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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE

Thursday, 17 July 2003

Members: Senator Ferguson (*Chair*), Mr Brereton (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Bolkus, Cook, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Harradine, Hutchins, Johnston, Sandy Macdonald, O'Brien, Payne and Stott Despoja and Mr Baird, Mr Baldwin, Mr Beazley, Mr Bevis, Mr Brereton, Mr Byrne, Mr Edwards, Mr Laurie Ferguson, Mrs Gash, Mr Hawker, Mr Jull, Mr Lindsay, Mrs Moylan, Mr Nairn, Mr Price, Mr Prosser, Mr Scott, Mr Snowdon, Mr Somlyay and Mr Cameron Thompson

Senators and members in attendance: Senators Ferguson, Sandy Macdonald and Stott Despoja and Mr Beazley, Mr Price, Mr Scott and Mr Snowdon

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

Watching brief on the war on terrorism.

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BURGESS, Mr Mike, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government 29

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Committee met at 9.00 a.m.

BURGESS, Mr Mike, Deputy Chief Executive, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government

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WRANGLE, Mr Christopher Guy, Director, Services, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the watching brief on the war on terrorism. The committee is pleased to welcome representatives of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Ambulance Services; the Department of Health and Community Services; the Chief Minister's office; Australian Red Cross Northern Territory Division and the Counter Disaster Council to our hearing today. I hope I have not forgotten anybody. This hearing is the third in a series of public hearings on Australia's preparedness to manage and respond to the consequences of a terrorist attack in Australia. The committee has heard from Commonwealth agencies about the existing policy and administrative frameworks for coordinating the responses to a terrorist attack, and from agencies in Western Australia about managing the consequences of a terrorist incident in that state.

The hearing today is the next step in the committee's investigation into the response structures and the strategies that exist in all states and territories in Australia. The focus of our interest is the response and management capabilities of each jurisdiction, the capabilities that can be provided at short notice to supplement local resources and the nature and likely effectiveness of the mechanisms in place to ensure a swift and well coordinated response. On behalf of the committee, I welcome each and every one of you here to the hearing this morning. The format for today's hearing is in the form of a roundtable discussion, but I would ask that all comments that are made be addressed through the chair.

I advise you that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect that proceedings in the respective houses of parliament demand. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence on oath, you should be aware that

this does not alter the importance of the occasion. The deliberate misleading of the committee may still be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but should you at any stage wish to give any evidence in private you may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to your request. The format of the morning is that I am going to invite representatives from each of the organisations to make a brief opening statement, signalling in particular your area of interest and responsibility, and later on we will proceed to questions and discussion. We will now proceed to the discussion, and am going to invite the deputy commissioner to open the discussion. As a general rule, could you keep your opening comments to between five and 10 minutes. That will give each person a chance to give us a reasonable brief outline of their responsibilities, and it will give us plenty of time for questions.

Mr Wernham—It might be useful for me to provide some brief comments, outlining in a snapshot manner the Territory scene and aspects that are peculiar to it. As a general opening remark, I offer the view that the Northern Territory is reasonably well prepared to respond to terrorist related incidents. That preparedness is within the context of a resource poor or a small jurisdiction base within a vast geographical area of around 1.3 million square kilometres. The key word when considering virtually any response in this territory is ‘remoteness’. As you know the Territory terrain varies from a coastal and island Top End, off which sits significant oil and gas infrastructure; to a semi-arid and desert centre, housing an important joint Australian-US defence facility. With the advent of the railway, the Territory moves closer to its potential as a South-East Asian hub. Amongst other things, Darwin had become noted for the frequency of visits by United States and other allied warships.

The unique nature of the Northern Territory offers positives and negatives in terms of both governance and counterdisaster and counter-terrorism response. Perhaps as a consequence of its small number—the Territory’s population is 197,000—the Northern Territory community consists of a number of close-knit, formal and informal networks involving both the government and the private sector. This situation lends itself particularly well to consequence management, which I will get to shortly. There is a ‘can-do attitude’ in the Northern Territory. That was evidenced when we received hundreds, or close to thousands, of East Timorese refugees some time ago. The creation of a reception centre in short order, while not quite miraculous, was very encouraging to see, in terms of porta-potties being driven up the Stuart Highway from perhaps as far afield as Alice Springs, in terms of kitchens being created and plumbers arriving, and in terms of the private and government sectors coming together and agreeing that that facility had to be in place by a certain time—and it was.

Remoteness is a disadvantage insofar as cost and service delivery are concerned. However, its very nature means that insidious activities such as terrorism should not easily flourish. It is fair to say that it is much easier to remain anonymous in the big city than it is to hide in the outback. The local network I referred to earlier is quick to identify unusual activity, and in turn that usually finds its way back to authorities. Since Cyclone Tracy in 1974, the Northern Territory has been acutely aware of the need for integrated consequence management response. In fact, that event was the genesis of the triservice arrangement we have today. The police, fire and emergency services operate as an entity under a single umbrella managed by the Commissioner of Police, as the CEO. I should apologise for the commissioner’s absence today—he is attending a funeral of a former commissioner in Adelaide.

Physical infrastructure is arranged to reflect this. For example, our communications for police, fire, emergency services and the ambulance service are managed within a single facility at police headquarters. The emergency operations centre adjacent to this communications centre can be configured to manage multiple events or component parts of an overall event. Our future building program will be very much triservice in nature so that that integrated response can continue.

Counterdisaster arrangements in the Northern Territory are headed by the Commissioner of Police as the Territory controller. The counterdisaster structure overlays the existing police command and control structure so that, as needed, regional commanders and local officers in charge step aside from their police role and assume responsibility as regional and local counterdisaster controllers. As with other jurisdictions, the events in New York and Bali have brought about a change in thinking in the Northern Territory with regard to terrorist incidents. We do not disregard the traditional hostage and stronghold scenarios that have formed much of our exercises in the past. However, consequence management is very much at the forefront of our thinking. Police response to counter-terrorism will therefore when appropriate run parallel with counterdisaster response.

The unfortunate event of Cyclone Tracy and other subsequent events have meant that emergency response arrangements in the Northern Territory not only are firmly in place but are also well tested by real-time events. Apart from cyclones, these have included massive flooding which required the evacuation of entire communities, the reception and management of refugees from East Timor, and the recent medical reception and management of the Bali bombing victims in October last year, responded to so ably by the Royal Darwin Hospital and, of course, other front-line services. It is probably worth noting that that response was facilitated by the generic aspect of all of these local counterdisaster plans that are in place. The cyclone plan lends itself very neatly to adaptation to other events such as the reception of burns victims.

As a small jurisdiction, the Northern Territory does not have the ability to create and maintain large specialised units within either the triservice or government generally. As a consequence, managers at all levels wear a number of hats and preparedness is, of needs, part of our core business. We are keen that our day-to-day business is as close to our response to a major event as we can make it, so that as far as possible there is a seamless transfer from one task to the other.

Notwithstanding the ability to manage an initial response to a major terrorist incident—and I make the point that we have a highly trained and effective Territory response group within the police force and other components of the organisation who are well-versed in all aspects of containment and control—we would as part of this response be considering requests to other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth for assistance to manage both the counter-terrorism response and the counterdisaster response. As you know, national counter-terrorism arrangements cater for requests of this nature, either because of the scale of the incident or because of the declaration of the incident as a national incident. It is fair to say that incidents requiring disaster victim identification or specialised urban search and rescue will need an integrated Bali-like response in terms of the specially trained individuals and specialised equipment necessary. Even in large jurisdictions these resources are located in major centres. A degree of importation will be necessary, along with a mix of personnel and equipment from jurisdictions, for an incident on the scale of Bali.

In summary, the Territory state of preparedness is adequate within the inevitable constraints that arise from a small jurisdiction managing a large geographic location. Fortunately we have, as part of our management of that process, a great asset which is the community of the Northern Territory. That concluded my opening statement. To respond to some of the more specific questions you may have I am accompanied by Mike Burgess, the Deputy CEO of the Chief Minister's Department, and Chris Wrangle of the Chief Minister's Department. Chris can talk about critical infrastructure and Territory crisis centre arrangements. Then there is Superintendent Mike Stevens, who heads our Counter Terrorism Security Coordination Unit, who can provide more detail than me to the specific counter-terrorism arrangements in the Northern Territory, and Mr Darryl Pepper, the Director of Fire and Emergency Services, who can provide further detail on the counterdisaster structure, CBR equipment and fire response generally.

Dr Notaras—Thank you for the opportunity to come along and speak to a distinguished group. From a Northern Territory health and community services perspective, and taking into consideration the non-government organisations and the private organisations associated with this whole health response, we are tried and true. I will table for the panel's information, copies of our CD-ROM relating to Bali. That particular CD-ROM is slightly dated as of midnight tonight, when we move into a new emergency department prophetically, so it is quite a marked day today.

Royal Darwin Hospital, which was the linchpin to the Bali response, is one component of an integrated response. Royal Darwin Hospital has approximately 300 beds covering a range of services, including emergency, critical care, intensive care, surgical, medical, maternal and child health, anaesthetic and some mental health services. The services cover an extreme range of accredited diagnostic and allied health support services as well. It is not just stand-alone clinical services of the bedside manner variety but rather support services and a range of hotel and administrative services that are critical to any whole of service response. I stress that because if Bali showed one thing it showed the need for a whole of service response, not just an individual response.

The hospital approach is closely integrated with the other Top End hospitals—the Gove Hospital, which runs at about 30 beds; Katherine Hospital, which runs at about 60 beds; and Darwin Private Hospital, which runs at approximately 120 beds. There are also the hospitals in Central Australia—the Alice Springs Hospital, which has 160 beds; and near to that the Tennant Creek Hospital. We operate pretty well as an integrated network working closely together.

Critical in our response, as I said a little earlier, were the health and community services—'community' being the word there—and indeed the private hospitals' assistance to us. Along with that were the public health facilities that we have here in the Top End; police, fire and emergency services, as the deputy commissioner referred to; the Australian Defence Force, which has been an outstanding resource and an outstanding collaborator with us; St Johns Ambulance Service; Australian Customs Service; the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs; the department of trade; and indeed domestic and international carriers, in particular Qantas—in the case of the Bali incident, I refer to the private carriers as well as Defence—and other groups such as the Australian Red Cross. We actually form part of the national burns network and the national disaster response network—as the deputy commissioner pointed out, we are all part of that integrated model.

Just prior to the terrible incident in New York, RDH had the privilege of winning a national award in terms of its own internal and external disaster manual. As a national award, that was a bit of a benchmark—it was tried and tested on 12, 13 and 14 October last year. All that being said, very few recognise that the response that occurred in Darwin during that period last year was greater than combined responses in both New York and Oklahoma—that is a fact. Most of the casualties in New York either were deceased immediately post the incident or, conversely, were resuscitated on the scene and treated. I think the maximum presentation of the critical nature of patients that we saw at Royal Darwin Hospital were six in New York and not much more in Oklahoma city.

All that being said, we do have facilities for chemical, biological and radiological responses as well as mass casualty presentation; disaster victim identification facilities, which is important; and mortuary facilities that can cope with a whole range of challenges. As demonstrated by the SARS pandemic, we are prepared for those types of outbreaks as well. Again, I would agree with the deputy commissioner that collaboration is the key to any success that we have here. One of our major cautions is that, while we are quite successful in a short-term response, sustainability without national, and perhaps even international, assistance would be a major concern.

CHAIR—Thank you, Dr Notaras. Mr Sellick, do you wish to add anything?

Mr Sellick—I do not have much to add, really. The ambulance service falls under the medical group in terms of emergency disaster response and, as already stated, works along with a plan that has been tried and tested and works very well, generally speaking.

Mr Watts—I have a brief comment. The primary role of the Australian Red Cross under the Northern Territory counterdisaster plans is the operation of the National Registration and Inquiry System after a major emergency or disaster. The system aims to ensure that all displaced persons can be accounted for, their whereabouts monitored and that information authorised for release is made available in a timely, sensitive and accurate manner. The system is jointly the responsibility of the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services and the Australian Red Cross, under a memorandum of understanding. We operate the system using a mix of paid staff and volunteers—and volunteers provide our surge capacity. We also maintain a capacity for a centralised telephone inquiry system for non-medical activities—as such, for example, immediately after the Bali bombings that system was activated to match offers of accommodation for families of victims with those people. The system we operate is linked into Australian Red Cross like systems in the rest of the country. Again, part of the surge capacity involves the operation of the inquiry system using the resources of other Red Cross divisions around the nation. We also have the capacity to provide an increased range of the traditional Red Cross volunteer services as required. Thank you.

CHAIR—Over the past nine months we have conducted hearings and had submissions from probably all of our national and Commonwealth agencies, but the fact remains that, if a terrorist incident occurs, it is the responsibility of the states and territories to react first because it has to be identified whether it is just a small disaster of some sort or whether it is an act of terrorism. Can you take us through the stages of how the Northern Territory authorities would react, for instance, if there were an incident in the mall or in the old Victoria or something like that where a number of people had been killed or hurt? What steps would be taken? At some stage it has to be determined whether it is a state responsibility for an accident, disaster or natural disaster like

a gas leak or whether it is a national responsibility. One of the difficulties we have had is in determining when it goes past being a state responsibility and becomes a national responsibility as well. Could you take us through the steps that would be activated if an incident like that happened in the mall?

Mr Wernham—Let me say at the outset that whether an issue is national is something that I think all jurisdictions in the Commonwealth are grappling with. There are some clear criteria laid down in the handbook or the plan as to what constitutes a national situation. Obviously the issue of scale is one criterion. But I think there is a pretty simple question I would be asking myself no matter what the situation was, scale aside, and that is: does this situation in some way threaten the nation's security or is there a possibility that it might? In any event there would be communication between the jurisdictions and between the PSCC and the Commonwealth of course. Whether or not the issue was declared national that network would be up and running. There would be requests for assistance or at least an indicator that assistance would be forthcoming.

Getting back to the specific situation—say, an explosion in the mall— police are used as first responders to a range of incidents. Incidents range from those sorts of incidents to urban armed offender situations so containment control is very much a part of our day-to-day operation. A situation like that would entail the deployment of a police forward commander. Clearly, advice back would suggest that the scale of the incident required an overall police commander set-up at our emergency operations centre at headquarters. As I indicated, all of the services operate in terms of communications from within that facility. Depending on the scale of the situation and the implications of it, we would consider very seriously standing up the Territory crisis centre.

I talked briefly about the structure of the counterdisaster arrangements in the Northern Territory, which is headed up by the Commissioner of Police. An issue which we and other jurisdictions are considering is the fact that people in state or territory crisis centres and people who sit on the Counter Disaster Council are often the same individuals, or to a large extent they are. In any event that might require the standing up of both of those facilities—and Chris Wrangle can give you some further detail about this. We are certainly considering a combined process whereby we can more quickly process the requests and facilitate the need for equipment and assistance that a counterdisaster committee would manage and also inform the Territory crisis centre.

CHAIR—Is there a trigger that activates your disaster committee or the disaster council?

Mr Wernham—I will get Mr Pepper to give you some further detail but certainly the scale or the scope would be important. We are used to dealing with floods in Central Australia, unfortunately, and we have fair warning of the scale and scope of some of those things. Clearly, when we are looking at evacuation of a whole community or when we have a situation that by its sheer scale suggests a massive response is required and possibly assistance from elsewhere, we would stand up the counterdisaster committee. A cyclone, for example, would automatically activate the counterdisaster committee. I will throw it to Mike just to give you some further detail about the police response. Darryl might add to that and Chris, perhaps, could talk about the Territory crisis centre component that we throw into that situation.

Supt Stevens—As Mr Wernham alluded to, the initial response would be that provided by the Northern Territory police in a crisis situation. An assessment would be made quickly as to the nature and scale of the event and whether or not it was terrorist related. If it was such that it could be handled within the confines of our own resources, it would be done without the request to other jurisdictions and the Commonwealth for assistance with resources and/or whether it is declared as a national terrorist situation. Even where it is declared a national terrorist situation, the Northern Territory would still have prime responsibility for the resolution of that incident. The policy and strategic aspects of the response would be given by the Commonwealth-provided guidance to the Territory for those purposes. We have a fairly well-practised counter-terrorism response capability in the Territory which has been developed over the last 10 years or so, but more so in the last couple of years since the incident in New York. All of our discipline areas take part in national training exercises and we have got to a point where we can provide a reasonable first response capability.

Mr Wernham—An event such as that in the mall would obviously require the instigation of the investigative arm of the organisation, and that was the important point I made in regard to the facilities that we have: they are set up so that we can co-locate an investigative or counter-terrorism response, if you like, alongside the counterdisaster or consequence management response, so it is important that those two areas inform each other as the matter unfolds. Darryl could probably talk more about the counterdisaster arrangements.

Mr Pepper—From initial response to an incident such as the one in the mall that you mentioned, from a fire perspective, as part of the triservice we are in a group that is working very well and we would respond as an initial responder. The Counter Disaster Council would be called only when it was believed by the resources that are there from the forward command and the police command that the resources would not be adequate to deal with the situation. That would mean that we would then activate the Counter Disaster Council to look at bringing in our resources from the rest of the Territory. That would be done in the first instance and it would only be after the council had been informed that it would be determined, through information and evidence available to us, whether we would need to extend that to a request for national assistance.

Mr Wrangle—I will talk briefly on the Territory's crisis centre arrangements. You would probably be aware that the concept of state or territory crisis centres was first mooted in the old national antiterrorist plan, which tended to be based around the scenario that we would be dealing with a hostage situation and so there was a need for the ability to develop policy advice, coordinate information support, media plans et cetera. Very importantly, the Territory crisis centre provides a secure link between the territory, the Commonwealth and the police.

The scenario we are now dealing with is probably changed in that we are actually managing the consequences and at the same time could well be dealing with a terrorist situation as well. The exercise in Western Australia which I observed highlighted very clearly the need to have a close link between the people who are managing the consequences and those managing the situation.

CHAIR—Was that in Western Australia or South Australia?

Mr Wrangle—Western Australia.

CHAIR—There was one in South Australia.

Mr BEAZLEY—The one we looked at earlier this year.

CHAIR—Yes, we looked at that one but there was a day spent in Adelaide at the Victoria Park Racecourse where they went through the process.

Mr Wrangle—We have been looking at how our arrangements would work here to make sure that the Territory crisis centre is able to perform its role without becoming an information demand on the emergency operation centre and making sure that decisions that are being made and information that is being passed to inform policy making is being made in light of the situation which is emerging on the ground.

We can see that there is a possibility we may have two models. If we were confronted with a normal hostage situation, we might find that the Territory crisis centre could quite easily be activated away from the emergency operations centre. But, if we found ourselves dealing with the consequences and we looked at activating the Counter Disaster Council—and, as the deputy commissioner has indicated, most members of the Counter Disaster Council also have input to the Territory crisis centre—the two centres would merge together very well. The consideration of both aspects would just become a normal part of the business. That is how we think we can best and better coordinate our response.

CHAIR—There has always been a point at which somebody has to make a decision. If an incident happened and it was what you might call a medium-size incident, there are probably three possibilities: it could be an accident—an explosion of a gas pipeline or something like that; it could be a civil crime gone wrong, but not necessarily involving terrorists; or it could be a terrorist act. Somebody has to make the decision as to whether or not it is a terrorist act to activate what takes place from then onwards. Who actually makes that decision?

Mr Wernham—I would certainly be responsible for advising the commissioner in that regard. You are right: it could well be an urban criminal situation gone wrong. We recently apprehended a person who had a large quantity of explosives in a vehicle. His relationship had gone wrong and he was embarking toward a nightclub. The consequences of that are just unimaginable.

CHAIR—It could be devastating.

Mr Wernham—Again, that was resolved within the confines of the criminal justice system. We would have to look at every bit of available information. A massive blast can be caused through accidental means, certainly, and we would be working as quickly as we could. That is the importance of having the investigative side of the response, if you like, working alongside the consequence management, so that we are quickly able to get quality information back from the incident. It may be that there are external bits of information—suggesting that something similar has happened in another part of Australia or that somebody had been apprehended elsewhere in the Territory or somewhere in Australia—that feed the intelligence flow that gives us reason to believe, or where there might have been pre-existing intelligence to suggest, that this sort of risk was on the horizon. I would certainly err on the side of caution.

As I said, if the scope or scale of the incident were such that it required national assistance, I would not hesitate to ask for it. But in terms of whether or not it is a terrorist incident, I think we should also make the point that we are dealing with criminals, whether they are terrorists or whether they are a disaffected local miner. The response will be pretty well the same; it is really just a case of scale. We would make the decision and provide the advice that we were probably dealing with a terrorist related situation when we had, I guess, reasonable cause to believe that that were the case, based upon all the available evidence and the information coming from the scene.

CHAIR—If an incident occurred, would it be in your best interests to notify the National Counter-Terrorism Committee that an incident had occurred and that it may possibly be a terrorist attack or would you wait until you had made that decision yourself before you notified them?

Mr Wernham—We would notify them at the outset of any incident that had the vaguest possibility of being related to terrorism or that had some national implication. I think it would be the practice of my fellow deputies around Australia that we would not hesitate to activate the network against the possibility that it was either terrorist related or a national incident.

Mr BEAZLEY—I have just a few questions. I think we would all acknowledge that what you have here and what you are trying to handle is a target rich environment if the terrorist tactic is to aim themselves at defence facilities, national or allied. It is probably less of a target rich environment if you look at what damage could be caused by attacking civilian targets. Nevertheless, I think you correctly focused on the two aspects of this that we can handle: one being the response to an incident that has occurred and the other being how you find out about the possibility of it occurring.

If you get caught in the middle of trying to apprehend something going on at a point in time, it is pretty unlikely that you would be lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time. Hostage crises are now rather passe as far as terrorists are concerned. Throughout your remarks, in terms of both the interception side and the response side, you emphasise to us the resource poor nature of your jurisdiction. Would you care to elaborate on that? What assistance would you like in terms of your physical requirements?

Mr Wernham—Most government agencies and people who operate throughout the Territory are pragmatic. It is a fact that we have a small police force of some 970 sworn members. At any given time we might have 400 of those on the ground. Obviously, we have other components to the organisation and we work as part of a triservice. We deal with remoteness on a day-to-day basis and that, on an exponential basis, exaggerates the effects of perhaps even an asthma attack in a remote location. People still die of asthma attacks in the Territory because of remoteness. I guess, because of the small nature of the Territory jurisdiction—and I mentioned this earlier in my opening remarks—we are generalists. Len and I, and people like Mike, wear a number of different hats. We do not have a large specialised antiterrorist unit. If you were asking what I would like, I would love to have 100 people specialising in just that aspect. I will never have that and so we must strive to make our response part of our day-to-day business.

But we are not alone in this. For example, some of the more remote parts of Western Australia, New South Wales and the northern part of South Australia would have the same logistic response

difficulties that we have. They would call upon their larger core units in major centres in the same way that we would talk to the Commonwealth or other jurisdictions. I think there is a range of things that we are looking at as Mike could probably elaborate on. Probably about 48 hours would pull us up in relation to a counter-terrorism response by the Territory response group in terms of a cordon and containment situation. We would look for assistance from other jurisdictions.

I mentioned briefly that disaster victim identification and urban search and rescue are very much national issues that need further consideration because I do not know of a single jurisdiction that has a total USAR or DVI capability to respond. There are specialised pods of equipment around the country and there are people well trained in DVI around the country, but Bali demonstrated to us that a single jurisdiction was not able to send a package, if you like, across and that an integrated response was needed. In very much the same way, we are aware of our place in the world. We are aware that we are a small jurisdiction in a vast area. We build that into the way that we do business, and we think ahead towards the sort of assistance we require.

Mr BEAZLEY—I could ask that question more generally beyond the position of the commissioner. If you were in the best of all possible worlds, within the bounds of reasonableness—and probably getting you an extra 100 police for the purpose is not within the bounds of reasonableness, in the way in which most people would think, as you yourself say quite correctly—in terms of basic equipment is there in the hospitals and in the emergency services a sort of physical infrastructure reserve capacity that you would like to see, albeit inanimate for most of the time, if you had your druthers? In other words, have you been able to identify, as you have now had considerable experience, bits and pieces of equipment, which could lie dormant to be activated at some time when you needed to respond, that you do not actually have?

Mr Wernham—I will make a couple of comments. One is that the issue of staging areas is extremely important, because when you are looking at contaminated individuals clearly one of those individuals being taken to a major hospital can mean that the whole hospital has to be closed down—and that may have been the experience in South Australia, I think. So that sort of staging area and associated equipment—or the means to adapt a facility to become an effective staging area—is important. Tragically, when you are looking at a major event, the post-mortem facilities are extremely important. Portable mortuary equipment is extremely important.

Dr Notaras talked about the capacity of the Royal Darwin Hospital, but again that is limited and it cannot extend beyond the bounds of the hospital. But perhaps Mike could just talk briefly about equipment, because across the board I think we are more than satisfied with the level of support we have had from the Commonwealth in terms of equipment across the board. Then perhaps Len can talk about the sort of equipment you are talking about.

Mr BEAZLEY—I might just interrupt briefly. I am amazed by the reasonableness of the state people we talk to about all this. Frankly, the bill for the Commonwealth is relatively small and the bill for the states is relatively high, but the resource capacity to address is disproportionate in the other direction. I would not mind hearing a bit of state screaming, and that is not just because I happen to be in opposition and always like to hear a bit of screaming going on. I mean it is better to have the screaming now than the screaming that would occur if this were really tested

and some part of the country was found to be inadequate in a way that could have been dealt with.

Dr Notaras—We have had preparedness over the last few years, going, as the deputy commissioner mentioned, from the time of Cyclone Tracy and indeed throughout the Timor crisis and the 1993-94 visit by the USS *Houston* when quite a scandal regarding the possibility of a nuclear-powered submarine leaking radiation occurred—I arrived around that time. As a result of that we put a number of protocols into place et cetera. Having said all that, the advantage of a small remote jurisdiction is a degree of self-sufficiency, which we do actually have in this place. As the deputy commissioner mentioned, there are still risks associated with that, and indeed people are placed often in situations of risk that they would not be placed in if they were in an urban centre.

Having said all that, our response is largely one of relying on vigilance, communication and the personnel that we can mobilise. The personnel issue is something we have at any particular time, and of course we have to compete with the rest of the nation for nursing and allied health professional staff, doctors et cetera. To answer the question more succinctly however, I would say that we would always appreciate some additional resources in terms of, for argument's sake, communication—satellite phones and the like. We found that during the response for Bali the information was very poor and disjointed until we had the first team on the ground in Denpasar, at around 10 p.m. on the Sunday. Up until that time the most accurate information we had came from an individual who had seen his way clear to actually evacuate the area and make his way on the last domestic flight out and arrive at our emergency department at 7 a.m. on Sunday the 13th.

The vigilance I mentioned a few moments ago relates to our staff being well trained and being able to see that something terrible has happened and alert the senior staff in the hospital that something was going on in Bali. So virtually the deputy who is here today, I and a number of others were able to put ourselves on an alert before the alert had actually been called, and then we were able to work very closely with police, fire and emergency and the other teams. So communication is one area we could be assisted with. It could lie dormant. We could have a more sophisticated satellite telecommunication area, I would suggest.

Other areas include ventilator capacity, burns and so on. So there is certain medical equipment. We feel we are adequately resourced for the day-to-day basis but we could certainly be enhanced for a terrorist or indeed disaster capacity with that sort of equipment being placed dormant to be called upon when necessary. From the personnel perspective, as I said recruitment is a day-to-day activity and I will not debate or discuss that really to any great extent. But there are certainly items that would certainly enhance our response to any such event.

Mr PRICE—Would you be able to give us a list?

Dr Notaras—I can have such a list prepared, certainly. I do not have one to table today. I can assure you, sir, that we can find such a list very quickly.

CHAIR—That would be very helpful if you did.

Mr Wernham—Mr Chair, my colleague informs me that he could also compile a shopping list.

Mr BEAZLEY—I bet the fire chief could too.

Mr Pepper—In relation to the major CBR and USAR, which again are new terms used since September 11, at this stage we are in the infancy of developing that capability. The money the Commonwealth has given us through the CBR advancement program has allowed us to not just have equipment sitting in every state going idle—and they all have a shelf life—but have interoperability over the states. Wherever the incident might be, we are able to bring the same type of equipment together. The difficulty experienced by the fire service with the New South Wales fires over 1994, 1997 and 2001 was that everyone had their own equipment that was different from everyone else's. I think the direction we are going now through the chairmanship of EMA is the right direction of standardising equipment so that it can be used across borders and across jurisdictions.

From a USAR perspective, that is one of the shopping lists. We are now trying to deal with EMA to look at a similar project to the Commonwealth's CBR project for the nation—we are trying to get that to be taken into the same field. If that were possible—and again, they are very expensive pieces of equipment; they are very technical and they need calibration and all the rest of it—it would be far more feasible on a cost-effective basis and also on the community response basis to have that equipment shared around multiple jurisdictions. In that regard, yes, that would be helpful.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT—Deputy Commissioner, you spoke in your presentation of the remoteness. That is one of the features that you have to deal with here. Not only are you remote from the rest of Australia but you have another geographic consideration—your nearness to the archipelagos to our north where there are known terrorist cells. Do you have any strategies that you look at in terms of 'what if' a terrorist threat was to come from our north? Given that the nature of terrorism today is the unpredictable—New York is the classic example of the unpredictable; we would never have thought that a civilian aircraft would be used in that way—do you have a strategy plan for 'what if' they came that way and whether you could cope initially? Is there a plan that immediately rolls out?

Mr Wernham—We would have to consider, as part of that 'what if', how they would come. We have a vast and pretty inhospitable coastline. If the 'what if' included them going to the west or the east of Darwin, the likelihood of that expedition force successfully making it to some infrastructure is certainly going to be tempered by the terrain. That is an aspect that works in our favour. I suggest that, were there to be some sort of initiative from that direction, it would tend to focus on Darwin and perhaps on large groups of United States personnel. Obviously, there is a heightened risk at times when we have a number of warships in Darwin. There is no question about that. Our strategy—and I will get Mike to talk about it in further detail—is about preparedness and relying on the business and infrastructure community feeding information back to us that would give us cause to believe that something out of the ordinary is happening and to respond accordingly. But the 'what if' is so vast in terms of the means by which it might come that I suggest it would be an infiltrated sort of an attempt which would rely on our intelligence sources—which would include ASIO, our joint intelligence team with the Federal Police—and our ability to read our part of the world.

Mounting a waterborne approach would be difficult from that side of the world without some sort of interception en route. Having said that, I can recall quite distinctly when the local policeman in Nightcliff had a bunch of refugees knocking on his door a number of years ago when the very first of the refugee boats arrived. I think things have moved along somewhat since then. The oil and gas infrastructure to the north would be perhaps the most likely target in an offshore sense. We would very much be relying upon the infrastructure of the gas and oil holders and of the ADF to enable us to make an initial response. Having said that, it is unlikely that they would want to take a facility; it is more likely that they would want to take it out. So we would really be responding to the consequences of that act as opposed to that traditional hostage seizure situation. But Mike might add a little about not only our preparedness but also our intel capacity.

Supt Stevens—Over the last 10 to 15 years, the Northern Territory has had a fairly acute sense of awareness through the Top End in particular in relation to things like drugs crops, illegal fishing and those sorts of things. There are a lot of informal networks that exist in remote areas, particularly through the Aboriginal communities, and we have our local Aboriginal community police officers working in those places and dealing with all those small outlying outstations and things like that along the coastline. Those sorts of networks are very valuable to us and we get a lot of information coming back to the local police officers. It would be highly likely that any suspicious or unusual movements through those areas would be picked up by that local network and fed back through the intel circle back to the police authorities. We rely on that fairly heavily.

Mr BRUCE SCOTT—Are you happy with the relationship with the intelligence agencies? One of the things we have all learnt about is joining the dots up of all the intelligence that is out there and coming to an opinion on what that means. Are you happy with the way these are operating?

Mr Wernham—It is an evolving situation. I am almost delving into areas where I might be asking for some confidentiality, Chair, in relation to the comments that I might make. But I will make some general comments and then perhaps if you seek further information we might—

CHAIR—If you want to make confidential ones, I think we will do them at the end.

Mr Wernham—Okay, let me just make some broad comments then. Since September 11, the information flow—and I separate information from intelligence—from intelligence agencies has increased dramatically. Clearly, agencies like ASIO are erring on the side of caution and deciding to provide as much information as they have. The challenge for us and for them is to work together to localise and value-add the information so that it means something to the Northern Territory. Again, perhaps Mike will be able to tell you about the foraging we have to do through information to glean what is of significance to the Northern Territory. But certainly it has moved along. I think it is an evolving situation. I think the establishment of the joint state and territory intelligence teams is another layer that will add to our ability to read and analyse intelligence so that we are better able to get to an early warning situation. I do not think that anybody would claim it to be a perfect situation, and that is the nature of intelligence. There will always be ways and means of judging information and weighting it for relative risk factors. It is an imprecise science. All I can say is that it is less than perfect. It is getting better and agencies like ASIO are certainly scrambling and trying extremely hard to better localise the information they provide.

CHAIR—I know that there will probably be a couple of other questions in this area. We will save them until the end, when we will have a short session in camera so that you can be as frank as you like with the committee.

Mr Wernham—Sure.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—In your written submission to today's presentation you talk about the Northern Territory Terrorism (Emergency Powers) Act and state:

Although this legislation does not contain all those powers that Police consider necessary, it will be subject to ongoing review ...

Would you define for the committee some of the powers that you think are lacking in the current Territory legislative arrangements?

Mr Wernham—The legislation is pretty broad. It is modelled to some extent on the New South Wales legislation, and it is in keeping with the national stance. This is probably the sort of argument that other deputy commissioners and police might raise, and it is this balance between preparedness, security and civil liberty. I cannot articulate in precise terms the sorts of sections I would like to see but, as part of the dialogue leading up to this legislation, I gave an example scenario. The scenario was of an individual who we become aware of moving about and checking and photographing installations. That individual may well have maps in his possession. He may be doing a whole lot of lawful things but potentially for an unlawful purpose. At the present time, neither our criminal legislation nor the terrorism legislation really captures the ability to address that sort of issue.

Mr BEAZLEY—A sort of stalking legislation.

Mr Wernham—You could call it that. But I think all the terrorism legislation can be activated when an event is imminent or has occurred. We live day-to-day in the real world and, honestly, I think it is important—and this will no doubt form part of national, state and territory debate—that police have the ability to at least question individuals engaged in that sort of activity and to carry out some sort of checking process. Balancing that is important. It is a balance between on the one hand doing what will enable the jurisdiction to be secure and on the other hand doing what may impinge on people's civil liberties. That is certainly a balancing act.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—If there are specific things that come to mind, I am happy for you to take that on notice. You said in your submission that you are reviewing the Criminal Code Act. I am not sure whether this is best addressed to you or Mr Wrangle, but is that review under way or is it about to take place? What progress has been made, given that on a federal level we recently passed the ASIO legislation? Where are you up to in your review of your Criminal Code?

Mr Wrangle—I will take that on notice. I am not able to answer that now.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—I note that the emergency powers act has only recently been enacted. Have those special powers been used yet? I think it has only been a couple of weeks, but I am curious as to whether there has been any reason to use them.

Mr Wernham—No, not so far.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—That is hopefully good news.

Mr Wernham—Yes.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—In regard to the issue of critical infrastructure—and again I am not sure whether this is an issue for in camera discussions, so I will put it on the table and see what you say—you talk about the database. Can you give us an idea of how many pieces of infrastructure would be on that database or would meet the criteria to which you allude in your submission?

Mr Wernham—I cannot, but Chris will be able to.

Mr Wrangle—Our process of identifying critical infrastructure has identified around 50 candidate facilities at this stage. We will continue to work with the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department as we go through and refine the definitions that will apply for national critical infrastructure versus local critical infrastructure.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Can you give the committee an example of what would be on that list? Deputy Commissioner, you mentioned the railway and the warships visiting. Are they the kind of infrastructure that we are talking about, or is it something very different from that? Is it public and private sector buildings?

Mr Wrangle—It is a mixture of both. The definition is those facilities and establishments which, if they were destroyed or became unavailable, would impact severely on our economic wellbeing or on our social wellbeing for a protracted time. Without going through and listing them, it is a mixture of private and public. If you were to look in some other jurisdictions where all of the services and utilities have been privatised, things like gas and electricity supply, which are clearly critical, fall within the private sector. Here it is a government owned corporation. It is those types of facilities.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—There is nothing that leaps out at you that makes the Northern Territory environment particularly vulnerable? We are not talking about a Lucas Heights installation in this Territory, for example.

Mr Wrangle—I do not think we have anything that someone else does not have already.

Mr BEAZLEY—What about Pine Gap?

Mr Wrangle—Pine Gap might be something you would talk to the Commonwealth about. It is critical for them.

Senator STOTT DESPOJA—Thanks, Kim. It is usually the Democrat that asks that question. On a different topic—and I am not sure to whom to address this—on the issue of media management in the event of an attack, crisis or whatever situation, whose responsibility is it to ensure, beyond the stage of you being informed and discussing those issues, that the public receive the information? What are some of the tools that you use and what kind of media

dialogue have you had so far to ensure that they are in the loop in a constructive and positive way?

Mr Wernham—So long as the matter or incident remains solely within the province of police, our media unit would manage that response. As it turns out, our director of media and communications is here today in the room. He, along with other media managers around Australia, is part of the national network in terms of synchronisation or consistency for media plans and responses. There is a government media unit that, were the incident to be ramped up, would certainly coordinate responses, but responses of an operational nature and responses that related to public safety we would be giving the highest priority. For example, for both the police forward commander and the overall commander of an incident, a very important part of his or her response is the media officer that is there. That media officer virtually sits alongside of and is part of the operation so that there is a further set of eyes that can advise the commander and the organisation generally in terms of the sort of information that should be going public and getting it out there as quickly as we can.

Mr SNOWDON—Mr Wrangle mentioned the 50 or so sites. My colleague Mr Beazley asked about the facility in Alice Springs and you rightly said that is a Commonwealth responsibility. How many other such sites are there and what relationship does your organisation have, Deputy Commissioner, with the Commonwealth in determining how to deal with any incident on those sites?

Mr Wernham—I guess the most recent example of responding to an incident at that particular site was the demonstrations that occurred there some months ago. That entailed extensive planning and consultation involving the APS branch of the AFP. It was an integrated response. In very simple terms, it is fair to say that we looked after the outside and they looked after the inside and there was some integration or mix of that response. There were contingencies, for example, if the outer walls or that part of the premises were breached and so on. I do not want to go into too much detail as to the physical security of the facility, but it involved extensive consultation with my counterpart in the AFP and at operational level. And that is an ongoing part of the arrangements in Central Australia as a matter of course. It is a Commonwealth facility but we see it as a joint Commonwealth and Territory responsibility to ensure that that site and others like it remain as secure as we can make them.

Mr SNOWDON—I did not necessarily want to go into the security arrangements. I am interested in knowing about the 50 sites you have mentioned. They are Territory owned sites, presumably?

Mr Wrangle—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—There must be another list of the Commonwealth sites, which would be all over the Northern Territory. Deputy Commissioner Wernham, does your depiction of that relationship exist for all of those sites?

Mr Wernham—I would have to have an example of the particular sites, but in general terms, yes. The relationship between us and the ADF is excellent. It has been built up over many years. Len Notaras made a very good point earlier: the response of the ADF has been nothing short of magnificent on many occasions. Were it not for them the response to the Katherine floods, for

example, would not have been possible. We look at sites and incidents on a case-by-case basis. The nature of the military is such that security is part of their business so in many cases they are self-contained. In those locations where some sort of joint or integrated response is needed consultation occurs and security is provided.

Mr SNOWDON—The obvious example is: if there were some incident here on the beach, which had an impact on Darwin, there would clearly be a strong emphasis on the civil response.

Mr Wernham—Indeed.

Mr SNOWDON—And the relationship is cordial and all those plans are in place?

Mr Wernham—Yes.

Mr SNOWDON—I notice that we do not have anyone from the Commonwealth here, which is why I am asking the question. I think that it would have been appropriate for the AFP to be here this morning and I think it would have been a good thing for the military to be here so that we could have a discussion about the dual relationships that might exist.

Mr Wernham—I can say that the relationship is cordial. There are formal arrangements in place and they cover a wide range of issues, facilities and incidents.

Mr SNOWDON—Can I ask a question about airports? Airport security has been an issue of hot debate in the federal parliament—regional airports in particular. We know that Darwin and Alice Springs have high security arrangements; to my knowledge Tennant Creek and Katherine have none and I do not think Nhulunbuy has any. Is that an issue that causes some concern? Is it an issue which you think needs to be addressed?

Mr Wernham—It is an issue that is part of the debate. The fact that light aircraft or smaller facilities do not have a high degree of security is certainly part of the debate at the National Counter-Terrorism Committee. I cannot fly an aeroplane but it is of concern to me that it would seem to be reasonably easy for an individual—particularly an individual who is not concerned about coming back—to hop into an aeroplane, turn it on and take off. That is the concern we have. This is an ongoing issue that DOTARS is examining in some detail. It has been the subject of some pretty robust discussion and it will continue to be. I think it is fair to say that that is an area of concern but it is an area of concern that is being addressed.

Mr SNOWDON—What are the jurisdictional limits of your operation? You have mentioned the gas fields out to the north-east, north and north-west of us—are they seen as part of your jurisdiction?

Mr Wernham—Some are; some are not. Superintendent Michael Stevens has brought a map along and I will get him to talk to it because he is intimately familiar with it. Certainly some of those gas fields are within our jurisdiction. As I indicated earlier, the sort of response we made would be dependent upon the goodwill of other resources. There is an issue of seaborne responses that has come up recently: you can have the best tactical people in the world but if they get seasick they are not too useful. That particular aspect needs to be considered. There are all sorts of complications. We are seeking an offshore vessel. We have access to those sorts of

facilities but it is not quite the same as having one. Government is well aware of our concerns in that regard. Mike can talk in greater detail about the specific facilities and in general terms about the way we might respond.

Supt Stevens—There are a number of facilities out there. We are responsible for our adjacent waters and also for the Ashmore-Cartier area outside the 12-mile zone around Ashmore Islands. The three main facilities out there are the *Northern Endeavour*, the *Challis Venture* and the *Jabiru Venture*. We have primary responsibility for anything that happens out there. The facilities within zone A of the area of cooperation in the Timor joint area is the responsibility of the Commonwealth but if something happened out in those areas, because we are here with the basic facilities, we would be required to attend. We would rely heavily, as Mr Wernham said, on ADF or Commonwealth assistance to get out there.

We would envisage that any sort of attack on those facilities would involve something like a vessel with explosives pulling alongside and setting them off, more so than a group of pirates taking over a facility, for example, and having a hostage situation, where we would negotiate a resolution. Based on that scenario, the issue for us would become one of consequence management and we would try to get out there and set up a forward command post. We would then rely on the facilities themselves, with their very well-practised evacuation and shut-down procedures et cetera to minimise any impact on the environment and the personnel that are out there. Basically, that is how we would operate under those circumstances.

Mr SNOWDON—What sort of transport assets do you have? You say you want an offshore vessel. Do you have access to helicopters?

Supt Stevens—We do not have direct access to them. There is only one helicopter, I think, in Darwin that is capable of that range. It is a Lloyds helicopter that transports personnel to and from those facilities. More so, we would have to rely on surface vessels or the military to come with any sort of aerial support.

Mr SNOWDON—That might be an issue we need to raise with the defence forces.

Mr BEAZLEY—We will look at that. Mr Chairman, we have been provided with a map.

CHAIR—It is going to be a bit hard to get that into *Hansard*. It can be tabled as exhibit No. 1.

Supt Stevens—The attachment provides details of who the operators and owners of those facilities are and where they are.

Senator SANDY MACDONALD—My question is to the deputy commissioner. In your submission you mentioned the Territory terrorist response group. As has been pointed out by you and us, the Northern Territory has many high-value terrorist opportunities and you are a considerable way from access to TAG East and TAG West. I am interested to know the capability and perhaps the number of personnel, if you are able to say, that your Territory terrorist response group has. Furthermore, if you have any suggestions as to what assistance might be given in training and hardware, you might take the opportunity to tell the committee.

Mr Wernham—I will just make a couple of brief comments and then get Mike to talk in further detail. Again, it would be nice to say, ‘We want more training, we want more of this or that,’ but, in a resource poor or small jurisdiction, it is like trying to fill up a bottle that has a narrow neck; you can only take so much at a time. Even if we had an enormous amount of largesse coming our way, we would have only a reasonably limited way to receive that additional support. The Territory response group was formed as a reasonably generous unit. Again, in keeping with the sorts of needs in the Northern Territory, it not only provides a counter-terrorism response and a response to an urban siege situation but it also has a search and rescue component, a dive component, bomb technicians, and so on. It is a pretty generous unit that can cover a fair range of areas with, obviously, a core of individuals who provide these sorts of responses. I will get Mike to tell you about numbers and the training regime.

Senator SANDY MACDONALD—Is the CBR response included in it?

Mr Wernham—Certainly. Darryl mentioned CBR earlier, but there are two streams to it: there is a CBR capacity for first responders, like members of the TRG, ambulance and medical staff, and then there is a further CBR capacity that the fire service has, in terms of their general response, but not so much as secondary responders. Perhaps if Mike gives you some broad outline of the TRG, Darryl could talk about the nuts and bolts of the CBR equipment plan that is under way.

Supt Stevens—It is fair to say that our TRG is comparable to the other states. We have 31 full-time trained TRG operatives. That includes seven team leaders, seven marksmen, one bomb response manager and two bomb technicians for render safe and disposal. All those people are represented at the national training venues that all the states attend under the umbrella of the NCTC. The training is identical for consistency purposes across all the jurisdictions in all areas such as bomb disposal, cordon and containment of incident sites, dynamic breaching of hostage premises and those sorts of things. Our training is consistent with everybody else and our level of training is also at the same level as all those other states.

CBR is an area where we are in the early stages of development. We have had people attend a CBR course at EMA just recently from our TRG group for purposes of coming back and training all our people in the use of protection and detection equipment, provided through the EMA enhancement program, which will be delivered later this year or early next year. Through the NCTC we have received about \$537,000 worth of protection equipment, some of it still to be delivered and some of it already here. We have received some level A—high level—bomb protection suits and breathing apparatus for going into contaminated zones, hot zones, with CBR incidents. Some other suits and things like blast mitigation systems are still waiting to be delivered to the Northern Territory. We would like to see more equipment, but it is a matter of priority and available funding.

CHAIR—We will now have a short break for morning tea.

Proceedings suspended from 10.17 a.m. to 10.32 a.m.

Mr PRICE—Dr Notaras, we all admire the work that the hospital did during the Bali episode. I ask a hypothetical question: if radiation had been an issue for the victims, how well equipped would you have been to handle that added complication?

Dr Notaras—We have a fairly refined radiation response policy. It is one that was refined from what I alluded to a little earlier—the 1993 incident with the USS *Houston*. From that time we have developed it further, looking at decontamination and the actual response to such an insult—whether it be terrorist, accidental or natural—given the proximity of the Ranger and Jabiluka mines and the export of uranium et cetera. From the response perspective, I believe that we have a very well-refined policy. We have had not only desktop exercises but, in the last few years, we have also had at least two full-scale practical exercises. The police, fire and emergency and indeed other agencies worked together to cope with a multiple casualty situation—casualties to the tune of about 20 or 30. That involved taking care of not only the casualties but also the carers—the clinical staff and those people who were retrieving the casualties from the scene.

The new facility does indeed have one significant decontamination unit with a number of portable units as well. We would be working very closely with police, fire and emergency and their facilities in that. A similar situation exists for the bioterrorism and other chemical attacks as well. But from a radiation perspective, I think we would probably be more or as refined as any other site in this country, given our proximity to the mines.

Mr PRICE—Looking at the Commonwealth Defence Force, it is shaped to respond to urban terrorism rather than to chemical and biological terrorism. You are well set up, but do you think that is the case when dealing with chemical and biological terrorism?

Dr Notaras—I do—again, from the hospital perspective. I would not wish to mislead the committee into believing that we can respond to anything for any period of time. Obviously, as I stated earlier, there is a period of sustainment and a capacity for response. Having said that, post 9/11 we were certainly called upon, as were the police, fire and emergency services, to respond to possible anthrax incidents and other incidents of suspicious powders and so on, and I believe we responded in a very efficient manner—with part of that efficiency coming out of the remoteness and the isolation that we find ourselves confronted with on a daily basis. We do have the intellectual capacity and, indeed, the national networking. We are part of the national network, so our people are up to date with exactly what is going on at a national level. Our physicians, our nursing staff and so on are highly trained, as I believe are the people we work with—fire, police, emergency and the military.

Mr PRICE—Is the Territory in a better shape to respond to one type of incident—an urban siege and terrorist incident with a lesser capacity for chemical or biological, for instance, and, if so, are you comfortable with that? And how do you determine that you should have a greater capacity in one area over another.

Dr Notaras—I might refer that to the deputy commissioner, with the preliminary comment that, from a hospital and a healthcare sector perspective, we are capable of responding to a range. The capacity of expecting the unexpected is one of the premises upon which we operate. Having said that, I would defer to Deputy Commissioner Wernham.

Mr Wernham—It would be fair to say that our chemical, biological and radiological response capacity is limited. It is a whole lot better than it was, which was zero, and it is being progressively ramped up as part of national arrangements. Mike and Darryl can give you specific details as to the numbers involved there. The other aspect of the question was, ‘Are we better equipped to deal with an urban terrorist incident?’

Mr PRICE—Yes, for example a hostage situation vis-a-vis a chemical, biological or radiological attack?

Mr Wernham—Yes, certainly, in terms of our capacity to respond to what you could describe as a hostage or an urban armed offender/siege situation, we are well equipped to deal with that not only within the urban area of Darwin but in other remote areas of the Northern Territory. We have plans and are well versed and practised in those. In general terms, our CBR response capability is limited but it is increasing. It is a measured process. As I say, Mike and Darryl can give you some numbers, if they are useful for you in terms of the way the capacity is increasing.

Mr BEAZLEY—Do you have enough chemical suits and that sort of thing?

Mr Pepper—Within the Territory at the moment from the fire service perspective we have 29 fully encapsulated suits and 92 splash suits, which is for the people who do the decontamination. There will be more suits to enhance that response capability from the \$18.7 million that the federal government has provided to EMA. The NCTC and the police have also got a capability in chemical suits for their first responders. So from a normal Territory perspective, yes, we have adequate supplies of those.

The difficulty in the Territory—and I think anywhere in Australia—is identifying what the chemical or biological agent might be. Again, that capability will be enhanced through the package now arriving. That package will include detection equipment, mini labs and the rest of it. The Territory has just sent away people from the health department and the fire, police and ambulance services to do training courses to start to be able to have a first response capability. But, again, as the deputy commissioner said, we are in our infancy and we are building on that on an as-needs basis to increase our ability to deliver that service.

Mr Wernham—Mike, have you got anything to add in terms of the police capacity?

Supt Stevens—No, I think Darryl covered it.

Mr PRICE—Is it fair to say that we are generally overdone on hostages and underdone in other scenarios?

Supt Stevens—I do not think it is overdone. History has dictated that those skills in the siege hostage scenario were honed very well earlier on. As Darryl said, the CBR thing is something that has come out in the last six to 12 months—that heightened awareness and the need to skill up those people who would be responsible for that.

Mr PRICE—Superintendent, perhaps this question should wait for later, but Mr Beazley made the point that we need to be prepared for a hostage situation, but in fact it appears that that would be the less likely thing that we will confront compared to the other.

Supt Stevens—I think that is correct. Intelligence suggests that the MO of most of the terrorist organisations which would be a threat to the Northern Territory—in particular JI in South-East Asia—is that they focus on the truck bomb type scenario and not so much like the Chechens that took hostages in the Russian theatre.

Mr Wernham—Whilst the MO of the terrorist groups is less about hostage situations, the skills of police across Australia remain honed in that area. I do not think that there is a single exercise scenario—within reason—that I have not seen in some way replicated in urban crime situations. That training, that traditional focus on that sort of approach, has not been wasted. Mike, I and others have certainly experienced it on a number of occasions. Whether it be hostage or siege situations, that training has not gone to waste.

Mr PRICE—As chief fire officer, in terms of a chemical, biological or radiation incident, at what stage would your resources be stretched and you need to call in assistance?

Mr Pepper—Very early. We would have a first responsible capability to go in and snatch people out of those environments. With the number of suits and not knowing what chemical you are dealing with, you are not sure of what result that chemical will have on the suits after they have been used. We would have an initial capability to go in and at least try to make the scene safe for people—that is, after the police. If a bomb has been detonated, then it would have to be made safe by the police bomb squad before we could go in. We would be there to at least render assistance and get the people out, after the police have declared the scene safe.

The reason for having the same standard suits under this new package is so you have the ability to call on another state to have them flown in immediately. They are not large pieces of equipment. We are not talking cranes and tonnes and tonnes of stuff. They can fly this stuff in from other state jurisdictions to support us. For a minimum of 24 hours—even 48 hours—we would be able to handle those sorts of first responses. We would call on our counterparts in other states and territories—both police and fire—to render assistance.

Mr PRICE—Do you think that every territory and state jurisdiction should have a certain standard—maybe a national standard—laid down of capacity or capability in this area, particularly if you are fighting for scarce dollars? I am sure that you have to make a decision about another fire crew or investing in this area.

Mr Pepper—That is the path that we are down at the moment, because there is a national approach to USAR and CBR. They are national working parties now, instead of the states and territories doing it themselves. Over the last two years there has been this concentrated effort of bringing this into a national field so that we have standards, especially in the sense of the equipment, because without interoperability the problem—

Mr PRICE—It makes it doubly worse.

Mr Pepper—It does not work at all. From a fire services perspective, we have seen this from the bushfires—with respect to equipment, appliances and so forth. There have been lessons learned from that. The national working parties now are addressing what would be a good amount of equipment to have. An underlying factor is how big is the bomb and how big is the incident going to be? You cannot really determine that. You need a first response capability and then you need national networks and coordination networks that bring in your additional resources to deal with it.

CHAIR—Dr Notaras, bearing in mind that in recent times the most prolific injuries caused in the event of terrorist attacks, whether September 11 or Bali, have been burns—bombing seems

to be the modus operandi now, much more than taking hostages—what is the maximum number of burns victims needing hospitalisation that you can cater for in the Royal Darwin Hospital?

Dr Notaras—In terms of the response to Bali, we coped in a short period of time with 55 who would require a major burns centre in any other part of this country. Our capacity was for four. That gives you an idea of the ability. I guess this comes back to the question raised by Mr Beazley a little earlier regarding what, if we had the opportunity for a wish list, we would like to lay dormant. Clearly, this is one of those areas. On a day-to-day basis, our burns unit is capable of moving up to usually four burns victims of a reasonably serious nature, but by the same token we are a domain or a jurisdiction of generalists. This is something that the deputy commissioner mentioned earlier. Our surgeons, our nursing staff and the majority of our staff are skilled in a number of areas, very capably. They are capable of responding on an average day to, say, four, but in an emergency situation we showed that we could respond to up to 50 or perhaps 60. With the new facility we would be able to do very much the same again for a short period—perhaps a week at maximum—with assistance then from interstate jurisdictions.

CHAIR—So your aim would be to stabilise victims so that they could be moved?

Dr Notaras—Yes. Someone with up to about 20-25 per cent burns to the body we can retain in the hospital and continue to treat with grafting and so on. After a 25 or 30 per cent burn, we would be looking at moving the patient to another centre such as the Concord or indeed Royal Perth or Royal Adelaide, as we did. But, having said all that, I think it is critical to underline the note in the CD-ROM that is being distributed. The injuries presenting after a bomb explosion are much more diverse than burns. Burns were indeed the most predominant but there were impalements and amputations—traumatic amputations indeed—and a whole series of injuries that we had not expected. The idea was that we were going to have a series of burns come down, and at one stage there were going to be 17 to 20 and that was to be the maximum. What we actually saw was that burns became secondary to the other injuries we were dealing with—brain infarcts or dead parts of brains, collapsed lungs and penetrative injuries and so on. So I think the multiple nature of the injuries sustained in any of these attacks, whether they be blasts or whatever else, should be taken into consideration as well. But, to answer your question, for a short period we have proven that we can deal with up to 55 plus, but on a day-to-day basis it is four.

CHAIR—You spoke earlier about the capacities for disaster management, with Tennant Creek, I think you said, and Alice Springs and a number of other major hospitals that you have in the Territory. In reality, if there was an incident in Darwin you would be more likely to trans-ship people to Royal Perth or Adelaide or Concord rather than those hospitals, wouldn't you?

Dr Notaras—Yes, absolutely. It would be the reverse scenario in terms of the smaller hospitals such as Gove and Katherine—they would be coming to Darwin for the purposes of stabilisation and then using, in conjunction with others, the C-130s from the RAAF, and we would be using our own aero retrieval service. We have five aircraft in the Top End, and we use the Royal Australian Flying Doctor Service in Central Australia. So we would be using those services plus other aero retrieval services.

CHAIR—And if it were a combination of chemical and burns, what would happen? I do remember being here in the early 1990s on a Senate inquiry and having talks at length with I think your former officer in charge, who was a Dr Nitschke, if I remember rightly.

Dr Notaras—Dr Nitschke has moved on to other things.

CHAIR—I have noticed. I do not think it was our fault, though.

Dr Notaras—I think he took the more adversarial approach at that stage.

CHAIR—Especially that day. If there is a combination of these, in the event of a chemical or biological attack and burns victims, then it would be something that you probably could not prepare for in general, could you? While you can prepare or be prepared to the best of your capacity, there are some events that are just beyond a city the size of Darwin, aren't there?

Dr Notaras—Again, given the size and the economy of scale, yes, there will always be events that are well beyond the capacity not only of Darwin but of New York indeed. Having presented at the National Disaster Management Conference in Melbourne, I learned from the people out of New York, out of Oklahoma and other places that they were not as well prepared for what they confronted on the day as we were, given that we had a ramp-up time—a time to prepare for what we were going to receive. So I think internationally we are dealing with a random element and an element that defies preparation in some senses. So I guess we have to be vigilant and prepared for the unexpected. To that particular cause, I think we are well prepared for just about anything that could be thrown at us.

CHAIR—I want to move to one other issue because I think that, as representatives of the Commonwealth parliament, we ought to ask questions relating to how comfortable you feel about the new policy that has been put in place for the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and the national security committee. Are you comfortable with the policies and the arrangements that have been put in place in recent times? Are there any improvements that could be made? I think it is important that we know about them, if there are.

Mr Wernham—I am comfortable with the arrangements because they have taken account of the changing world and Australia's circumstances. There has been a degree of flexibility. There is certainly extensive consultation. A massive amount of work has gone into the documents that we live by, if you like—the plan and the handbook. As with any good plan, they are living documents. I think the preparedness of the committee as structured and the PSC generally to listen and to adapt is excellent. So it would be a brave person who said that the plan and the handbook are perfect. It is in a recently completed format. No doubt as we exercise it, we will identify flaws and deficiencies but, like any good plan, it will be adapted and changed to meet those contingencies.

There is a certain degree of pragmatism and 'it'll be right on the day' about any exercise or real-time thing. You can refer to plans, but really it comes down to operational efficiency of your response. You have a broad plan, you have a broad mandate to work to, but it comes down to your efficient and effective operational working practices and training that carry these things through. So, in general terms, I think the structure is good and the evolutionary nature of the plan

and the handbook meets the requirements certainly of us as a jurisdiction and the need for integration and interoperability of national responses.

CHAIR—During the consultation process that took place were you satisfied that you had a good enough opportunity to have input into that plan?

Mr Wernham—Yes.

CHAIR—I guess the chief minister's office—

Mr Wernham—Indeed. The difficulty in the Northern Territory of course is that we are a long way from anywhere. It takes us forever and a day to go to Canberra and back. Notwithstanding that, we are part of the executive of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee. Chris certainly is part of the national working party on crisis centres. So again, notwithstanding that we are a small jurisdiction, we have had significant input, along with the other jurisdictions, in the planning and the preparation process.

Mr Wrangle—I would add that the new arrangements, I think importantly, are underpinned or supported by an exercise program—I think it has trebled compared with what we had last time.

Mr Wernham—Yes.

Mr Wrangle—It is also quite ambitious in that it is multijurisdictional exercises. So, by the very design, we are seeing ourselves relating with other states more frequently. The process of keeping the procedures updated and revising them in the light of every exercise is very active. Certainly, in all the forums I have attended these things have been discussed quite openly and the approach has been, 'If there is a better way we can do it, we'd like to hear about it.' It has been very positive.

Mr BEAZLEY—Deputy Commissioner, in your submission it is stated:

As such, the Northern Territory Government passed legislation in the April 2003 sittings requesting the Commonwealth to enact appropriate Legislation for the Northern Territory. This has the effect of providing the Commonwealth the legislative means to deal with terrorism in the NT when and where appropriate.

What is the character of that particular request? I thought your legislation was complete unto itself. What do they particularly require of the Commonwealth here?

Mr Wernham—I will get Mike to provide some further details. However, it basically means that there is that reciprocal ability for Commonwealth agencies to operate within the Northern Territory. I think it is as simple as that.

Mr BEAZLEY—It is not anything particularly special?

Mr Wernham—That is right. I will not attempt the word that arises from reciprocal but, as I say, it is about achieving that.

Mr BEAZLEY—There is no particular gap in Commonwealth legislation as far as you are concerned that is identified by that process?

Mr Wernham—Not to my knowledge.

Supt Stevens—No, there is not. As Mr Wernham says, it is mainly allowing those elements of the Commonwealth to be used and act in the Northern Territory to assist in that counter-terrorism arrangement.

Mr PRICE—Chief Fire Officer, you talked about your first-in capability in chemical, biological and radiological, and we talked about the ability to get more suits if you want them. Could you scale the circumstances where you would need to get more personnel in? What determines the difference between getting assistance from other state jurisdictions, such as in the bushfires, and calling the Defence capability in?

Mr Pepper—From a Territory perspective, we have 156 permanent firefighters and some 500 volunteers. All of the nine permanent stations in the Territory have chemical suits. There are four chemical suits in each of those, and the staff are trained to use them. Under the Territory legislation we have hazardous chemical responsibility for hazardous chemical loads. Because of that, we are trained in that form of response. CBR enhances the initial response we have for hazardous chemicals. I suppose in the Northern Territory we are gained by the sense that we have the emergency response squadron of the military here. I am sure the committee knows the one in Sydney. They have a detachment of that response squadron here. It has full CBR and fire capabilities.

Mr PRICE—I did not know that.

Mr Pepper—That is a military—

Mr Wrangle—Secret.

Mr Pepper—It is not a secret any more. The military has an emergency response squadron stationed in the Northern Territory and they assist us. We do joint exercises together, and they are part of our counterdisaster plan. Again, it all works within the Territory response.

Mr PRICE—So you would call them if necessary ahead of calling someone from Queensland or South Australia?

Mr Pepper—Yes. Look at an incident we had here in June last year. It was only a hazardous chemical incident, but we used the military response to help us because it was a container ship and there was a long duration to it. The military came forth as soon as they were requested. It is good backup support for the Territory.

CHAIR—We talk about a terrorist attack as though it is going to be a single terrorist attack. Do you have any special arrangements in place for simultaneous events or attacks occurring throughout the Territory? That is what happened in the US—simultaneous attacks.

Mr Wernham—Yes, you are right. That is part of our day-to-day working life, I suppose, and it is the nature of policing, that we are dealing with things on a number of fronts and we prioritise. Our infrastructure, as I indicated earlier, is designed so that it can be broken up into a series of EOCs. Were we to have simultaneous events in Darwin, for example, and something happening down the track, we could set up command centres that dealt with each of those and have a structure that communicates one with the other. It would be also fair to ask how we would deal with a range of issues. With some difficulty, but that is the nature of policing. We would ramp up as best we could; we would respond in an operational sense as we would do for any other range of events that we have on a day-to-day basis. Like any policing issues, we prioritise so that resources most needed are put to these particular incidents, perhaps at the cost of others.

CHAIR—What about your disaster council record? What sort of a register do you keep of things like who has got the heavy lifting equipment in the case of structural damage? What sort of a register do you keep of all those things?

Mr Wernham—That is kept and Darryl, who is the executive officer of that committee, can probably answer it better than me. Certainly the disasters act is an extensive document with extensive powers that enable that sort of equipment to be taken hold of and controlled for a period of time. But an annex to the workings of the committee is lists of available equipment.

Mr Pepper—There is a Territory plan, plus there are regional and local plans. Each of those plans has had local input into them. And in each local area, from the bottom upwards, we would know what is available in those areas through the local police controller.

CHAIR—For instance, if something happened in Katherine, you would know who to ring to get a crane?

Mr Pepper—Yes.

CHAIR—You have got all of those things registered?

Mr Pepper—Yes, all that is done under the local counterdisaster committee.

CHAIR—Colleagues, are there any further general questions before we move in camera? If there are not, I must explain that for the purpose of going in camera Deputy Commissioner Wernham and Superintendent Stevens will remain, as will Mr Wrangle and Mr Burgess, who are both on that disaster council, as I understand it. I thank those other people who have been here this morning for their information and the way they have imparted that information to us, particularly Dr Notaras. Your contribution in relation to what the hospital can and cannot do is very important to our inquiry. When we are taking evidence from somewhere like Darwin and then move to a city like Sydney with 4½ million people or whatever, there are obvious differences. It would appear from what you have said to us that you are in a very good position and have put a lot of thought into it with your own disaster council and working with the National Counter-Terrorism Committee. It certainly means we are better placed than we would have been a couple of years ago to handle any incident that might happen. Thank you very much on behalf of the committee for your time in meeting with us this morning. With that in mind, I have to ask everybody else to leave the room because we are going to have a session in camera

with Deputy Commissioner Wernham, Superintendent Stevens, Mr Wrangle and Mr Burgess. Thank you very much.

Evidence was then taken in camera—

Resolved (on motion by **Senator Sandy Macdonald**):

That this committee authorises publication of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.30 a.m.