

25 July 2002

The Secretary
House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam.

This is a private submission relative to the -

Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting.

It relates specifically to potentially significant enhancements to mid and long term policing throughout Australia with particular emphasis upon issues embraced by -

- Public order,
- Personal safety,
- Local community security and well-being, and
- Community freedom from crime and anti-social behaviour.

In particular, this submission refers to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference No. 5, in that the scope for achieving a rationalisation of roles and responsibilities between the levels of government and the better use of resources and better quality of services to local communities can be successfully achieved by the decentralisation of most, if not all, of the general functions undertaken by the civilian police throughout Australia.

1. **DETAILS**

- Some Australian local government areas are relatively secure in terms of public order, personal safety and levels of crime
- In the vast majority of cases, this welcome situation is largely a result of environmental, sociological and demographic good fortune rather than the product of specialised policing or overt planning or design by public agencies.
- Many, if not most, other areas experience an environment which is far less safe in factual conditions as well as in terms of public perception.
- Local phenomena and world-wide trends give clear warnings that even where favourable situations exist, they may not last and certainly cannot be guaranteed without very careful attention. In the less favourable environments, the probabilities are that conditions will continue to decline.

- In all cases, communities are unlikely to be able to rely solely on State police to establish and maintain a satisfactory level of safety, security and freedom from anti-social behaviour in the years ahead. There will need to be a planned and concerted local community contribution in addition to, or in place of, centralised state police enterprises.
- Notwithstanding their regularly declared intentions to work more closely with the community, the fact is that throughout Australia, State police are probably becoming more detached from genuinely close community inter-action and partnerships. This is not a direct criticism of the various police agencies themselves, because factors such as economic rationalism pressure them to heavily prioritise their services towards emergency response which, in turn, has a negative impact upon pro-active and preventive policing.
- Nevertheless, Australian police tend to rely on traditional methods rather than adopting a lateral thinking approach to the use of their human resources and individual skills. Only time will tell the ultimate story as to the wisdom or otherwise of their selection, but it is interesting to note Victorian Premier Brack's reported comments in justifying his government's assessment of the merits and qualifications of their then newly appointed Chief Commissioner of Police. Mr Bracks is quoted as saying "*She (Ms. Christine Nixon) was a stand-out candidate for her vision, her leadership and her views on modern policing, experience as a police officer and impeccable integrity*".¹ Vision and modern policing is an integral part of this scoping paper. Experience and integrity are very important aspects as well, but are not the primary features of this present discussion.
- At about the same time as the Victoria observations were made, Adelaide's "*Sunday Mail*" carried a feature article on South Australia's Police Commissioner, Mr. Mal Hyde, in which it was reported that he referred to very contemporary phrases and concepts including being *proactive*, *developing partnerships* and finding *local solutions for local problems*.² These are the very essence of this critical social issue. This submission is about converting the rhetoric into reality.
- It is also interesting to note that in 1998 in the United Kingdom there were proposals for statutory community safety partnerships between police and local authorities as a (quote) "*valuable opportunity for us (UK) to reinforce the good work that has developed informally between agencies over the years*". It is believed that these proposals have since progressed to reality.
- Regardless of claims to the contrary from some quarters of Australian governments, as well as the vagaries of crime statistics and their analysis and interpretation, it is reasonable, and probably sensible, to accept that crime and social misbehaviour are on the increase throughout the nation.
- It is probable that no Australian area is exempt from this increase in crime.
- Although there are frequent and highly publicised plans to inject additional numbers into Australian police organisations in the short or immediate term,

¹ The Herald Sun, Saturday 17th March 2001, at Page 1.

² The Sunday Mail, 25th March 2001.

the slow but steady reduction in police numbers may continue in the longer term. Indeed, the economic situation in some states would seem to dictate that a more skilful course of action than simply increasing police officer numbers, is a superior solution. These factors suggest a greater need for local government to safeguard their communities.

- Closure of police stations is an unwelcome, but probably inevitable, phenomena unless public opinion, local government or other concerned group can bring effective pressure to bear upon police administrations and state government to re-assess their stance on this issue. That is unlikely to happen.

2. DISCUSSION

For the purposes of this paper, ideas about public safety, crime prevention and policing are briefly discussed under two headings. The first deals with structures and operating systems in a broad sense. The second deals with individual programmes and practices which can be selected “off the shelf”, so to speak, and can be operated on an ad hoc basis according to need and suitability.

2.1 Structures and Systems

- In so far as traditional Australian policing is concerned, it is the author’s view that the solution to the problems associated with public safety, crime prevention and law and order generally, does not lie simply in increased police numbers, but rather, in the way existing numbers are distributed and the way in which police personnel operate.
- The emergency, urgent response and road traffic aspects of policing have become so pre-eminent that they now consume the significant majority of the attention and resources of police personnel. This inequitable balance in priority levels produces a mind-set, or corporate mentality, among police practitioners that any duty or function which is not a result of one or more of these phenomena, is relatively unimportant. Hence those activities which have come to be known as “*community policing*” or “*community based policing*” are regarded as secondary, or optional extras.
- There is no suggestion whatever, that “*emergency*” situations do not call for the utmost police response and attention. They do. This argument of this submission is that the very important operations which are not in the “*immediate crisis*” category are suffering and that this, in turn, militates against effective and efficient community safety and crime prevention across the wide social spectrum.
- The demand for police services in the “*emergency*” mode has not diminished for many years. It is unlikely to diminish in the foreseeable future. The preventive or therapeutic aspects of modern policing are therefore equally likely to continue to receive minimal attention at best, and be neglected at worst.
- One means of addressing this imbalance would be to have two, separate but complementary police enterprises. One dealing exclusively with emergency,

high risk, major incidents and similar affairs in the manner in which groups such as “*Special Tasks and Rescue*”, “*Emergency Response*”, “*Special Weapons and Tactics*”, and “*Special Operations*” currently operate in Australian states and territories; and the other dealing with all those policing duties which are not of an emergency or immediate life threatening nature. Admittedly, this is a futuristic concept, but possibly its greatest advantage is that operatives in the non-urgent, or “*community policing*” field could be attached to and be employed by local government rather than state government. In turn, probably the best feature of such an arrangement would be the much greater “closeness” to the community which officers working at local government level would develop. Their effectiveness would be equally enhanced.

- An enterprising and visionary local government could approach its state government with a proposal to undertake a “pilot” system in this way and, if need be, have state funding re-directed from the traditional policing enterprise in the area concerned to be applied in this new way. In effect, this would be the local government employing their local police officers. It would be partnership policing. This is, essentially, the model upon which police agencies in North America operate and do so with considerable success. The image quite commonly entertained in countries outside of the North American continent of politicised, “gun toting cops”, in the USA in particular, is far from being a true picture across the entire American society. A close observation and analysis of policing systems in Canada and the US reveals some very important features which are quite superior to those we apply in Australia. It is not suggested they are perfect, but they do have some impressive qualities which we would do well to consider carefully.
- There is a vast amount of research material now available from extensive crime prevention, crime reduction and public safety studies and investigations conducted in Australia and overseas in recent years. This cannot be productively applied in an ad hoc fashion within a given local government area. It requires a planned and systematic process, preferably undertaken by a qualified and competent practitioner. This need should be addressed in any on-going deliberations.
- A strong technology component of the master system is contemplated. For example, the administrator of the enterprise could build a wide-ranging and comprehensive network using the Internet and its e-mail system, by which information could be regularly, effectively and, very importantly, swiftly channeled. The potential of this characteristic is profound. An enthusiastic, community minded person of suitable character and with the necessary information technology skills, could be invited, for example, to design and maintain a “state-of-the-art” web page for the enterprise.
- Closely allied to this information technology component is the fact that “*intelligence led policing*” is becoming the cornerstone of modern police operations. Forging innovative, reciprocal information and intelligence links between an Australian local government policing outfit and the relevant state policing agency and collectively pursuing public safety programmes and

intelligence led operations will produce mutual benefits of considerable proportions.

- The proposed system will also benefit greatly if the police can be persuaded to re-configure their present, highly centralised operations into a more de-centralised model. In short, this means spreading police officers across the community instead of having them all positioned at only one or two geographical centres, trying to service a vast area. Realistically, such persuasion will not be an easy task. However, progress must begin somewhere and it is suggested that acting through the auspices of the House of Representatives **Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting** would be an ideal path on which to begin a journey of such important social progress.
- The assumption or argument that centralisation of police personnel is the most efficient and effective method of service delivery may well be quite wrong. Indeed, there are cogent arguments which indicate it to be a specific error. It is certainly not the people's preferred option, as evidenced by almost every public and private comment or discussion on police officer deployment. Furthermore, overseas experience has demonstrated that the contrary approach is not as costly as some people claim, assume or imagine.
- This decentralising process does not necessarily mean building or opening more police stations in the conventional sense, but it does mean giving individual police officers responsibility for carefully defined and specific areas within the district (in Council terminology) and within the local service area or local area command (in policing nomenclature). It also means exercising greater creativity such as exploring the use of "shop front" type premises to increase positive police-public interaction, as one example only.
- The vitally important function of traffic policing is another dimension which fits perfectly into the decentralised model of policing at local government level. The advantages of applying truly localised management and control, underwritten by perceptive, precise and in-depth local knowledge and understanding of traffic needs and associated affairs, cannot be over-stated. Advances in this direction will also assist in resolving and eliminating the various rivalries, conflicts and resultant inefficiencies currently emerging between state and local government authorities in various parts of Australia.
- The benefits of a more modern approach to community based policing and catching up with successful practices and styles already operating and emerging in other parts of the free world are almost unlimited.

3.2 Programmes

A wide range of other community based crime prevention and community safety programmes exist in Western societies. The following list, which is a mixture of Australian and North American applications, are some examples.

- Adopt-a-Senior
- Bikes for Easy Access
- Blue Light
- Business Watch

- CAPTURE - "Citizens active participation through use of relevant education"
- CEACE - "Citizens engaged in anti-crime effort"
- Children's Road Safety
- Citizen's Police Academy - a highly innovative USA programme
- Coast Care
- Cops and Tops (Teens on patrol)
- Council Watch
- Crime Stoppers
- Designated Driver Programme (DDP)
- Graffiti defence mechanisms
- Home Assist Scheme
- Hospital Watch
- Individualising policing to meet neighbourhood needs
- "*I Would Like to Help You*" policing approach
- Kids, Cops and Responsibility
- Marine Watch
- Mobile Family Services Unit
- Neighbourhood Watch
- PACE - People's Anti Crime Effort
- PAYS - Police assisting youth services
- Police Rangers
- Police social workers acting as community brokers
- Project PAL - People and Law
- River Watch
- Rural Watch
- Safety House
- Satellite police facilities
- School based constable programme
- School monitor education
- School resource officer
- School Watch
- Security Advice
- Stars and Stripes
- Stop and Talk programme
- Stop Auto Theft
- Street Legal
- Targeting delinquents
- Taxi Watch
- Traffic Law Education
- Using police as social scientists
- VAP - "Volunteers Aide Police"
- Youth Driver Education

Neighbourhood Watch was the prototype community based policing programme in Australia, certainly on a major scale. Together with its associated "watches" it has served Australian communities quite well and should continue to do so. It is not, however, the ultimate answer to crime, public safety and community well-being. It is important, also, to note that Neighbourhood Watch has waned in some areas around Australia. In some jurisdictions it would appear that police organisations, on a corporate basis, may have even discontinued their direct and active involvement in the programme at large. Victoria, particularly, has made considerable advances beyond Neighbourhood Watch.

I would be pleased to expand upon any or all of these ideas or to provide further information as may be required. I would also welcome the chance to make a personal representation to the Committee should an opportunity to do so be available.

My contact details are as follows.

◇ Home Address:	20 Stonehenge Avenue, Stirling, SA 5152
◇ Home Telephone:	(08) 8339-2550
◇ Mobile Telephone:	0438-464-505
◇ E-mail Address:	bevan@picknowl.com.au

Yours faithfully.

O.L.W. Bevan, APM, MPRIA, MAIES
Chief Superintendent of Police (Retired)
South Australia