



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND
CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Reference: Crime in the community

THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2002

CANBERRA

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Thursday, 19 September 2002

Members: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop (*Chair*), Mr Murphy (*Deputy Chair*), Ms Julie Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Kerr, Mr Melham, Ms Panopoulos, Mr Sciacca, Mr Secker and Dr Washer

Members in attendance: Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Cadman, Mr Melham, Mr Murphy, Mr Secker and Dr Washer

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

The extent and impact of crime and fear of crime within the Australian community and effective measures for the Commonwealth in countering and preventing crime. The Committee's inquiry shall consider but not be limited to:

- a) the types of crimes committed against Australians
- b) perpetrators of crime and motives
- c) fear of crime in the community
- d) the impact of being a victim of crime and fear of crime
- e) strategies to support victims and reduce crime
- f) apprehension rates
- g) effectiveness of sentencing
- h) community safety and policing

WITNESSES

MAYHEW, Ms Patricia, Consultant Criminologist, Australian Institute of Criminology1

Committee met at 9.09 a.m.**MAYHEW, Ms Patricia, Consultant Criminologist, Australian Institute of Criminology**

CHAIR—I welcome Ms Pat Mayhew, a very distinguished criminologist. We are delighted you were able to join us this morning. We are very anxious to hear about the work that you have done both in the UK and here. It will be very pertinent to our inquiry. So I would be delighted if we could hear from you to begin with, and then people will ask questions.

Ms Mayhew—I am passing around a document which I will walk you through. You can consider it in more detail afterwards. I thought I might make a small number of points about fear of crime and about trying to get it into better perspective, both from the Australian point of view and from the point of view of understanding it. I then want to move on to some facts about the level of crime in Australia relative to other countries, and whether or not the picture of crime in Australia is any different. Then I want to talk about some trends in crime in other countries and how Australia does and does not line up against them. There is some material at the back of the pack on the crime prevention program in the UK, but I will not go over that unless you particularly want me to. This is because the results of this very expensive, ambitious and innovative crime reduction program are not really coming through as yet—although they will in due course.

Let me start with fear of crime. The sources of information I am drawing on principally are some results from your own crime and safety survey—which is a victimisation survey—some results from the British crime survey, and some results from the International Crime Victimization Survey, which I will explain a bit more later. These are all victimisation surveys which typically ask not only about people's experience of crime but about their attitudes to crime, their fears, their perceptions of the police and so on. Frankly, they are the best source of information that we have about what people do and do not fear.

Figure 1 shows from the international crime survey that fear of crime is relatively high in Australia, as compared to other countries. The 17 countries shown are industrialised countries—mainly in Western Europe, although they include North America. There are a number of measures which you can read down the left-hand side of the graph. We have pretty similar levels of fear to those in England and Wales, but in Australia these levels are substantially above the average for these Western countries. So you are pretty poorly off as regards what people's concerns about crime are.

One question that is often raised—and I have seen it in the terms of reference—is that somehow people's fears are irrational, in the sense that their risks are not as high as they perceive them to be. The point to make here is that that is only true to an extent, because it is very difficult to talk about someone's perception of their own risk because we do not know what they are comparing it to. Are they thinking of themselves as more at risk than their neighbour, or more at risk of being burgled than of getting breast cancer, say? The fact of the matter is that the most fearful people are

the people who have most to fear. They are typically those who live in the worst areas and they are typically the most vulnerable.

You might say, 'Well, what about the elderly?' One misunderstanding about the elderly which I think is worth holding on to is that there are some measures of fear on which they register highest, but it is not true to say that they are more fearful of burglary, of car theft or of physical attack. It is activities out of the house that they register the most fear about. But you could argue that this is a function of age and that they are generally more fearful about going out at night because they are going to trip up on the pavement, and so on and so forth. It is a point to bear in mind that one should not labour too much the idea that is from the elderly that fear is coming; there are many other groups which are also fearful.

One point I should make is that I feel quite strongly that one can talk about criminological facts as pertaining to many countries. There is nothing special about victimisation in Australia. There is nothing special about the dynamics of fear in Australia. All the criminological evidence shows that patterns of offending and of vulnerability and attitudes to crime are very consistent across counties in terms of the dynamics of them. That means that you are able to draw on evidence from outside Australia. I do appreciate that people always want their local evidence. They want their local examples. They want their local figures. On the other hand, there is a great deal you can draw from research and understanding elsewhere.

Who are the most fearful? Women, generally speaking. People who have been victimised and people on lower incomes are generally less confident about all aspects of their lives. People in high crime areas have got the right to be more fearful. The elderly, on some measures, and people who have poor health are more fearful—but, again, this might just signify a general feeling of vulnerability. Tabloid newspaper readers rather than broadsheet newspaper readers are more fearful, as are those who are in areas where there is social dislocation. One of the findings that has emerged in England that is quite important, in so far as it gives you a handle as to what you might do about reducing fear, is that over and above crime levels, if areas are disorderly—if they are run down and there is lots of graffiti and litter and they seem uncared for—levels of fear are higher in those areas. It may be because the run-down nature of the area is signalling a crime problem.

This is a personal view, but I get slightly cross with the view that fear is inherently a bad thing. Of course, it is not necessarily a bad thing entirely. Crime prevention publicity builds on fear. A certain amount of reasonable cautiousness is what one would want in people. We asked in England about the notion that fear of crime destroys people's quality of life and whether this was so. In fact, relatively few people said it had a serious effect on their quality of life—six or seven per cent. This is much lower than people would imagine from what newspapers write up. I would suggest it is a similar level here. What can you do about it? The box on the page has some of the things that have been suggested with some sort of evidential backing as to what you might do. I am sure none of them are particularly new to you, but I have listed them there.

I want to talk now about comparative levels of crime in Australia, drawing on the International Crime Victimization Survey, which I have had a lot to do with. It has been done in 60 countries across the world and in about 20 industrialised countries—and I am only talking about industrialised countries. It has been done four times and Australia has taken part in three sweeps. The point of it is that it is entirely standardised. It is done in exactly the same way with the same questions and with the same data analysis in all the countries. In that sense, it is unique.

I have only shown a couple of slides on the results. Australia comes at the top of this list of 17 countries on most types of crime, such as burglary with entry, theft of cars and theft from cars. It is in company, however, with England, Wales and the Netherlands. I do not know whether that makes you feel any better. Many of the differences at the top end of the scale are fairly marginal statistically. One can say that there is a group of countries at the top which are statistically different from the countries at the bottom but one should not quibble too much about the precise differences in risk.

Mr SECKER—Could I ask whether that is over a one-year period or over a life period.

Ms Mayhew—It is over one year.

Mr SECKER—You are saying that 58—

Ms Mayhew—There are 58 incidents per 100 people or 30 people out of 100 who have been victims, once or more, of something that the survey measured.

Mr SECKER—That is a lot.

Ms Mayhew—That is relatively typical—a quarter to a third—bearing in mind that many of the things are relatively trivial. They are technically criminal—for example, vandalism, thefts from cars and attempted burglaries—but that is par for the course. Risks in Australia are higher than in other countries. In the previous sweeps—

Mr SECKER—Maybe I should get a motor bike or a bike.

Ms Mayhew—Yes, if you have a motor bike you are doing really well!

Mr SECKER—If you have two wheels you are fairly safe!

Ms Mayhew—The only crime that Japan comes top of is bicycle theft. One thing to take from figure 6 is that over a quarter of people's everyday experience of crime is something to do with their cars. That really has quite an important preventive implication. There are other results in the survey about attitudes towards the police, which are favourable here. The level of reporting to the police is not quite as high as in some other countries. On the other hand, the evidence is that attitudes to the police do not drive reporting; it is really more about pragmatic considerations and cultural tendencies.

Moving to page 4, one of the interesting things about the ICVS results, to go back to a point I mentioned earlier, is that it shows that the contours of victimisation and experience of crime are remarkably similar across different industrialised countries. One respect in which they are similar is assessments of the seriousness of different crimes; namely, what it is that victims rate most seriously. One of the things they rate seriously is having their car stolen because it is highly inconvenient. Robberies with weapons are regarded seriously, as are assaults and burglary with entry. There is nothing all that surprising there except perhaps theft of cars which, in victim's terms, is really quite an important—

CHAIR—It is the second largest purchase you make in your life.

Ms Mayhew—Yes, but you also cannot get to work—

CHAIR—You have probably left your credit cards in it.

Ms Mayhew—And your rollerblades in the boot or whatever. Similarly, the contours of risks of victimisation are remarkably similar in most of the countries. This is seen when one does sophisticated analysis of the independent effect of particular factors, bearing in mind that some factors are linked—for example, low-income households tend to live in higher crime areas. Some of the factors that bear on the high risks of crime are these: if you live in urban areas, if you are an affluent household in a poor neighbourhood then you are not doing very well; if you are a younger person or a younger household; if you go out a lot you are exposing yourself to a lot more assaultive crime and street crime; and if you are not in a permanent relationship, irrespective of being younger—

CHAIR—Why?

Ms Mayhew—Probably it is lifestyle: you date more often or you go to late-night bars more often. It may be that you are not in a permanent relationship because your previous relationship had been abusive. Men generally—

Mr SECKER—If you are a young playboy in the city you are in trouble!

Ms Mayhew—Victim Support in England, which is an extremely strong movement, emphasises the fact that people always underestimate the effect that crime has on young men. People now are used to the notion that young men are the ones at risk but they pooh-pooh it saying, 'They can cope with that.' Victim Support's line is that actually that is not true. It is very distressing to them. They are just as affected as other people. I will now move on to my last section.

Mr SECKER—Are we looking at page 4?

Ms Mayhew—Yes.

Mr SECKER—It is interesting that the US and Canada have gone down. Has Australia gone down?

Ms Mayhew—I am just coming to that.

Mr SECKER—Has Japan basically been the same?

Ms Mayhew—No. Let me take you through it. I think you will find this very interesting because it is probably not something that is widely known. Victim surveys are best for looking at comparative levels of victimisation because, as you know, they pick up crimes irrespective of whether they were reported to or recorded by the police. When looking at a number of countries over a long period of time, one has to resort to police figures. One of things that I was doing before I came to Canberra, and which I have continued here, is looking at trends in crime in a number of different countries. You cannot look at comparative levels of crime recorded by the police, because what the police record in different countries is a different basket of apples and pears. But if you assume that they keep the same apples and pears in the basket over time, you can look at trends. This is what I am doing here. I am mainly indexing crime rates to 100 at a particular point in time. Obviously, while I have been here, I have been trying to locate Australia in this pattern of trends. It is now widely accepted by Americans and other people that crime went down in the US. It took a remarkably long time for them to notice that it was going down. It was only really when violent crime went down at the beginning of the 1990s, according to police figures, that everybody woke up.

Mr SECKER—Was violent crime the area that went down?

Ms Mayhew—No. I have only shown you some figures. The US is unusual in that it has had a crime victimisation survey since 1973, annually. It has been a very large-scale survey that has shown decreasing violence since the late seventies. The survey shows that property crime is 60 per cent less now than it was in 1973, which is really quite a remarkable drop.

Mr SECKER—Is there a reason for that? Is it because there are more burglar alarms?

Ms Mayhew—We will come to that. When violence was going down in the police figures and the Americans woke up to what was happening, all sorts of explanations were put forward. The point I would make is that they were very insular and parochial explanations. They were saying, ‘Is it guns, unemployment, zero tolerance or Comstat?’ They did not look across the border to Canada where exactly the same thing was happening but without all the specifically American factors. It was not exactly the same drop—in truth, it was a bit less marked—but certainly there was a large drop in crime.

I have put together three decades of figures by looking at the percentage change in crime in the seventies, eighties and nineties. I have done that in figure 8, the first figure on page 5, which shows the percentages for the US and Canada together, nine Western countries together, New Zealand, Australia and Japan. We will look at Japan first. Japan was extraordinarily unusual after the war in that it had no increase at all in crime in the sixties, seventies and eighties, whereas rises in crime were very characteristic in every other country. Japan managed to buck the trend. Very

interestingly, in the nineties it had quite a substantial increase in crime. I do not think that I have to be terribly profound in explaining it: it must simply be the influence of Westernisation.

Mr SECKER—Is the overall rate still lower?

Ms Mayhew—Yes.

Mr SECKER—So the increase is coming off a low base?

Ms Mayhew—Yes. The ICVS shows Japan is extremely low on all the measures, except bicycle theft. There are two things in figure 8 that I want to draw your attention to other than Japan. In most groups of countries the increase in the seventies was higher than in the eighties and the nineties. What people do not understand, in this debate on rising crime, is that although it is rising in Australia it is rising less than it has done in the past. I will provide some more information on that later. The main thing about figure 8 is that, although New Zealand has followed the Western European trend, Australia has not. It is necessary to say that the long-run series of figures on crime in Australia is not terribly pukka. In fact, these figures do not quite relate to the seventies, eighties and nineties because the best long-run series of data in Australia starts in 1973-74. One has to collate the state figures together. It is only since 1993, as you will know, that the ABS has had a program of providing state figures.

One thing that is clear, looking behind these trends, is that what is driving the downward trend is property crime not violence. Violent crime figures, here and in other countries, are generally still increasing. The point I would make is to sound a note of caution about whether or not the figures should be taken at face value. I strongly believe that you should not take them at face value for reasons I am sure you will know. There is more reporting to the police with changes in tolerance thresholds. There is certainly more recording by the police of some forms of violence, for example domestic violence, and this is well established. The survey trends for violence in England and Wales and the US, for which we have long-run data, are much lower than the increases in police figures. In England they are going up, but nothing like as steeply as the police figures. In the United States they are actually going down more than the police figures.

I got together some data for Australia on hospital separations. This is a count of people who go out of hospital, but I assume that if they go out they must have gone in. It is people who occupy a bed whether it is for half a day or three weeks. It is not accident and emergency data, but it is for those occupying a bed.

CHAIR—I can tell you that most people go there for kidney complaints.

Ms Mayhew—Yes. There are codes for separations, so you have the cause of why they were in hospital. I have some figures from AIHW.

CHAIR—Yes, they are very good.

Ms Mayhew—Very interestingly, the ABS figures since 1995-96 show a 36 per cent increase in violent crime, whereas the hospital separation figures show an increase of only a third of that level of 12 per cent. Those are new figures. You will not have seen them anywhere else because I only did them yesterday. Going to page 6, figure 10, Australia is not any different. The increases in violent crime, according to the police figures, are much higher than the increases in property crime.

But if you look at property crime—that is, the middle group of bars—the 17 per cent increase is a lot less than the increase was in the seventies, and it is less than the increase was in the eighties. So there is a little bit of good news there. If you look at figure 11, you can see that vehicle theft and burglary since 1993 are relatively flat. There is a bit of a clue here about the trends in other countries. In England, it was burglary which started to drop first, and this is when people started to think, ‘Oh, perhaps something is happening.’

CHAIR—There was a quite considerable drop, we heard, in the car theft figures last year, as opposed to 2000-01.

Ms Mayhew—I do not think that one should put too much store on year-on-year changes, because these figures can be volatile for a number of reasons. But one can look sensibly at five-year bands and 10-year bands to get some sort of idea. Robbery on the ABS figures is the thing that one should be concerned about. There is no particular reason why the police should be recording more robberies. With assault, one could say that it might be a bit artificial, but I do not think one could argue that with robbery—it is something genuinely different. The increase in robbery I have to say, is common to some other countries. England and Wales have had particularly steep increases in robberies. Figure 12 shows some of the drops in property crime in the nineties. This is very unusual. All these countries have had two previous decades of very substantial increases in crime.

Summarising these main points, the downward trend is most remarkable in the US, but the explanations have been very unsatisfactory because they have concentrated too much on specifically American factors and disregarded the fact that Canada has had the same thing happen even though not all the conditions in Canada are the same. The downward trend in Europe came later, typically about 1991. It is not entirely consistent by country—I have lumped them together—but in more countries than not crime has gone down, as you can see from figure 12. It is driven down by property crime, whereas violence has gone up; but I do not necessarily put great store in the increase in violence. It is very interesting that New Zealand conforms to Western Europe and is out of line with you, and that you are out of line with everybody else. The rate of increase was much higher in the seventies, and that was true in Australia as well as here.

We do not necessarily have to go through all this, but obviously when I present these results to other audiences the first question is, ‘Why have crime rates gone down?’ It is extremely difficult to explain it, because you are talking about factors that have to be relevant to a large number of different countries with different social and economic change. One has to think of macro explanations. If you want, we can go through them very quickly. As we will see, many of these explanations are things that

we used the other way around to explain rising crime. Rising crime could be because police are recording more; rising crime could be because victims are reporting more. If you use those reasons to explain the decrease, you have got to turn them upside down and say, 'Well, is it because they are now recording less?' It seems to me very unlikely that they are recording less; it seems to me very unlikely that victims are reporting less.

One of the big issues in the debate about the drop in the US—as you will probably know—was how much it was due to the extraordinary increase in imprisonment rates. But the imprisonment trend was absolutely flat in Canada over three decades, and they had a similar decrease in crime. Figure 13 shows that there is no relationship between changes in imprisonment rates and changes in crime rates. Some countries that have had increases in imprisonment rates have had decreases in crime, and some countries where there have been very small changes in imprisonment or even a decrease in imprisonment have had a decrease in crime.

Are there other sanctions? Is there something about the criminal justice options now available to countries that has increased the likelihood of people being punished? That is very difficult to substantiate. Certainly it is impossible to substantiate, in terms of the UK, where the risk of punishment has gone down. One of the things that is probably important—and there may be a little clue here about Australia—is the demographic effect in terms of the ageing population. Although this is a nice, seemingly simple explanation—it is something people can understand: the number of higher risk males is reducing—the best empirical studies have not come up with quite as clear an answer as one would think. There is a demographic effect but it is not that powerful. However, clearly there must be something in it. The demography in Australia is slightly different.

CHAIR—It is.

Ms Mayhew—I was astounded to learn, when they were writing up your census results—this was in a useful article in one of the newspapers—that one in four people in Italy is over 60. That is an astonishing figure.

CHAIR—Their birthrate is 1.1 and the year before last the city of Bologna lost 10,000 people from its population. Japan will lose 10 million. By 2100, if it does not do something, Germany will run out of Germans altogether.

Ms Mayhew—As well as a straight demographic effect there are also the repercussions of the change in demography.

Mr SECKER—You are saying that there is no causal relationship between imprisonment and crime?

Ms Mayhew—I would say that the figures I have collated on changes in imprisonment rates do not substantiate the idea that increases in imprisonment lead to decreases in crime, because you can see that there is no obvious relationship in figure—

Mr SECKER—But if you worked the other way and basically said, ‘Well, we won’t imprison you,’ surely the crime rate would go up.

Ms Mayhew—It may do. What is the figure? Is it a 10 per cent increase in the prison population and a one per cent decrease in crime? Clearly, nobody is going to take imprisonment away. In a way, it is silly even to consider it. It has to be there. It still is the ultimate sanction. But you are imprisoning what may be a relatively small proportion of the offending population.

CHAIR—We are here—only 25 per cent. I have talked about the ageing population for quite some time and I think it is important. I like your second point about the increase in the dominant value of middle-aged people. That is a whole new way of thinking about it. Our major offenders are 17 to 25 and if you have fewer of them, presumably you are going to have a little less crime. I really like your idea there.

Ms Mayhew—As I say, this would be a spin-off from a demographic effect. The other thing that has taken some hold as an explanation is that economic conditions in Europe were more favourable in the 1990s, so there are more jobs and so on. You should be able to test that because the economic data are relatively good. However, I am not so sure whether the economic conditions in New Zealand were any better in the 1990s than the economic conditions were in Australia.

CHAIR—They have been pretty good here recently.

Ms Mayhew—That is why it is really difficult to explain all this. One of the explanations when crime was rising was that it was because mothers were going out to work and leaving latchkey children et cetera. You know the arguments. So has crime gone down because there are fewer working women? We know that there are not fewer working women. We know that there is not less mobility or less leisure, although more mobility and more leisure were explanations for why it went up.

Mr SECKER—That had actually been explained as well. With regard to the latchkey children, aren’t there now better ways of looking after children in the school system after school? That is one of the schemes instead of having a latchkey system. There are also more part-time workers.

Ms Mayhew—Yes. But, again, in order to put this forward as an explanation, it has to be an explanation for all the countries where crime has gone down. This is why it is so hard to do this.

Mr MELHAM—Yes. But that is the point that you are making: that there is no simple solution and that the trends seem to be consistent internationally, with the different things that are happening in each of the different countries.

CHAIR—You could put it down to Dr Spock, really, couldn’t you?

Mr MELHAM—I find the US comparison fascinating. The trend lines are the same but different things are happening; and people seek to attribute it to one simple thing.

Ms Mayhew—One of the notions for why crime was going up was that there was worse parenting and worse schooling. So, in order to put those forward as explanations for crime going down, you would have to say there is better parenting and better schooling. I know that that is not seen as being the case in the UK. One reason why crime was supposed to have gone up was that there were all these nice things to steal. But what we know now in the nineties is that there are even more things to take that are smaller and more attractive. So that is not a good explanation.

Better security is probably a good explanation, but here one has to think in terms of a step change in security—because, let's face it, security in homes and security of cars incrementally improved over the seventies and eighties. There were more burglar alarms in the late eighties than in the early eighties. Somehow, you could envisage that at a certain point there is sufficient security to protect a sufficient number of targets. But you have to think of the notion of a step change. As for the advent of community crime prevention, I do not know. Perhaps there is more innovative and targeted policing. I think these sorts of policing trends are relatively common across Western industrialised countries.

One thing I have found very notable since being in Australia is how similar the agenda for responding to crime is—the words are the same. There is nothing very different about what Australia is doing compared to what England, Germany or France are doing—which is obviously due to the globalisation of knowledge and techniques.

CHAIR—On the policing question, if you compare New South Wales with New York, say, I know that we have far fewer police per capita than New York. Have you done a comparison? Has Britain more police per capita?

Ms Mayhew—I have done it. It doesn't hold up. I will look at those figures again. It is a bit difficult, because different countries use their police in slightly different ways. The best comparison would be with respect to the number of policemen per capita in each country who are directly doing a crime-fighting job. But I have certainly looked at this with respect to the US, Canada and the UK, and there is no particular relationship between police numbers and crime. You have to bear in mind that—what is the famous saying?—a policeman is likely to come across a burglary only once every 65 years. So, if you put two more policemen on the street, they are not going to come across very many more burglaries. How the police operate is quite complex. It is true to say that many countries have spruced up their policing techniques.

Dr WASHER—Going back to the fear issue for a moment—and tying it up with the police—people certainly expressed to me that a police presence reduces their fear. At one stage in WA, in order to save money, they stopped the police taking their motorbikes and cars home, and so they had to take their own private cars home. The public complained as there was less of a police presence, because people recognised the police motorcycle and the police car, so to speak. So they said, 'You can take your cars and your bikes home and return in them, because at least it shows a presence.' There was a palpable sense in the community that the fear factor had diminished a

little. There was no difference in the number of police; it was just the way they handled it.

Mr SECKER—Their presence was more visible.

Ms Mayhew—Yes. I have put that in the list of fear reducing techniques. Certainly, police presence is one thing. What I have put there is that you do not need to pay for a policeman; you need to pay for somebody in a uniform, but you do not need to pay a policeman's salary. In the UK and in Holland they have done a lot of this, with community constables and city guards. What people want is somebody who appears to be in a position to be able to do something if something goes wrong. That is the point I would make about the policemen: you do not need to buy a policeman to reduce fear; you need to buy a uniform.

Mr MURPHY—Members of the community from time to time complain in New South Wales that some police stations have been closed down or only operate limited hours, and that when they need to knock on the door of a police station either no-one is there or else very few policemen are there—and that worries people. I cannot understand that mentality myself because I feel, as we have been talking, that when I see policemen walking the beat, or in a police vehicle or on a motorbike, it gives me personally more reassurance.

Mr SECKER—Of course it does.

Mr MURPHY—But yet there is a mentality—and I do not know whether it is promoted in the media—about policemen not sitting in a police station waiting for something to happen. How do we educate the public to say, 'It's not a bad thing'? As I see it, there are mobile police officers in cars and that is better because, with the communications being so advanced these days, if they are out in a motor vehicle and are mobile, they can get to a crime scene or respond to a call from some desperate person quickly.

Ms Mayhew—It seems to me to be a function of a general increase in expectations about public services. People expect better care in hospitals; they expect a constant police presence. The Canadians have done quite a lot on that front. It goes under the term 'store fronts' or 'shop fronts', where they put policemen in busy shopping centres—they have a police booth. They have spoken well of that. The Dutch have done quite a lot by putting city guards on buses, in shopping centres and in areas at night where there are lots of pubs and clubs. Again, this is providing a presence. Your point about police stations not being open became a huge issue last year in England—all to do with rural crime. There was a very unfortunate incident where a farmer shot an intruder—a gipsy, actually—and he was imprisoned for it. This raised the whole spectre of rural crime. Of course, what it focused on was that there were just not enough policemen to deal with it. We had to do quite a lot of political briefing to show that it was perfectly sensible for there not to be a police station because there simply was not the volume of crime to merit it. But it is a difficult thing to sell.

Let me finish off this page and then I will stop. What I think is that, although it would be amazingly difficult to prove, it is some cultural shift which has perhaps

brought young men—because it is mainly young men involved—at the margins of criminality back into the law abiding centre. All these things—economic conditions and so on—probably have not made much of a difference to the real core of committed young men who offend, at least those in their teenage years who might grow out of it. A lot of youths on the margins offend—shoplift or break into a house on the way home from school—and it may be that there has been a cultural shift that has civilised those on the margins; but it would be very difficult to prove that in a comparative setting.

The point I would make about drugs, because they are such a dominant factor in the discourse about crime now, is that they were never a factor in the seventies or eighties. Crime was going up then, but nobody blamed it on drugs, because drugs simply were not there. It seems to me odd that drugs are blamed for everything now.

CHAIR—I think that is explained here. There was a major shift in the attitude to drugs in 1986, when the whole culture went from saying, ‘We want to stop it, police it and prevent it,’ to saying, ‘It is something we ought to live with,’ and therefore there was a discourse about it. To make that case, you had to say that it was dominant in every aspect of crime and that you had to do this or else turn it back.

Ms Mayhew—It is fairly well established that people steal to support a drug habit, but probably in the seventies it was leather jackets that were taken. I do not know about the early eighties, but in the late eighties it was trainers. Drugs now are the reward of choice, but that is not to say that the attractions of leather jackets were any less in previous decades.

Mr SECKER—We had some interesting data from the Victoria Police in our hearings in Melbourne, where, as a result of the heroin drought, there was quite a drastic reduction in certain areas of crime—drug related crimes and burglaries—and so there was seen to be a very causal relationship there.

Ms Mayhew—But the implication of saying that a lot of crime is caused by drugs—which I do not deny—is that if you took drugs away in the nineties, you would have had massive falls in crime because drugs were not there. There is some evidence that cannabis use has substantially increased, especially in Europe. I once very rashly said to a journalist that it could have been that the youth of Europe were just too stoned to offend—which of course he liked very much. But who knows? What is important from your point of view is why you have bucked this trend—if indeed it is the case and if we can rely on police figures. I do not know. I hope that, for the rest of the time that I am with the AIC, I can collate more data on the sorts of conditions in Australia and how they might differ from others. It is a bit of a quandary. As I say, in explaining the drop, the line I always take when people say, ‘You must be able to explain it,’ is that criminologists could never satisfactorily explain why it went up, and so you cannot blame me for not being able to explain why it has gone down. I will not cover the UK crime prevention program, but there are some details on that.

CHAIR—We had a very odd piece of evidence at our hearing in Melbourne last week, where it was asserted that crime in Victoria is 20 per cent less than crime in New South Wales and that that has been the case since 1880.

Mr MURPHY—Where is that listed?

Ms Mayhew—This is the debate about whether or not the Victoria Police are cooking the books.

Mr CADMAN—More stringent application of the law in New South Wales is the obvious explanation.

Mr SECKER—They let them go in Victoria, do they, rather than book them?

CHAIR—I did ask about the kidnapping of those two young Australian girls by Muslim Lebanese guys who took them to Melbourne to rape them, and was that a reaction to the 55-year sentence in New South Wales?

Ms Mayhew—The AIC has done some work for Victoria Police on their crime recording systems, to see whether there is anything behind it and whether they are in some way recording crime in a different way. I know that the ABS has just started quite a big program to compare the way that the different states record crime. Frankly, police have an enormous amount of discretion, when a crime is reported to them, as to whether they record it and what they record it as. It is by no means the case—and very many studies have shown this—that virtually all reported crimes are recorded. The figure from England is that only about 50 per cent of reported crime is recorded.

Mr SECKER—Going back to figure 4, I find it extraordinary that in Australia and England it is 58 per 100 people, but in Northern Ireland—

Ms Mayhew—It is a very rural country.

Mr SECKER—Are you saying that the reason is that it is rural? It is not because of the strong army presence there?

Ms Mayhew—It might be. Northern Ireland is a religious country. Other indicators show that Northern Ireland is quite peaceful, other than disturbances through terrorism. What emerges from the ICVS is that none of its results offends criminological wisdom. Criminologists have always known that Japan's crime rate is low, and criminologists have always believed that Northern Ireland's and Switzerland's are low. They have generally said that densely populated countries like England, Wales and the Netherlands have a high crime risk, partly because of the population density. You cannot quite say that in relation to Australia, although I suppose you could work out the proportion of people living in cities in Australia, relative to rural areas.

Dr WASHER—It is two-thirds. It is very urbanised.

CHAIR—You see this discrepancy. You say you are going to collate more figures—

Ms Mayhew—I will try.

CHAIR—but do you have any gut feeling of why it is so?

Ms Mayhew—I could explain it better if New Zealand had gone along with Australia. New Zealand is, in a way, the anomaly—because it is slightly behind Western Europe, perhaps, in cultural and social development terms.

CHAIR—Certainly, in ageing we are behind.

Ms Mayhew—Certainly, in ageing Australia is behind. An economic comparison is relatively easy to do.. It may be something to do with the way people move in and out of cities here. One of the explanations for crime going down in the United States was suburbanisation—that people moved out of cities. Offenders who move out of cities offend less, and the people who were victimised in cities and move out of the cities are not victimised. So the suburbanisation of the population in America was put forward as one explanation. I do not know whether you have less suburban—

CHAIR—We have a huge suburban sprawl.

Ms Mayhew—And it has not changed, has it?

CHAIR—It is growing.

Mr SECKER—If anything, the suburbs have gone up.

CHAIR—It is certainly growing. Sometimes, New South Wales stands for Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong, because it is almost one sprawl.

Ms Mayhew—There is no evidence that the drug problem is worse here. There is quite good comparative information on drugs.

CHAIR—What about immigration? Is that a factor?

Ms Mayhew—Immigrants certainly offend more, wherever they go to. This is a big issue in Europe now.

Mr CADMAN—I think the crime rate for the Asian community is much lower than the average Australia crime rate.

Ms Mayhew—For Asians, perhaps.

Mr CADMAN—I wonder about some of your generalised statements. I do not know whether there is substance behind the research, or if this is just a professional opinion.

Ms Mayhew—Some of it is opinion, but most of it is evidence based. But there is not really an explanation for the drop—which, frankly, nobody has come to terms with. I have probably done more than anybody else in collating these figures, and I do not know of a satisfactory explanation for the changes in patterns.

You do have the Indigenous phenomenon. In England, for instance, Afro-Caribbeans are an enormously high offending group. They are proportionately more of the population: nationally they are about six per cent of the population and in some urban areas as much as 15 per cent. They present the same sort of problem as you have with Indigenous people here. It is also the case in many countries. Holland, for instance, has the same problem with immigrant Turks and people like that.

CHAIR—Our Indigenous people are only two per of our population.

Ms Mayhew—But they do offend disproportionately.

CHAIR—They are a disproportionate figure, of which we are very much aware. Do we record our figures differently?

Ms Mayhew—Who knows? I have compared the ABS collated figures since 1993 with the state collated figures since 1993, and there is no difference really. It is not something that has happened with ABS collated figures.

Mr CADMAN—So it is not a statistical problem, as far as you can see?

Ms Mayhew—We simply do not know. It could be that the culture of recording crime in the nineties in Australia is somehow different from elsewhere. It is a bit unlikely, but there is no evidence to allow you to categorically rule it out. The problem with explaining these international patterns is that it would be extremely difficult to actually document how the police record crime in Switzerland, France, Australia and New Zealand. It would be very difficult to document what the new policing patterns were in different countries.

CHAIR—Because New Zealand has such a small population—three million—sometimes I say it is a better comparison just comparing New Zealand with Sydney.

Mr SECKER—Except that Sydney is urban and New Zealand is very rural.

CHAIR—That is a point—it is a rural country. It is part of our tradition here to be rude about New Zealand.

Ms Mayhew—So I have gathered.

Mr SECKER—We do not care how well we do, as long as we beat New Zealand.

CHAIR—Could an explanation be that we are such an urbanised society and New Zealand is not?

Ms Mayhew—It has gone down in other urbanised societies, though, hasn't it?

CHAIR—Yes; but you were saying that maybe the demographic factors could be part of the explanation, except for New Zealand; whereas, if you say New Zealand is rural based, perhaps we ought to be only comparing ourselves with really urbanised, dense populations.

Ms Mayhew—It is something I can look into a bit more, as to quite what has gone down in New Zealand and when it started going down. There seems to me to be a bit of a clue in the fact that it happened roughly at the same time in a lot of countries: more or less, between 1990 and 1993 was when the figures peaked and started to come down. I have got lots of other slides on it but I thought there were quite enough here for you.

CHAIR—1990?

Ms Mayhew—1993 was the peak in England and then it started to drop. I do not have a figure here on it.

Dr WASHER—You have shattered a lot of urban myths, like high unemployment, lack of social security—all these things—contributing to crime, drugs et cetera. That does not add up now, does it? Those were the kinds of things we had long assumed.

CHAIR—Except you could say that, together, they could have an impact on what you call the cultural shift, couldn't they? Together, those things may have made up a change in behaviour.

Mr SECKER—Which country has the smallest social security system? It is Japan, isn't it?

Dr WASHER—Well, Yugoslavia does not really have a social security system.

CHAIR—Japan's crime is very organised, very businesslike.

Ms Mayhew—I still think the notion of something having happened that affects those at the margins is possibly a good thing to hold on to. This is purely anecdotal, but when I say it I actually get quite a lot of support from other people: I have two children—my son is 21 and my daughter is 26—and those in my son's cohort, especially, were very conventional; they were slightly boring, really.

CHAIR—My children are very conventional.

Ms Mayhew—They had their sights focused on jobs and focused on getting enough money to have a car. Obviously, you cannot generalise, but a lot of people with teenage children agree with me that they have lost a rebellious spirit, somehow. Clearly, some youths are not conforming—we obviously know that—but it may be that things have happened that are pulling in young men who would have otherwise misbehaved.

CHAIR—I can never explain, even though it was part of my growing up, what happened with ‘flower power’. It was never attractive to me, I never understood it and yet it occurred. It has not occurred with my children’s generation. The university was very militant—the law school probably was not—with demonstrations and stuff. That carried on through the 1970s and the early 1980s, but it has gone.

Ms Mayhew—As I said, it is possibly that. One other way of looking at it is that it is something very macro. What we all have in common is the Second World War, and that obviously has had all sorts of social and demographic ripples. We know that there was a huge demographic set of ripples. It could be that, as there has been generational shift, there has also been cultural shift. There is something called the World Values Survey, which is done in many countries. I have had a look at that, but there is nothing quite near enough to something that would measure the propensity to offend. This survey has religious affiliation and some things on moral values, but it not quite useful enough for me, I think.

Mr CADMAN—Rebelliousness in young men in cities tends to be amongst those who are marginalised and who form groups. The pack-rape incident, I think, is the most violent expression I have seen of what is a culture in Sydney. Would that also be related to the disregard for property, that sort of mentality where a group can gain a disregard for the mores of society from one another and, as a group of half a dozen, go into car stealing or property theft?

Ms Mayhew—The general evidence is that offenders do mix and match their offending patterns, although property crime is very much more dominant. But a youthful burglar is also more likely to be a youthful thug. So there is some crossover in offending, yes.

Mr CADMAN—It is my impression that property damage and theft in my own district, which tends to be populated generally by Anglos, are crimes perpetrated by people who have come up from Harris Park, basically from the Lebanese community, and just work over streets or whole sections of suburbs as a group of maybe four people—say, one woman and three men.

Ms Mayhew—Yes; it is a good point to remind everybody of. You tend to think of a single young boy going out and committing a crime, but the fact of the matter is that most offences are committed in the company of other people.

Mr CADMAN—There is your thing about the migration program. If that were teased out, I do not know whether there would be any element there at all. But that is purely empirical, so who knows?

CHAIR—But it would fit in with the cultural theory: if you have had a cultural shift from what has been cohesive and you introduce an element which has no links to that cohesion—I do not know.

Ms Mayhew—What is quite interesting about Australia is that the make-up of crime—and I am obviously talking about everyday crime—is actually the same as in all other countries. There is nothing that stands out, except that the proportion that

motorbike and bike theft contributes is lower. This is because you are too big a country to bicycle around so you do not have many bicycles.

Mr SECKER—We do not want them; we want four wheels, at least!

Mr CADMAN—We are choosy: we would rather be stealing Porsches than pushbikes.

Ms Mayhew—In terms of what offenders are doing, it is not that they are doing anything different here. They are doing the same things as offenders in the UK are doing.

CHAIR—You did say that most of the reduction in crime has been in property crime, and that violent crime is actually on the increase.

Ms Mayhew—No. I said that the police figures are still increasing as regards violent crime, and I poured a bit of cold water on that.

CHAIR—Do you think a lot of that could be because we are now reporting domestic violence?

Ms Mayhew—I think those figures on hospital separations are very interesting.

CHAIR—Yes, they are. I have used those figures.

Dr WASHER—I would have assumed that a lot of property crime was committed by more than just one person at a time, as you indicate. But at an earlier inquiry, I think it was the Federal Police reporting on behalf of the state police and stating that the large majority of these crimes are actually committed by individuals. I thought it was odd, and you have given evidence counter to that.

Ms Mayhew—There are a number of studies. It ranges, as I recollect, from studies which show about half being committed by individuals and half being committed by groups, to studies which show about one-third being committed by individuals and two-thirds being committed by groups. There are probably some clues there: you get a bit of Dutch courage if you are with your mate more than if you are on your own.

Mr CADMAN—Should local government become more involved in policing?

Mr SECKER—They are in America, aren't they?

Mr CADMAN—I do not mean necessarily with flashing lights on motor cars—more low-level policing in streets and shopping centres. Would that help with the fear factor, for instance?

Ms Mayhew—Yes. I was being slightly facetious about the point that you did not need buy a policeman, but I think it is quite an important point—because police are expensive. There are all sorts of things which local authorities, as we call them in

England, can do in terms of providing surveillance of public space. One of the big features of the last three or four years in England, which stemmed from the first piece of legislation that Labor introduced when they got into power in 1997, was the so-called Crime and Disorder Act. It is a wide-ranging piece of legislation, but one of the things that it did was to make it a statutory obligation to have partnerships at local authority level between the police and local authorities. There were such partnerships but there was no statutory obligation to have them, and the legislation put in a whole raft of things that had to be done. They had to do local crime audits and they had to publish them. Every household had to be surveyed as to what they wanted. They had to publish a performance plan, give it to every household, set themselves targets, et cetera. Obviously some of the partnerships did it a lot better than others. That is the nature of things, isn't it? One of the things that has happened is that it has opened people's eyes to the fact that some elements of what is conventionally called 'policing' can be taken over by other agencies.

CHAIR—I might ask the secretariat if they would do some research into that act. We might look at that in terms of local government.

Ms Mayhew—I have some information about it here, and there are now some publications on how that whole process worked. One of the things that was important about it was that the legislation was passed in summer 1998 and they had to comply with it by April 1999. It was an extraordinarily tight timetable. It caused a lot of resentment, because the partnerships said, 'We don't know how to do crime audits; we don't know how to take account of people's views.'

The other thing—and this is interesting; and I have heard it here several times—was that you should consult the people, take into account their concerns and address the crime problems that they think are important. All the partnerships did this and they said, 'They want us to reduce the speed of traffic around estates,' and so on. Then, 18 or so months down the line, central government decided that this, that and the other were national priorities—in particular, burglary and car theft—and they set enormously stringent national targets that each police force had to meet in terms of countering burglary and car theft. The partnerships put up their hands and said, 'Hang around! You told us that we had to concentrate on what the people wanted, and now you're telling us we have to meet a target for burglary and car theft.' That was a difficulty.

Dr WASHER—One of the things that local governments like the City of Joondalup and the City of Wanneroo mentioned to me is that they feel bitter about the fact that they are taking up the role of policing more and more by rangers, and are addressing the issue of graffiti. The City of Joondalup, within 24 hours of graffiti being done, come and remove it. So, as you were saying about the perception of crime, by keeping it looking good, we create an impression that at least reduces the fear. There are far more of their rangers on the road than there is any police presence on the road. You see a lot more rangers at least driving around all the time. Their annoyance is that the federal government funds states to have a police force but that, more and more, local government is picking up the gap to police the neighbourhood and improve conditions in the neighbourhood to reduce crime. It is at quite a cost, and they feel they are not getting adequate funding flowing through to them.

Ms Mayhew—I am rather off line with regard to so-called community agenda setting. It is commonplace now to say that communities can deal with crime, that communities know what their crime problems are and know what to do about it. I think that is bunkum. Why on earth should communities know how to deal with crime and what the real crime problems are? It is terribly fashionable in every country; there is nothing singular about here or England or Wales. It is just part of the crime—

CHAIR—The jargon of the day.

Ms Mayhew—prevention jargon and the thinking that you devolve responsibility down to the local level.

CHAIR—I thank you enormously for this morning's presentation. It has been most enlightening and will send us on various lines of thinking. If we may have the opportunity to talk with you some more, I think we would appreciate it—would we not?

Mr MURPHY—Yes.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. We appreciate it very much. We would be most interested to see what stuff you get.

Ms Mayhew—Yes; if I do some more.

CHAIR—Could we have whatever you get that is new, please?

Committee adjourned at 10.24 a.m.