, in the context of intelligence policing, as to whether we need X number of police on drugs and so on. We have a fluid conversation. Secondly, you are asking me to tell you something which may occur after the 2003-04 annual report and may or may not be the subject of budget discussions. I would rather leave it there for the moment and ask you to examine me in another forum. I invite the question in another forum.

THE CHAIR: Good. I certainly hope you take it on board in the deliberations you are going through at present, Mr Hargreaves.

Mr Davies: I think you need to recognise that not all overtime is forced overtime. There are a number of dimensions to overtime. It goes without saying that, if somebody rings in late and can't make a shift, we have to fill it. Clearly, that is going to be an overtime situation. If we have a large, unexpected event or demonstration we have the same thing.

Also, there is an element in having available overtime that is really important to our strategies in policing. We couldn't run some of the operations we run if some of those weren't on overtime. They are not all on overtime. We are starting a campaign this weekend. With Halite, it sometimes involves persons joining the team through overtime. If we didn't have that sort of flexibility, and everyone in the ACT was within shifts over a seven-day period, our flexibility to go out and target crime would be extraordinarily limited. I only push the point to say that questions of overtime are not necessarily negative; they can be very positive.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that, having worked, in various capacities.

Mr Davies: We have to assist the—

THE CHAIR: That is certainly so, but my question really is—and that is why I want the figures—that since 1979 when I have had dealings with the police, since being a prosecutor and onwards, I don't think I have heard in the form of a complaint that they don't want to do it or they feel they have to do it because it is passed on to them; they would prefer not to do it. I suppose it is a bit like complaints about nurses doing two lots of shifts. It points out that we simply don't have enough people. It is in the form of people saying, "Do I really have to?"—rather than all those very valid reasons which you

have given for genuine overtime. Indeed, people quite often welcome doing that sort of overtime. It was more the burnout factor that I was concerned about, which I haven't really heard of to such an extent before, which would seem to relate to the numbers issue. That is the point I make.

Mr Hargreaves: We have to oblige the committee to assist in getting an idea of whether or not they can criticise the government for insufficient numbers, after all. We have got to be helpful about that because they might like to have a case to put before the public that we haven't got enough police officers—and we would love to help you!

MS MacDONALD: On page 31 there is reference to the new Woden police station. It is the closest police station to my home, so I am curious to know how the construction progress is going, and if you envisage that it will be on target to be completed by the end of 2005.

Mr Hargreaves: The short answer is yes. We are confident that it will be on line before the end of 2005. I am particularly delighted with this police station coming out of the ground—on a number of levels. One is that I stopped JESC from popping it up in a grossly inappropriate position. In fact, they were promoting this particular site when I was the opposition police spokesman and I now find that it is emerging there.

It is high time, as folk will agree, that the Woden police station was pulled down, the bricks sold and a new state-of-the-art station provided. As you know, the layout for it was done through a consultative process with the AFP, with proper consultants, the community and the Woden community council involved. It is in a very nice location close to the shopping centre and the youth centre, so we have got a good bit of synergy between the young people and the police. October is our target, with a bit of luck and good weather. I shall ensure, Mr Pratt and Mr Stefaniak, that you are on the guest list to attend its opening.

MS MacDONALD: I hope I will be on the guest list too!

Mr Hargreaves: No doubt Ms MacDonald will be a regular visitor, given her husband's complaints about car immobilisers.

MS MacDONALD: Thank you, minister.

Mr Hargreaves: I look forward to seeing you!

DR FOSKEY: I want to make a comment before I begin my questions. I did have quite a large number, but I have cut them back. I have spent hours reading this report. I have probably read it at least as well as anyone on the committee. I am concerned that I have got two minutes to ask my questions.

THE CHAIR: You have got a bit more than that.

Mr Hargreaves: Dr Foskey before you do, can I invite you to perhaps sometimes reconstruct the questions. We will take them on notice and get back to you within the three days.

DR FOSKEY: Thank you. I will do that with the questions that aren't answered. I have heard from many other sources that the family violence intervention program is a very successful collaboration between community groups and the police. I am reading in the report at pages 34, 35 and 36 about the police sexual assault and child abuse team. I am interested in the media campaign and education package that is spoken of there. There is mention of a media campaign and education package to educate young people about their rights and responsibilities with regard to consensual sex. I think it is in relation particularly to under-age young women having sex with older or over-age—over-age, I guess is over 100—men. I am sorry, I am having a go at you there!

Mr Hargreaves: I could be the victim of a paedophile yet! Are you suggesting that?

DR FOSKEY: No. I didn't really want any specific comments at all. I am wondering if the police are the appropriate body to produce such a package, for a start. I am hoping that they are working with appropriate community organisations. Is the production of the package and the media campaign in progress?

Mr Hargreaves: The answer is that, all too often, the police are the first people to see the devastation which occurs in this particular instance. The police officers who are trained in this sort of exercise are among the most psychologically strong people that we have within the AFP. They are particularly well placed to describe the trauma people go through and to try to come up with preventative methods and mechanisms. They work with people such as the rape crisis centre and support agencies like that, to develop this sort of package.

It is most appropriate that the police be involved in the interventionist and the preventative part of people's trauma. We don't want the community to perceive the police as merely, "those coppers that'll lock you up". They are not. They are concerned members of our community. I think, quite frankly, they are best placed to be the lead agency in this sense. It is part of our community safety strategy. Can I say that attacking this particular issue is an ongoing type of process; it is an evolving issue. This one here is just one part of it.

DR FOSKEY: Has there been an improvement in police handling of people with a mental illness through the development of the police negotiating team? Could you please explain how it works? This is on page 43.

Mr Hargreaves: We are talking about the 2003-04 achievement. To satisfy your question might take more time than we have, because it deserves a detailed response. Could I offer you a briefing from the AFP on just how that is happening? Of course, the rest of the committee would be invited to that.

DR FOSKEY: The Greens are interested in that, but you would be aware that, as there is only one of me, I have to be around for all sorts of things. Finding time for briefings is getting really difficult.

Mr Hargreaves: I am sure we all have a similar sort of problem.

THE CHAIR: Could you take the question on notice?

Mr Hargreaves: We can try to respond to that on notice if you like, if you have got the time out of your schedule to read the response.

DR FOSKEY: I do have that time. Are traffic accidents reported to ACT Roads?

Mr Hargreaves: Yes.

DR FOSKEY: In that way, hot spots can be identified. From pages 44 to 47, mention is made of the managerial challenge of integrating new operational structure into the culture of ACT Policing. This, of course, is around the topic of terrorism. Has the increased focus on counter-terrorism and related issues led to a decreased emphasis on community policing matters?

Mr Hargreaves: No.

DR FOSKEY: That is good. Under indigenous community liaison: how many indigenous police officers are there? How much attention is being given to this role, given the disproportionate number of Aboriginal people involved in the statistics mentioned here? The relevant page numbers are 59, 67 and 68.

Mr Davies: Given the time constraints, I will partly answer it but I will provide an answer on notice to ensure that I don't give you my best-guess estimate. It is my understanding that in this reporting period 1.2 per cent of our people were of indigenous or Torres Strait Islander extraction, which would probably put it in the order of eight or nine persons. We have two Aboriginal police liaison officers. One works within crime prevention and the other works in other ways with the Aboriginal community. I can give you a more fulsome answer on that, if you like. I think we have the highest representation there. It is still a very low number, but I think we exceed other police forces in that regard.

Mr Hargreaves: In percentage terms.

DR FOSKEY: It is obviously a key area for you.

Mr Davies: It is something that we have been targeting and trying to do. We have some further strategies in mind to try to increase that ratio.

Mr Hargreaves: There is also a really strong relationship between the AFP and institutions such as the Aboriginal justice advisory committee and the Ngunnawal community. That relationship is a vital one. We recognise the role, for example, of elders, in diversionary conferencing.

DR FOSKEY: I was going to ask—and this will be a long answer—for a progress report on the use of restorative justice processes.

Mr Hargreaves: That is a question that you should put to the Attorney-General, it is not a police matter.

DR FOSKEY: Sorry. It is in here.

Mr Hargreaves: Yes, but it refers to corrective services.

DR FOSKEY: All right. I have heard it said by police officers that there are a relatively small number of persistent offenders in the ACT.

Mr Hargreaves: It is a small number of people's relatives.

THE CHAIR: Persistent offenders, regular offenders—recidivists.

Mr Hargreaves: That is right.

DR FOSKEY: Yes. In fact, this is probably why you have a targeted approach.

Mr Hargreaves: Exactly. The police will tell you that when you take them out of the game for a while there is a significant drop, but that when they come back out of jail up she goes again.

DR FOSKEY: So I have heard, but I still wondered—and this question is related to that—if there are efforts to work with their families. We know that these things are often a cycle of crime, where they learn from their parents. Is there any effort made to work with the families of recidivists in an attempt to break the cycle?

Mr Hargreaves: That is a question you need to put to the Attorney-General.

DR FOSKEY: Okay.

THE CHAIR: This will be your last question, Mr Pratt, because we are running out of time. I would ask that all further questions be put on notice.

MR PRATT: Following up on a question about half an hour ago: minister, you made a comment that this is not a matter of police numbers but a question of the delivery of police service. By the way, I happen to think that you are stunningly erroneous in saying that this should never be a debate about numbers of police. Going back to your invitation to talk about the delivery of service, on page 84 it talks about response. I want to ask a question about this.

The police say that they invite people to send in details, particularly with the latest spate of road rage activities, burnouts and God knows what. I think it is a great idea that people provide those. We are getting a lot of reports that people are phoning in registration numbers. I can talk about an incident I have written to you about where I have sent in five registration numbers of people that I personally saw at a 25-car burnout.

I don't know whether activities have occurred there, but in that particular case the police response was about 45 minutes. I know that those police were extremely busy, but my question is: if we are concerned here about the service, what are you doing about these sorts of response times? What are you doing about these failures—not deliberate failures, but simply because I think police are overstretched—to get back to people who send in evidence and information about offenders?

Mr Hargreaves: We have a twofold question. I direct your attention to the response

times, which I think are fine. People provide five rego numbers to Crimestoppers, and what happens? I will tell you what happens, and I will quote another example. I gave Crimestoppers about 15 registration numbers about another type of activity which was causing community concern. When I did that, it just happened to be the last piece of evidence that Crimestoppers needed. An operation was mounted in the particular area and the person who was indulging in that criminal activity was taken out of the game.

You saw in the paper, either today or yesterday, the results of an operation targeting burnouts. You also have to appreciate that the law relating to burnouts is that the police have to catch people in the act of doing them; it's not a case of a person laying a charge before the court. If that is the law, then there is a problem with the law. I don't happen to think there is. I have to remind you that it wasn't a law that the Labor Party introduced; it was a law that your party introduced, and we are enforcing the law.

MR PRATT: Do you propose changing the law?

Mr Hargreaves: I have to tell you that, when we receive information from the community, the police take action. If you don't think that they're taking enough action have a look at the *Canberra Times* and you will see the result of it—there are seven of them. You can ask, “Why didn't the police turn up?” I have to tell you that I would rather they turn up when somebody is getting assaulted than turn up 15 minutes after a bunch of cars have gone. Do you think those same people ring the police back and say, “Don't bother coming out, because they've gone”? No, they don't, they just sit there and complain when the police turn up a little later.

When they put the information into the police machinery it builds a body of evidence. The registration number, the description of the driver, the description of the car, what colour it is, what type it is, are all added together to form a map. At the end of the day the police can predict when it is going to happen, and they are sitting there waiting. They are not coming along half an hour later, they are sitting there waiting for it to happen. If you don't believe that that is so, check the *Canberra Times* results, they are there in front of you. I think you should encourage the people who complain to you to contact Crimestoppers.

MR PRATT: Chair, I presume there is no time to dispute that?

THE CHAIR: There is no more time. I don't know if anyone else has any burning questions they want people back for. The committee can discuss that later if that is appropriate. We look forward to receiving your questions on notice. Mr Hargreaves has said he will do his best to do it within three days. If any member wants to see if the committee needs to be reconvened, they can do that in a formal way.

Thank you, gentlemen and ladies, for your attendance. Please get any further questions on notice from any members of the Assembly, or members of the committee, into the committee as soon as possible—in fact, you should have them anyway—so we can give them to the minister and the chief police officer.

The committee adjourned at 12.12 pm.