



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

## Official Committee Hansard

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL  
AFFAIRS

(Subcommittee)

**Reference: Crime in the community**

MONDAY, 7 JUNE 2004

RAYMOND TERRACE AND FORSTER

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

**Monday, 7 June 2004**

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

**Members in attendance:** Mrs Bronwyn Bishop, Mr Cadman

**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

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**Subcommittee met at 2.34 p.m.**

**ABBO, Mr Malcolm John, (Private capacity)**

**AUSTWICK, Mr Kevin Stephen, (Private capacity)**

**BALDWIN, Mr Bob, MP, Federal Member for Paterson**

**BEEVERS, Ms Chloe, (Private capacity)**

**BICKFORD, Mr Edgar, (Private capacity)**

**BRAMBLE, Mr Brett, (Private capacity)**

**CHADBAN, Mr John, Mayor, Great Lakes Council**

**FRENCH, Ms Teresa Ann, (Private capacity)**

**HALL, Ms Donna Jeanelle, Chairperson, Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council**

**HOLSTEIN, Mrs Mary Patricia, (Private capacity)**

**KRZEMIEN, Mrs Margaret, (Private capacity)**

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**SHORT, Mr Thomas Howard, (Private capacity)**

**STEPHENS, Mr John Alfred, Councillor, Great Lakes Council**

**VAUGHAN, Ms Leigh, (Private capacity)**

**CHAIR**—We are delighted to come and have this community forum. Thank you for lending me your chair, Mr Mayor. I and my colleague the Hon. Alan Cadman, the secretary of the committee, Gillian Gould, and Hansard, who have come with us, have had quite an exciting journey here from Raymond Terrace. We landed on Wallis Island and came across on the boat. We were a little bit late starting this morning as we were unable to land at Williamstown because of fog, so we had to land somewhere else and move on. However, we are here, and I would now like to formally open this meeting and will do so with an opening statement.

I now declare open this public hearing of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs inquiry into crime in the community: victims, offenders and fear of crime. Since this inquiry was referred to the committee, we have taken evidence relating to many aspects of crime. Of particular interest has been the nature of crime experienced in local communities, such as yours, and the programs that have been put in place by community bodies to combat neighbourhood crime. We have found that in responding to crime in their communities some councils and other groups have introduced some innovative strategies which are clearly making a difference.

We are pleased to be here in Forster this afternoon to hear from you about your concerns and about how you think crime issues can be addressed. We will commence this afternoon's program with a roundtable discussion, at which various organisations will be present. As the proceedings will be recorded by Hansard, it would be appreciated if you could address your remarks through the chair. Following the initial discussion, there will be an opportunity for others present here today to put their views to the committee.

I welcome witnesses. Although the committee does not require you to give evidence under oath, I should advise that the hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. When I ask you to identify yourselves, it would be in order to make an opening statement if you wish. Mr Mayor, if you have something you would like to add, I now ask you to do so.

**Mr Chadban**—No, I do not. We have wide representation here today from elected representatives, from community representatives and from business owners. I am looking forward to each of those sectors bringing to you the matters of concern and interest in our community. Our council is vitally interested in this subject. We have attempted to address many different issues that we see in our community, but I would rather my community talked to you first-hand.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. We have appearing before us Councillor John Stephens; Senior Constable Ken Sheather, the Crime Prevention Officer of Forster police; Judy Payne, the Secretary of the Forster-Tuncurry and District Chamber of Commerce; Donna Hall, the Chairperson of the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council and the Aboriginal education officer



at Forster high school; and Mr Ted Bickford, from the Tuncurry Neighbourhood Watch committee. Mr Bickford runs a graffiti truck which patrols Forster-Tuncurry and removes graffiti with the assistance of local youth. That sounds like a terrific project. We have Mr Jim McShane, from the Forster-Tuncurry Security Service, and his company runs a night patrol service in the community. I will ask the various representatives if they would like to say something to begin. Councillor Stephens has provided the committee with some background information and potential discussion topics. Councillor Stephens, would you like to begin?

**Mr Stephens**—I am a councillor of Great Lakes Shire and a member of the safer communities task force, which covers suicide falls, crime prevention, road safety, child safety and a youth task force. My approach, which I hope reflects that of the rest of the community, is to have a holistic approach to addressing all these problems. As the conversation goes down, I will go into detail.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I am the crime prevention officer with the Manning-Great Lakes Local Area Command. I cover an area wider than just the Forster area. I do not cover all the Forster council area; the bottom of end of it, around Tea Gardens, falls into the Lower Hunter area, where you have been this morning. My role involves liaising with the public and with non-government agencies and other government agencies on behalf of the police department, running community programs, and doing other basic crime prevention type strategies. I have brought some statistics with me on the major crime types for the Forster area over the last three years, showing trends. Gladly, most of those trends are downward over the last six months or so. I am happy to answer queries on behalf of the police service.

**Mrs Payne**—My role as president of the chamber of commerce here in Forster-Tuncurry is to dispense information to all our members about things that are coming up, particularly in the way of law and order. The effects of law and order problems on the business community are quite wide reaching so I certainly have a lot to say about that.

**Ms Hall**—As well as being Chairperson of the Forster Local Aboriginal Land Council I am the Aboriginal education assistant out at Great Lakes campus. I am here today because of the Aboriginal youth within this area and the crime rate around the wider community.

**Mr McShane**—I wish to have it noted that we are security officers. We are not police officers yet we work consistently with the police within Forster-Tuncurry and Newcastle. We are very proud of our record of liaison with the police. We are also very proud of the fact that a lot of public do not know that the police normally respond very quickly to our requests. We can only speak highly of the police. We do have problems but we are not police officers, we work with the officers. Later, if required, I can enlarge on that.

**Mr Bickford**—I am a bit of a loose cannon. I am just an individual who lives in Tuncurry. I try and maintain a good rapport with the younger generation. I work very hard to keep the place graffiti free. I also run the Tuncurry Neighbourhood Watch, which is not really a neighbourhood watch; it works more on looking after local projects. My idea is very positive. I am exceptionally successful with the younger generation and I am quite happy to let anybody know how I go about doing that. It is purely an individual thing as far as I am concerned; I belong to no organisations.

**CHAIR**—Mr Cadman and I have a series of questions that we would like to ask the people who have just spoken and then there will be an opportunity for people who have come from the community and are sitting in the gallery to speak. I will begin by asking Councillor Stephens about the submission that he was kind enough to send to us. It was made on behalf of the Great Lakes Council and I presume you are familiar with it, Mr Stephens.

**Mr Stephens**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—You set out on page 1 of that submission, the local crime issues:

- High incidence of malicious damage to property—cost to Council and Community.
- Break and Enter non-dwelling—Great Lakes is the 11<sup>th</sup> highest Local Government Area in New South Wales for this offence (Bureau of Crime Statistics 2001).
- Theft—this includes from dwellings and motor vehicles (Great Lakes rates per 100,000 population exceed the NSW rate in most of these categories).
- Offensive Behaviour including offensive language.
- Anti Social behaviour involving excessive and underage abuse of alcohol and drugs and the combination of the two.
- Perceptions of crime having a negative impact on peoples sense of personal safety and good neighbourly behaviour.
- Lack of 24 hour policing in the main population areas of Forster/Tuncurry. The nearest manned station is Taree 46 kilometres to the north.
- Lack of resources for police to adequately perform their tasks such as vehicles and technological support.

Mr Stephens, could you enlarge on the submission and tell us which of those are of main concern to you, or whether they are of equal concern?

**Mr Stephens**—Street behaviour is the one that we see as the public problem. It particularly impacts on our local citizens and the tourist trade as well. It creates some terrible economic problems for us, because we have to spend an awful lot of dollars to get new people back, rather than the ones that have already come and do not come back because of the behaviour in the streets. Many of the people that do come here—I am talking about the people who settle around town for their holidays—are going out late at night, and this is when the problems occur.

I am not saying that our problems are any different to those in any other coastal town; they are very much the same. Our approach is to look at street pacifiers. We provide a free sausage sizzle on Friday nights, and we are looking at providing classical music in the shopping centre late at night as a pacifier and a way to move them on. We will probably take it even further by encouraging the late night clubs to put on classical music in the last 20 minutes before closing to calm people down. So we are going to look at some innovative ways to deal with it.

Long term, though, we need to deal with the core problem. One way would be to use channelling, where police, juvenile justice workers, the parole service, the night ministry—anyone working with problem youth at night—would forward kids through to somebody involved in a life-saving, soccer or fishing club. We would have a permanent arrangement so that they do not accidentally turn up at these things but were actually passed on to an area that interests them.

Some council initiatives that we will be looking at are better planning for lighting in our open spaces—and late night lighting is the main thing that we need there—and a social planning officer. As I have said, we have also established the ‘A Safer Community’ Committee and that

has been operating for 12 months. It will take a couple of years for some of those programs to have effect.

Long term, the idea I am looking back to is the 'school of arts' building. I know that it is a new problem and that we have to have new solutions, but in all country towns the school of arts was the centre of cultural and social activity. I think it is a shame that we have \$30 million worth of infrastructure in the high school that has just been opened, yet we cannot access it at night. We have a TAFE college with all sorts of woodwork and metalwork equipment and it just sits there. We are now looking for \$1½ million to build a PCYC when we have already got the best facility in town just sitting there are unused. I would like to see it as a long-term federal policy, seeing that the federal government underwrites the capital costs of these things, that that would be part of the use of the buildings and that we do not have this territorial game by the teachers and the principals, who we love and appreciate dearly. The community would be better served if those facilities were available after hours.

**CHAIR**—So you would like to see the grants that we make to the state governments for state schools tied, in that sense?

**Mr Stephens**—I think so. Otherwise, you will get situations where they build a Girl Guides hall and use it once a week—as happened in Annangrove, which Mr Cadman will be familiar with—and then the Scouts would not go into the hall so they build another hall on public land, again used once a week. So you have two halls alongside each other being used once a week. There is this incredible growth of single-use buildings. That is why I would like to see it as a long-term policy that we look at using our schools and our school infrastructure. It is all there. Why do we have to build another one in town?

**CHAIR**—Is it Forster High School that you are talking about?

**Mr Stephens**—It is the Great Lakes campus. It is split in two: there is Tuncurry and Forster.

**CHAIR**—It says that:

The Forster High School is the largest in NSW with some 1500 students attending a facility that was designed for 800 to 900.

**Mr CADMAN**—Could I clarify: is that 1,500 in a split campus?

**Mr Stephens**—Now it is. That happened last year.

**Mr CADMAN**—Okay.

**Mr Stephens**—The behaviour is remarkably different. I was talking to one of the teachers the other day and they said that just by breaking up the groups they can manage the problem children better. The whole infrastructure works much better. It was just too many kids in one place at one time.

**CHAIR**—So that has really been dealt with?

**Mr Stephens**—That has been dealt with.

**CHAIR**—You also say:

A large majority of this crime can be attributed to young people and be related directly back to four main areas;

1. Abuse of drugs and alcohol including the responsible sale of alcohol—  
the irresponsible sale of alcohol, I suppose that should be—
2. Lack of parental control,
3. High level of unemployment,
4. Lack of services and facilities to address youth issues.

Have they remained constant since this submission?

**Mr Stephens**—They have, really. Attacking it at the personal level would be the best way to go. We need to get these kids into some sort of program that they can appreciate: building a motorcar or creating furniture after school. That is the only way to deal with it. The punitive stuff of attacking the licensees who should not be selling liquor after hours is another way to go. I suppose it is a similar tactic at the same time.

**CHAIR**—We heard earlier today that one of the problems is where a group of young people will designate someone who is of legal age and who can buy alcohol—they might be 19—who will then share that alcohol with children who are underage. That is a very difficult one, isn't it?

**Mr Stephens**—It is.

**Mr CADMAN**—I would like to probe that. Do you have such a thing as a code for the responsible sale of alcohol? Do you get all of the retailers together and have them lock down and then target publicly the people who will not join?

**Mr Stephens**—Constable Sheather can probably address that question better than I can.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Responsible service is built into the legislation in relation to the sale of alcohol, so it is built into the Liquor Act or the Registered Clubs Act. Possibly the line that you are looking at would be a committee of local licensees to address it. There is a committee that exists within our local area of command but it is mostly made up of Taree based publicans and licensees. The issues there have been larger over the years. It would certainly be of some benefit to have out here a committee of the licensees to try and further this. We have found that the existing committee in Taree has been hugely effective, not just in dealing with the basic alcohol issues of people leaving registered clubs or licensed premises after hours and causing problems in the streets, which is probably the most acknowledged issue that we get from those places, but also in being able to take quite a social stance as well—supporting different charities and organisations and so forth. An organisation such as John's church ministry could be

supported through funding from the licensed premises if they had a communal group that worked together.

**Mr CADMAN**—How does the chamber feel about such an approach?

**Mrs Payne**—It would be excellent. I find that the more businesses talk to one another, whether they are in the drink business or any other business, the better the effect.

**Mr CADMAN**—You would have to include bottle shops as well.

**Mrs Payne**—Any liquor outlet. We would be happy to coordinate a meeting for those people to come to.

**Mr CADMAN**—You have the council on side; you have the cops on side. You ought to do it.

**Mrs Payne**—We will do it.

**Mr CADMAN**—Good on you. Great.

**CHAIR**—In connection with that, what about the interaction between alcohol and things such as ecstasy and other drugs? We hear evidence about kids who will take a drug and then wash it down with alcohol, the combination being pretty diabolical. Is that a problem here, too?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Our drug problems in this area are primarily cannabis—marijuana—and, secondarily, heroin and amphetamines. Amphetamines have had a bit of a growth. We do not seem to have the same level of problems with drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine and the party drugs. We do experience problems in this high-profile tourist area in December and January. Quite often the tourists come and bring those problems with them, so we experience problems at those times of the year. We have experienced a number of incidents of drink spiking in this area during holiday times. We have not been able to prefer charges against anybody because we have not had enough evidence to prove where the problem is, but it is more than coincidence that it tends to happen at those times. It may be coming up from the more densely populated areas.

**CHAIR**—What is the source of the cannabis?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—There are very good conditions for growing it around this end of the world, so it is quite freely available. There are lots of state forests and lots of areas where the climatic conditions make it fairly good for growing cannabis plants. We have regular operations utilising our helicopters to try and enforce on plantations, particularly around the mountain areas. Our border goes out to the top of Barrington Tops, so we cover quite a large area of the forests and the national parks. They tend to be favourite places. People do not want to grow it in their own backyards because they can get in trouble for that, but if they grow it in the national park or in the state forest then they are more likely to not get pegged. We find a lot of crops but often we do not find anybody with them.

**CHAIR**—What about heroin, amphetamines and speed?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Amphetamines are becoming more widespread. In this area we have been extremely successful in heading off what we call pseudoephedrine runners—people going up and down the coast, going to chemists to buy the pseudoephedrine cold tablets in bulk and conveying them in whichever direction they are going, be it Sydney, Newcastle or Brisbane. We have had probably more effective detainment of offenders in that area than most of the other country LACs around. We have had quite a success rate. A very good working relationship with our local chemists has assisted with that. It has become a bit of a drug of choice nationally, or certainly state-wide, to my knowledge. It is not just a local thing. Luckily we do not seem to have as many problems with ecstasy and cocaine.

**CHAIR**—I must say, the methamphetamine problem is growing internationally. Going back to your council submission, some of the things that you see as solutions include:

- Allocating extra resources to police to provide for 24-hour policing and quick and appropriate response times.
- Providing creative social strategies to address offenders and repeat offenders, such as community conferencing.
- Allocation of resources to other Government and Non Government services to provide education and support to families, especially reinforcing parental responsibility.
- Providing creative programs that focus on changing culture in relation to social values such as; good neighbourly behaviour, acceptable behaviour, responsible citizenship, acceptance of others. These are some of the traditional Australian social values that seem to have been slowly eroded ...
- Education campaigns that address the fear of crime and its negative impact on people, creating social isolation, mistrust in the community and melts the glue that binds ... free society.

I am particularly interested in the one that says 'Providing creative programs that focus on changing culture'. I guess that would link in with non-government agencies. Would you like to say something more about that?

**Mr Stephens**—Those are mostly the initiatives coming through from the Safer Communities program. The Safer Communities program is initiated and funded by the state Attorney-General. Each one is allowed to take up its own personality, so the local community in each task force decides how to solve the problem, be it a bus to pick up the kids and take them home late at night or an emergency card which lists all the emergency numbers—for Lifeline and what have you—so that people have a resource in their wallet if one of their kids gets into trouble. On the social gluing we were talking about in the end point, we have something like 800 volunteers recognised by council. The more programs we can institute, the more volunteers we can bring in and recognise. That will act as the social harmony in the civil society that we are after. So we are stepping our way through it.

**CHAIR**—You also mentioned your pacifiers—sausage sizzles and classical music. You might be interested to know that we had some evidence come to us some weeks ago concerning the effect of music on behaviour. Can you give us some indication of how long you have been doing this and how successful it is?

**Mr Stephens**—We have not started yet, unfortunately. It is all in the homework stage. It seems that something about the three, four beat in classical music reacts on the sympathetic nervous system for some reason and lowers their emotional state into a gentler one, shall we say. But it has the move-on effect as well. For kids of that age, who have had rap music playing in their ears for some time that night and then encounter this, it is a safer move-on strategy. I believe in Katherine they now play it from sunset to sunrise, and I believe there is a Melbourne radio station. I first got my facts from Westfield Parramatta, where it is used. The manager of

Westfield Parramatta is now becoming quite an expert on which music—Tchaikovsky or Beethoven—acts as the best pacifier.

**CHAIR**—Here I thought it would be Mozart.

**Mr Stephens**—Or Mozart. It did not work for the composer himself, but it will work for others perhaps.

**CHAIR**—That is quite interesting. We might talk to the manager. What about the sausage sizzle?

**Mr Stephens**—That is a great interrupter. They are looking for trouble, they are in a mischievous frame and they are three-quarters full of the old liquid, but just getting them to eat something means you can talk to them and talk them down with your voice tone. So it is a great one, but it is only a stopgap thing. That is mainly to target the window breakage. The last window breakage was \$70,000 worth in one shop. The retailers are getting to the point where they cannot get insurance, and you can imagine what position that places them in. But it does work. Penrith and Newcastle are doing it, and they have a 50 per cent reduction in crime there, such as cars not being stolen and what have you. It is a very effective way, and we would like to see it continue as a permanent program.

**CHAIR**—Do your volunteers do that? Does the council buy the sausages?

**Mr Stephens**—There is very little contribution in money terms. The local butchers donate the sausages, Bakers Delight donates the bread rolls and the labour is free, so it is very cost effective. We are thinking of approaching insurance companies, because it would be nice if they supplied some equipment.

**CHAIR**—How innovative.

**Mr CADMAN**—It is very good.

**CHAIR**—How many such sausage sizzles do you have?

**Mr CADMAN**—How many sausages do you sell a night?

**Mr Stephens**—They are giveaways, of course. The average is about 120.

**CHAIR**—A hundred people on the rampage can cause a lot of damage.

**Mr Stephens**—A lot of them come back for repeats.

**CHAIR**—How many people would you deal with?

**Mr Stephens**—All up, we would deal face to face with about 60 on an average Friday night.

**CHAIR**—Sixty people a night could make quite a difference to the behaviour.

**Mr Stephens**—Yes.

**CHAIR**—Mr Bickford, can you tell me about your project to remove graffiti?

**Mr Bickford**—Yes. To me, that is one of the big success stories. I have lived here now for nearly 10 years. Running is my sport. The system I used to operate on was that I would go out at 5.15 in the morning, because I was always petrified people would know me, and I would run Forster-Tuncurry to find out where there was graffiti. If it was only a small lot, I had a backpack and I would jump on my pushbike and go and clean it off. If it was a big job, I had an old car so I would fill up the boot and away I would go and clean it up. The council has since purchased a car for me—which you will all be privileged to see out the front—and the result is absolutely tremendous. I go out every day, regardless. Where I was cleaning graffiti seven days a week, I can now go for two or three weeks and not find any.

**CHAIR**—Really!

**Mr Bickford**—That result is purely and simply because the kids love the truck. I always make my first point of call the skate park in Tuncurry, which is second to none. That situation has been brought about solely by the kids, who put graffiti on it the first night. I went and whacked a little red coat on and I looked like a council worker. I blocked it off and told them they could not skate for six hours. I learnt some beautiful words. They could not skate and away they went. I did this two or three times. I then found that that was for the birds; we were not gaining anything by doing this. There can be up to 200 kids down there. I said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said, ‘We need shade trees.’ I said, ‘Whacko, I’ll get you the shade trees. But you’re putting them in, I’m not. I’ll get them, if you put them in. I’ll help you.’ I went to the council. I got eight shade trees. That was two or three years ago, and we still have eight shade trees.

The next project the kids wanted was seating, so we got money. I got 60 metres of seating through a donation from Tuncurry Neighbourhood Watch. I went through the same process, ‘You put it in; I’m not. You paint it, I’m not.’ Those seats have been in now for about two years. They have never been touched. We now have a signboard which we had built. It has a glass front. It has a skateboard cut into the top of it. It is absolutely magnificent. It is worth looking at. That has now been there for over two years. It has never been touched. That is purely and simply because I go to those kids twice a day usually, and I sit down and talk to them and find out what they want and what is going on. I am not judgmental at all.

When I was out this morning I would say that at least 15 to 20 kids spoke to me. I would know within two days anybody who had touched that skate park or most other areas around the place. The kids come and see me. My normal procedure is not the correct one. I go and talk to the kids. Some of them are not kids. Some of them are married. I have been to one of their weddings, and they bring their little two-year-old down, who skates like a beauty. I talk to them and say, ‘Hey, fellas, we don’t want our place looking like a pigpen. Let’s have it.’ Nine times out of 10 I win. I have had a lot more successes than losses. I have changed my whole system. I used to hide the fact that I was going out doing this. I now make it very obvious. The truck goes out two or three times a day so that everybody sees it. The kids absolutely love it. I can go to the skate park and no-one will touch the truck. I could leave a camera or anything in it and it would not be touched. They come up to me and ask, ‘Can we borrow a broom to sweep the park?’ or whatever. I have absolutely no hassles whatsoever with them.



I believe that is the way you go about it with these young people. I create jobs for them. When the skate park first opened, it was pretty easy because we had lots of jobs to do. As it has turned out now we slowly but surely have the skate park pretty well under control. I have a whole new group of kids coming through, so I have to find something for them to do. The other week we got a hot-water hose, or a gurney, and we washed the whole park out. I had something like 30-odd kids who were quite happy to come and do this. We are about to repaint the whole thing. I have my little book. I just put it up on the noticeboard. I will get 50 kids. I will not have any problem with that. They will come and do it. As I said, that is the system I have worked at. As I drive through the streets, I will pull up and have a yarn with them.

One of the biggest things that has happened lately, which I am really thrilled about, is that the schools have invited me in—I am not a social worker; I am a nothing, an old printer—and they allow me to talk to years 7, 8, 9 and 10. It is pretty easy to sit down and weigh them up. I have about 10 minutes—and that is about their concentration span. I bring my truck in, and they can crawl all over it to their hearts' delight. It must be working, because I have been invited back to other schools. I think I have only had one failure, which was when the headmaster decided to speak for 30 minutes on how Columbus discovered that the world was round. Two other teachers then talked about something. By the time they got to me, they could not care less about me. If I can continue to get into schools and get to that age group, I think I can win.

A lady down at Pipers Bay rang up and said that she had offensive graffiti. I went down and fixed it up. While I was down there, I went through Pipers Bay to make sure it was okay and found it had been graffitied in around 60 places. I tracked it back. It intrigued me that they must have spent around the last three years of their allowances on spray cans. I thought they had come from the caravan park, but they had not. You can find out who has done most of these things. We found out around two months later when the school called me down. I do not go down to the school very often, because it is done by contractors. But if it is racial or porno, I will go down and clean it up. When I got down there, what did I find but the same signatures that I had found at Pipers Bay. So I mentioned it to the headmistress. I said that these kids would have it in their books. So they went through their books and, of course, there they were. They were year 7 and year 8 kids from Smiths Lake. The next day I went down there and started to clean it up. Those kids had to front me, and they expected me to blow my stack and go off. But I just sat there and asked what they did it for. By the time I had left the school, I think I had around 25 kids who wanted to help. But I could not let them help, because the chemicals were too powerful.

That was a win-win situation. I have met those kids' parents, and I doubt that those kids will ever do it again. A lot of graffiti can be put down to opportunity. I got hold of one young fellow and asked him how he did it—and I catch quite a few. He had pinched the cans out of the back of a council truck. It was white marking paint, so he had a beaut time. I had a mag with him and he is all right, he will be okay. That is the way I work, and I think it is working. When we have a working bee down there, I always make sure the newspapers are there. That is for two reasons: firstly, I always get the kids that are a little bit naughtier than the others and make sure they work and get their faces in the newspapers, and consequently no-one will go near the park because they know the blokes that have cleaned it up; and, secondly, the kids get a bit of self-esteem from what they have done. I think that, if I took that truck off the road for a week or two, we would revert back. Constable Sheather showed me the figures and, since the truck went on the road in September, the drop has been unbelievable. Changing from going out at five o'clock to doing a daytime run has proven to be a massive success.

The kids will not have people touch their stuff. I am delighted when kids come up to me. I was down there the other day. They had rung up because they had found some needles. To my knowledge that is something that we have never, ever had at the skate park before. They rang me and I went down there immediately. I got the needles and took them down to the police station. Those kids said, 'We don't want that sort of thing around our park.' To me, these sorts of things can be achieved. As I say, I do this seven days a week, 365 days a year.

That is the system and how it works. I am little different inasmuch as I look to the kids and try to find the way to make them a bit better. I will just harp a little and tell you a story. A friend of mine who is very anti youth said to me, 'They're all crooks.' I said to her, 'Next time you see a couple of kids walking up the street with a skateboard and they look a bit rugged, just say g'day to them.' So she did, but the thing is that she also said, 'You're not going to pinch my car, are you?' It was not quite what I wanted. She was going to church, and when she came out these kids were sitting next to the car and said to her, 'We minded your car for you, lady; she's still here.' That lady has been converted and does not think all kids are bad.

I will admit that there are problems. I went down to the shop the other day and I saw a kid. I only ever knew him as Monkey; I did not know his name. He had caused me more strife than King Billy. I had never seen him tidy in his life, but I ran into him down at the shop and he had a nice little goatee beard, a clean shirt—he looked a million bucks. I walked up to him, and I found out that his name is Damian because he had a name plaque on. I said, 'How are you going?' He said, 'Great. I've got my job here. I'm down here working and I'm now in charge of smallgoods,' or something like that. I get a kick out of that, out of those sorts of things. We have achieved at least 20 to 30 jobs for kids from that skate park, and that does not apply just to the skate park now. I am circling right throughout the area. That is all I do.

**CHAIR**—Senior Constable Sheather, while you were away Mr Bickford was telling us how the figures show that since he has had the truck on the road, working with the kids, graffiti has dropped absolutely dramatically.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Yes. I was just discussing that with Ted before the meeting. This man deserves any medal that they are handing out at any particular time, because he has put in a tremendous amount of time into the community in a number of ways. Ted and I have worked reasonably closely together over a few years now. He is a very dedicated, selfless individual who does a good job. As he said, he works very well with the young people and I think they respect him for that. I look at my malicious damage figures and I can see that from the point when he had his truck up and on the road we have had a continual decline, to the point that in April we were actually down to the lowest monthly figure substantially over the last three years. If I had the figures for May they would probably show that we are going even lower. It is interesting that graffiti is a problem in the Forster area whereas it does not present as a problem in Taree or any of the other cities or towns that I service. The graffiti here is a very localised problem and Ted combats it with a great degree of venom.

**CHAIR**—That is interesting. Why do you think it is not in the other towns?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I do not know. I think that a lot of crimes that we experience in these areas can be attributed to probably one or two individuals. We will often find that we have a spike in a particular type of crime—it might be car theft, and just recently there were a series of

break and enters committed upon motels and holiday units that saw quite a substantial rise in our figures. We identified a particular suspect. They were arrested and taken out of play and, all of a sudden, the figures dropped substantially.

When you look at the quantity of crime that we have rather than at the peaks and troughs, it is quite low. An individual can come out in any month and possibly commit 20 or 30 offences, be they break and enters, car thefts or graffiti, and substantial peaks show when your mean figures are only 30 or 40 a month. I think in the case here—it would only be a summation—that the majority of graffiti would be committed by a small number of individuals and it would probably be consistently committed by those same individuals. We do not have individuals in the other areas who have that habit and we do not have those offences.

**CHAIR**—Do you find, as tends to be discovered these days, that the same people who commit minor crime also commit the more major crime?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I suppose it depends on what level you draw your point in this geographical area about what major crime is. If you look at our figures for robbery, we may have one robbery a month across our area—that would be it. If you went into more suburban areas then that becomes a substantial problem. Our major type of crime problem is property offences, and in those I would include break and enters, stealing—if something is taken from somebody's garden shed or bikes are taken from the front of people's houses—and I also consider malicious damage to be a property crime. That is the bulk of our crime. You probably find that people who have a mentality that allows them to damage something would probably steal it if the opportunity presented itself, as well. But they may not be involved in an assault because it is a different type of mentality that goes with that.

**CHAIR**—Ms Hall, I would like to ask about the work you are doing with your Aboriginal Land Council and the education work you are doing with the school.

**Ms Hall**—I am chairperson of the Forster Aboriginal Land Council. We deal in housing for Aboriginal families within Cabarita community—that is the Aboriginal community there on the mission. We have 41 homes and two houses at Nabiac and one at Pipers Bay. We have a large waiting list of people waiting for homes, so the houses up at Cabarita mission have usually got two or three families in those homes and are overcrowded. That in itself puts pressure on young kids and on the families. Kids are bored, students are bored at school. If Aboriginal kids get into trouble or suspended, they are out of the school system for a couple of weeks or so and they get into trouble because of their boredom and because there are no alternate programs for them. That is something we are looking at now. Something we are trying to look at now are alternate programs for them to keep them out of trouble when they get suspended.

**CHAIR**—What do they get suspended for?

**Ms Hall**—It could be for violence, like hitting another student, swearing at a teacher, being non-compliant, not listening or not doing what is expected of them on a continuous basis. If they are suspended, they go around and get into trouble. They are bored. They might see a bike on a road or in a yard and pick it up. There are no alternate programs, nothing outside to keep them engaged or occupied and out of trouble. That is my problem. I always used to think it was just 10- to 17-year-olds. In the last couple of years I am now realising those kids are as young as 7, 8

and 9 but they are not recorded in any statistical data with the police because of their ages. It is the older kids who are taking them around. They take them out of school and say, 'Don't worry about school. Let's go to the beach, let's go and do this. Let's go over to Kmart shopping centre,' and they get into trouble.

**CHAIR**—What number of kids are we talking about?

**Ms Hall**—It is not a large number; it is just a minority group, but it can build up to about 10 to 12, depending on what age group we are looking at. That is my concern and the concern of the Aboriginal people in the community—how we can fix it and what we can do. We want a youth centre up on Cabarita mission. We feel these kids need to occupy themselves.

**CHAIR**—What would you do with them if you had a youth centre?

**Ms Hall**—We have a youth worker who had the young boys doing boxing, sports, surfing, and a number of things. They were entertained. We want not so much a youth centre but a venue to go to to play games, to play pool, to get together, to chat and to talk. We used a couple of times the land council hall just to put little discos on on Friday or Saturday nights for those kids between the ages of eight to 12. They liked that. The older group would come there, but they were intoxicated, so we needed to shift them away.

When you are looking after kids in different age brackets, you need different venues. You do not need one venue where you have kids from the age of seven to the age of 18 or 19 mingling together because they soon learn from the older group the bad things. You need to break those down into different activity levels for the age brackets that are there. It is a big problem, and the way things are going I think it is getting a bit worse. It is because of the boredom out there. The boredom occurs of a night—not through the day when the weather is fine and they can go fishing, swimming, skateboarding or things like that—it is always in the afternoon from five or six o'clock onwards.

A lot of these kids, I must admit, are out there because their parents do not care. That is where the awareness needs to be brought out more openly for the Aboriginal community. You might have a minority that are carers that are looking after the kids. When we used to have Street Beat going, the emergency contacts were usually the grandparents and the extended family rather than the parents, because they were not home. Those are the sorts of issues in these sorts of areas. Cabarita mission is a bit different from any other mission—not only around the state; I have been to nearly every state in Australia—in the sense that it is in the centre of town. Most other missions are on the outskirts of town or 10, 16 or 20 kilometres out of town. The Cabarita mission is right in the centre of town.

**Mr CADMAN**—What difference does that make?

**Ms Hall**—You have an Aboriginal community in the centre of town. If there are any criminal activities around the town then the judgments go to the centre of the community. Not everyone does the crime but the Aboriginals are all labelled the same. They are all stereotyped, yet we have so many people within that community that are trying to do their best, trying to teach these young kids the right way and looking to solve the problems. But they cannot be solved just within the community; the wider community needs to be involved too. It needs to stem from

everyone rather than be an isolated little community in the centre of town. Working in the school, I have taken schoolchildren down there and let them have a look at the land council, the native trees around the place, bush tucker foods and the medical centre so that at least they know that the Aboriginal community there is not a bad community. The more people who go down there and see it and talk to the residents there, the more they can see it is not a bad community; it is just a handful of people—

**CHAIR**—The troublemakers.

**Ms Hall**—who make it look bad.

**CHAIR**—Mr Bickford, do you have any Aboriginal kids who are part of your group?

**Mr Bickford**—Three or four.

**CHAIR**—And everybody works together well?

**Mr Bickford**—Yes, we have no problems at all.

**CHAIR**—So they are accepted as part of the group and they get along fine.

**Mr Bickford**—Yes, there are no hassles whatsoever. In fact, one of them—a little bloke who I do not think had ever done a day's work in his life—came over one day and worked his butt off like I have never seen anyone work. I have never been so proud of anyone in my life. He was considered as one of the not so good kids. With me, he has worked really well. I know he would not touch that park. He would not go near that park and touch it.

**CHAIR**—What sorts of things do you think your group can do to help those kids? What about their parents? If the parents do not care about them, how can you help those parents care about their kids? Is it a domestic violence problem?

**Ms Hall**—In the last couple of years, working within the school system, we have got literacy and numeracy funding for the Aboriginal students. I have put Aboriginal people within the schooling system, which is part of the Aboriginal education policy: you get the Aboriginal community working within the schooling system. One thing that Aboriginal people that did not do any schooling are frightened of is high schools. They love primary schools. Families will always go down to a primary school to watch a show et cetera. But for Aboriginal families, when it comes to high school, there is a threat: they feel it is not place for them to be. It is getting them into the schooling system in such a way that they can help the kids.

So I have put them in there as teachers aides to sit within the classrooms to help the students. Usually it is their nieces or nephews and sometimes their daughter or son. It gives them confidence; it gives the kids confidence too to see more Aboriginal parents within the schooling system. They go back and talk to the Aboriginal community, and then you get more Aboriginal parents into the school system. They will go and watch NAIDOC day. That is a big day where you get a lot of Aboriginal parents at the schools. That is the sort of thing that we need to do.

We need to look at alternative programs. I looked at a program a couple of years ago. I sent a submission through to the Attorney-General. It was called a cross-cultural program, where I looked at funding to do a cultural area with bush tucker foods, tiles and artists from Tobwabba teaching the kids—the Aboriginal kids and their buddies, the non-Aboriginal kids. It was an ownership area for kids. The Aboriginal kids had an area they could identify with. It meant that there was something they had done themselves, so they would not damage it, they would have respect for it and they would look after it. It was something to try to keep them in school.

When there is a suspension, you do not send them home; you send them down to do a project. You put them down there to do some work rather than send them home. You say, ‘Two weeks suspension at home or one week’s in-school suspension where you are not actually in the classes and you are not talking to any of the students.’ I am thinking about an alternative program within the school. They still have some sort of work. I looked at places like Homebase, where the Aboriginal youth worker there got a tutor for those kids when they missed any subjects and got behind with assignments. The tutor would work with them while they were on suspension.

**CHAIR**—And did you get the funding for that?

**Ms Hall**—No, it did not happen. They said it was a great submission but, due to the number of submissions that were put in, they would look at it again later, so I will remind them this year. I hope the submission is still sitting there. I would like to draw it out again.

**CHAIR**—We will talk to you later; there might be some federal funding you could apply for there. Stronger Families. It sounds like a very good idea.

**Ms Hall**—When Aboriginal kids have days off school, the days usually turn into weeks and the weeks turn into about a month.

**Mr CADMAN**—If I were a kid at school and thought that I could get suspended and have two weeks at home, that would be great.

**Ms Hall**—Yes, and that is what was happening two years ago. I am grateful to the principal and deputy principal for the amount of work they have done in the last two years to change the system and try not to suspend the kids. If they are really violent then they may suspend them but look at an alternative program with a youth worker to work with them. But if they are not that violent, then they will not suspend them but monitor them on a day-to-day basis so that the kids know that they are being watched all the time. There is usually an aide in the classroom with them. Since that has happened, we have had fewer suspensions in the last 12 months—touch wood.

**CHAIR**—And that has been successful?

**Ms Hall**—I think it has. It is because the principal and deputy principal are listening to what needs to be done. Suspensions are not the thing for Koori kids because that is all they need to go out and not come back. Then you lose them in years 7 and 8. I lost a couple of kids five years ago in years 7 and 8 and I do not want to see that happen again. We got in programs like the Careers Aspirations Project and a couple of others.

**Mr CADMAN**—What do you mean lose them? They left school and did not come back, or worse than that?

**Ms Hall**—They left school and never came back. A couple of suspensions turned into expulsions. We are talking about kids that were not even 15—some were 13 and 14. There were no alternative programs for those kids to look at. They were too young to be at TAFE. You could not send them to TAFE—they would not take them because of their age. They were in a no-man's-land, and they ended up getting into trouble. The Career Aspirations Project started to look at kids in a younger age group—year 7. As soon as they have that transition from year 6 to 7, you focus on those kids and give them all the attention you can because, if those kids do not get the attention and get looked after in terms 1 and 2, they drop out. That is the way those Koori kids at the high school were going five years ago. That is slowly starting to change, but it needs to stem from primary school too because by the time they get to high school they need to be prepared. If they are not prepared, then that is it: they will drop out. Last year was the first time we have ever had eight Koori students complete year 12—the first time ever. And that was because of the Careers Aspiration Program.

**CHAIR**—You run that program?

**Ms Hall**—Forster Land Council run that program. We have a coordinator. The previous coordinator was Jackie Trotter; she has left. Now we have got Perry Ping running that. It is run under the auspices of Foster Local Aboriginal Land Council. That is focusing on Koori kids in years 9 to 12. In reality, first off we focused on getting them to year 9, then to year 10 and then to years 11 and 12. Last year was the largest number that we had.

**CHAIR**—Does that then rub off? Do other kids think then, 'Hey, they're doing it; I'll do it'?

**Ms Hall**—We have got 22—I am not exactly sure of the number. In years 11 and 12 I think we have about 14 or 15 Koori kids. In year 10 we have about ten or 12. We have never had that number of students before.

**CHAIR**—That is very good.

**Ms Hall**—Yes. We are starting to keep the kids at school, and that is our priority. There is nothing out there for them. CDEP is not an easy line. The kids that want to fail and do not want to go are just waiting to jump on the CDEP—the Community Development Employment Program. They do not want to go to the dole. CDEP is work for the dole. That is where they are jumping. They can't get there until they are 16, so they have got two or three years floating around getting into trouble.

**CHAIR**—Would anyone else at the table like to make a comment? Perhaps the people in the gallery would like to make a comment.

**Mr CADMAN**—Before we do that, I wonder whether we could have some of those stats.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Basically, what I have got statistics for are the major key crime categories as we see them. For assault, we have monthly figures. We also have what is called a control chart average. Our aim as police is to drive that control chart average down. The Forster

sector covers Pacific Palms and Smiths Lake; it is broader than just the Forster-Tuncurry township. In January 2003 the level of assaults for the Forster sector was 29 per month on the control chart. We have managed to push that down to 19. It has had a lift again. Quite often, levels of reported assaults can actually be a positive thing when we look at domestic violence. Having it reported can actually be a very positive thing. The stats on assaults can be looked at from two different perspectives. I know that with domestic violence there are some issues with not having court support workers based at Forster court. That causes some dramas when you compare that to, say, Taree court, which is the other main court that I work with. The service provided is nowhere near as efficient.

**Mr CADMAN**—They are more efficient or less efficient here?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—They have court support workers for domestic violence at Taree who help the victims through the whole process. Having them in place enables us to get a more thorough reporting and action system on domestic violence. Without those same workers in place out here at Forster, the victims are not receiving the same level of support.

**Mr CADMAN**—What is the number of total cases per month at either court?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I could not help you with that figure.

**Mr CADMAN**—Taree would be twice the size?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I do not have those statistics, I am sorry. Population wise, the Taree council area has about 42,000 on the last census and I think Great Lakes has around 31,000. That is a rough idea. As far as court cases go, I cannot help you. With break and enters we had a peak up to a high point in February this year. That was a high point over the three-year period, so we had a real spike in the number of break and enters. As I mentioned earlier, we were able to target an individual who we thought was having a substantial effect on that level. We have taken that person out of play and I noticed when I had a look at some figures this morning that there have been three reported break and enters in total over a two-week period in the Forster area. During that spike we got up to 97 for a month.

**CHAIR**—So it was the same person doing it?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—We do not have that proof. Quite often we have reasonable suspicions but not enough evidence to put a matter before the court. If somebody is charged with other matters and they are incarcerated based on those—

**CHAIR**—Suddenly the rest of it drops?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Yes. Anecdotal evidence basically is—

**Mr CADMAN**—They are out of circulation.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—It shows up in quite a lot of statistics but they have never been charged. Those offences still stay on your record as uncleared, but from our perspective it has vindicated what we thought. With malicious damage, I referred to the work that Ted has been



doing. Over the last six months our reported malicious damage offences have been driven from 52 down to 19 and it has been a consistent decline. Whether it is coincidental or not, it coincides with Ted having his vehicle available and his action plan in place. Whilst graffiti is not the only malicious damage offence that exists, it was certainly one that had a bit of bulk in it out here in the Forster area. Whilst I cannot attribute all of that to Ted's good work, I certainly think he is a contributing factor.

As to robberies, our average is one per month and quite often we go for four or five months without having a robbery in the area. Stealing offences include things like shoplifting as well as theft of pushbikes from outside somebody's house. If somebody goes into your garden shed and takes something from it, if the garden shed is not locked it comes under the heading of stealing. It is not a break and enter because they have not had to break in. So it can be a bit misleading as to what falls into that. Stealing offences have substantial peaks and troughs. What we tend to see is that at holiday times we get a rise. The majority of that rise is shoplifting type offences and the majority of those would involve young people. They are dealt with mainly under the Young Offenders Act, so they are not matters going before the court. Even with our stealing offences, since January, when we had our normal holiday peak, they have gone down consistently from 92 to 38 in May, which is well below our average of 61. So, again, we have had a very sharp drop over three months. The same drop is reflected in stolen vehicle offences. We have gone from a peak in January consistently down to a low point of only seven in the last month.

In the majority of the crimes that have the most impact upon the community—and they would be break and enters, stolen vehicles and property type offences—particularly over last three months we have seen a good decline. Some of the credit falls with us for good policing and some of it goes to people in the community liked Ted and the council for the work that they are doing in trying to drive things from a crime prevention angle. Some of it might be just plain luck. It might be the colder weather. It is hard to attribute it, but we certainly have not had any great rise in crime over the three-year period.

**Mr CADMAN**—How does the chamber feel about all of this? What is your impression? Is your experience reflected by those figures or not?

**Mrs Payne**—Yes, it is. We hear about the window smashing ones and the sorts of things with a vandalism type factor. Most of the law and order things are really going along quite well. We kept mentioning to our members what they are supposed to do and they are starting to report things more often. Sometimes a lot of hidden things were happening and people were being affected but, of course, Ken Sheather and his crowd would not know about it. So we made a big point now of saying, 'Report anything that happens because, if there is a pattern there, at least we know where we can start looking and perhaps put a source team out to rectify those problems.' As to the graffiti and things, with Ted the shops are looking so much better. They do not get any of that graffiti on them now, which is very good for them. But stealing within stores is still a fairly major problem. I know that Kmart and areas like the shopping centres have a fairly major loss with in-store stealing. That is a major problem. The other problem we have, of course, is the fact that our insurance costs are going up. Every time there is a claim of any kind, insurance costs then reflect the fact that you have had claims. So the insurance we pay for glass cover is fairly high because of the fact that the possibilities are out there.

**CHAIR**—But that has diminished now, has it?

**Mrs Payne**—It has diminished. As I said, it has got a lot better. The other problem we have is that we have a tourist town and there are law and order problems within the town with kids roaming around at night and the language and carry-on. That is reflected in the complaints tourists make about the sort of town we have got. We have really got to make sure that is one aspect that we try to get rid of. Some of the programs that I have heard about today will go a long way to doing that, and that is excellent.

**Mr CADMAN**—What about the ‘opportunistic tourist’, which is the term that John used? Do you think that is a factor?

**Mrs Payne**—It is.

**Mr CADMAN**—Do get smart alecs who come in and cause trouble?

**Mrs Payne**—Being a tourist town, the youngsters know that in town tonight we are going to have people relaxing on holiday, things left in cars and windows left open in the motels. People are relaxed so they are not thinking clearly enough. So we do try to say to people, ‘If it is in your car, put it in the boot. If it is in the house, put it under lock and key and lock your windows.’ It is a simple precaution but it does make a big difference. But on holidays you are relaxed and you do not think these things happen and you do not do anything about it.

**Mr CADMAN**—So in tourist season are they blow-ins or locals?

**Mrs Payne**—I would attribute some of it to blow-ins.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—You get two issues in tourism: you get tourists themselves being targeted possibly because they have not yet reached their destinations, so they have their valuables like laptops and cameras still in their vehicles, which is unavoidable. Quite often they leave them in clear view rather than putting them somewhere out of sight, so they do not do anything to lessen the chance of being a victim. But I know we have had experiences where Sydney based criminals have done the run up the North Coast in December-January, breaking into motor vehicles parked at isolated beach locations. In our command we would probably have six or seven locations where there is a parking area and a beach. Crime is where opportunity meets with intent, and that is where they are looking. They have the intent; they are looking for their opportunity. So you do have criminals who are travelling to the area or through the area and committing offences but we also have the tourists being targeted by others, be they locals or from out of town— itinerants—who are victims as well. That is where we get a stolen vehicle or the theft of items from motor vehicles or thefts of items from motels, caravan parks and even tents.

**CHAIR**—Basically it is opportunistic crime. You really have no organised crime?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—No. There are no gang issues around here. We have young people who gather together. If you talk to a lot of people in the community, they may refer to that as a gang. In our position as police, we certainly would not refer to them as gang type issues. You may get two or three individuals who work together and commit a certain type of offence; they have a similar modus operandi all the time. We have distinct advantages in country policing in that we know who a lot of our criminals are, so if a type of offence is committed we can probably

narrow it down to five or six people who would have done it. In the city you would not start to try to do that because you have people moving widely through areas.

**Mr CADMAN**—Do you think that if Ted were given a hand to expand what he is doing by people with the right attitude, you would solve the problem of broken window and the blown-up letterboxes? He has fixed the graffiti—

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Basically the work that Ted does is good-natured and it is well directed. Any support to people like Ted in they do can only be of benefit; it cannot have a downside. I believe this town certainly needs a youth centre of some description.

**Mr CADMAN**—Do you think a PCYC would work?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—PCYCs have their limitations. I worked in them for over 12 years, so I know them pretty well. They are effective in some areas but they have their limitations. When you are working with some kids, the very fact that you have a uniform in there may keep some of the kids you are targeting away from the place, and it is hard to overcome that, no matter how good a personality your police officer in there has or how well they interact with young people. The mere fact that they have a uniform on can eliminate the opportunities that may be provided by a youth centre that is not manned by police. I have some misgivings about whether it would need to be a PCYC. It just needs to be a youth centre that has a commitment of funding from some area that is going to be ongoing. Too many times we see things that are short term and, when you are dealing with young people, what you need is a commitment to them that if you are going to encourage them to do something, next week when they turn up they are going to be able to do that.

**Mr CADMAN**—John, do you reckon it could be a council operated show or do you not see that as council's role?

**Mr Stephens**—The state government are moving more of the health and community activities to councils; that seems to be a general policy. I think it would be better to go that way. I think the best delivery of these sorts of services is really at council level.

**Mr CADMAN**—What about the Indigenous people—the Koori kids? You are talking about something at Cabarita that is a bit separate. What about a central one where the kids can do a bit of boxing, judo and other stuff?

**Ms Hall**—At the moment that is what they are doing. There is a gym across the road and just around the corner. They are doing lifting and boxing there. Yes, it is central for everyone. That is fine, but we still need a small one up there on the mission for the younger kids, to keep them away from the town.

**CHAIR**—Welcome, Bob. Would you like to say a few words?

**Mr Baldwin**—Yes, thank you. I apologise for being late. As you know, I was called to be with John Anderson. We have just announced the upgrading of the Pacific Highway to the Queensland border and the upgrading of the New England Highway. When I asked you to come here and take evidence from the community, that was because there are some issues of growing

concern within the community. I can remember working with the chamber of commerce before we got a couple of extra police—this was a couple of years ago—walking the streets at night to try to keep an eye on the kids that were vandals. There is a simple truism: no kid is ever born bad. The problem is that some of the environment that they are brought up in and the peer pressure that they are involved in lead them to perhaps be not the best behaved. Probably the greatest concern is the people who specifically do the break and enters. That is one sort of crime whereby people do not feel safe in their homes. It is the wanton vandalism that is perhaps the most annoying of all of the crime that occurs, whether it be graffiti or smashing a window or puncturing a tyre; those are just acts of destruction. There is no one specific group of kids responsible. From the experience that I have had in and around the town of talking to people, I know it is not just Indigenous kids or the kids from the poorer areas; it is some kids from the wealthy areas too. It is not specific to one class level. How you address that I do not know.

**CHAIR**—We heard a terrific story from Ted Bickford today regarding the success that he has had with graffiti, which is backed up by Senior Constable Sheather's statistics. It seems we need a few more Teds.

**Mr Baldwin**—There are some key issues. I believe that a lot of the solutions are in the community. As you heard this morning down at the terrace, more police is one part of it. A greater visual police presence is a part of it. Sometimes the solutions are within the community. I am pushing the pedal on the \$20 million worth of National Community Crime Prevention Program funding that is out there for a community to come up with ideas and to work with the funding of it. The simple thing is that you have to come and listen to what the people out here have to say and not only take that message back to Canberra but also disseminate it back through the state ministers—the state governments—and down to local government as well. I think we need all three levels of government working together to try to bring about solutions. The quickest solution to make a marked improvement is always to have an increased police presence—more people driving around in cars and more people walking the beat. Part of the problem is that, whilst you might move the problem from the centre of Forster, it may go to Tuncurry. If it moves from those two, it might go into some of the suburban areas. The problem is there; it just depends on whether you want to try to address the problem or shift it to another area. A lot of people sometimes think the solution is shifting it from one area to another. That is not really the solution.

**CHAIR**—You mentioned that the \$20 million that was in the last budget for community groups to directly access funding for communities does not go through the state government, it goes directly to the community groups. It has guidelines, and we actually brought some forms with us today. Nicholas has the forms, so anyone who is interested in applying for funding for the community group they work with can pick up the forms and see if their group meets the criteria.

We will now hear from the people in the gallery about the things that they would like to comment on. We have a roving microphone so that people can have their say. Everybody who speaks today will be recorded in *Hansard* and they will be entitled to get a copy. The evidence that we take today will be posted on the web site, probably by the end of the week, so that everyone can see it. Who would like to be the first?

**Mr Paulson**—I am a new ACLO. I have been in the job for three months and I have been working with Ken Sheather and the Manning Great Lakes Area Command and also with Donna Hall from the Forster LALC in trying to establish a youth centre here at Forster. I am in agreement with Donna that we do need a youth centre here in the Forster area, and we are looking at the Cabarita mission. We have been involved with DOCS and juvenile justice, and we had the minister up here a couple of weeks ago in looking for funding. We have worked with our local area command, Inspector Powers and me, to try to establish this and get that youth centre up and running.

Mr Stephens spoke about the sausage sizzle. It is a good idea. My aunty has been part of that sausage sizzle, being a Christian person herself. Twelve-year-olds are coming up to these people and looking for sausages, and they are out at that time. Donna mentioned the schools. We are trying to keep the 13-year-olds and the 14-year-olds out of the Frank Baxter centres. We are trying to keep our criminal events down and get families up and running. There might be a problem with one or two of the parents, and we are looking to our people in DOCS to provide services for these people.

I do believe what Ken Sheather was saying, that we do need to make the publicans a little more responsible about serving alcohol to those who are under age and that gaming and racing come to the party in fostering some type of service to our local council to try to reduce the number of under-age drinkers who do not go home and who are looking for food and shelter. We are hoping to get that centre at Cabarita up and running. Mr Stephens was talking about utilising our schools. I believe we should have a halfway house where those kids who are under the age of 12 are not permitted to go out of that house after a certain time so that we can keep them off the streets.

**CHAIR**—Do you mean a curfew?

**Mr Paulson**—A curfew for those kids who attend that centre so that after a certain time they are not allowed to go out of that house. Some of them are only 10 or 12 years old, and something should be in place there so that we can keep those kids off the streets. Otherwise, we are going to end up with more rapes happening to our youth. I really appreciate what Ted is doing there. He is doing a marvellous job—I will acknowledge that. There is graffiti around the place. Graffiti does happen around Taree, and it is not just an isolated thing. It is a bad thing, and people are trying to get messages out there—and it is happening all around the country.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

**Mr Randall**—I am the Manager of Beaches International. I have a holiday accommodation building which backs onto the CBD and fronts onto the ocean. It is an interesting slant that I look at things and see what affects our business. A lot of it that I see does not actually have a criminal element. There are probably four groups of things that happen which I have identified. The first one is school age children from eight, nine and 10 up to about 16, 17. Often they are drinking, and I have even seen 10-year-olds walking blindly through the streets of Forster. They are often the loudest, the noisiest, and often the most destructive. I have seen them walk along, pick plants out of gardens, throw bottles through windows and through anything they can find, so to speak. It is just totally unprovoked—un-anything. They just see something and grab it, smash it, pull it and break it. Their language is terrible. Sometimes you can pick on the girls,

because it is amazing what you can hear come out of the girls. They have total disregard—in most cases they are drinking but usually, I guess, it is a case of their not having a lot to do.

The second group that I can really identify is a group of young people, perhaps of about 17 to about 22 years of age. They particularly gather at the waterfront in Forster—again, particularly in summertime or the warm times—and they have cars. They are 17-year-olds and they have grabbed this you-beaut thing which they have put a muffler on so it makes more noise than a Harley Davidson. You could have six, seven, 10, 15 cars up there all at one point in time. In each car you could have two, three, four, five people sometimes, and it is amazing because five cars can have an entourage of, say, 20. They are sitting there, but they are not necessarily doing a lot of damage. In the eyes of the police, they are not doing any damage at all.

There are a number of apartments that front onto the waterfront, and I know for a fact that many a guest has said to us, ‘Stuff this; we’re not coming back because of the noise that comes out of these people.’ Again, the police idea is that they do not do any damage, so to speak; they are not a criminal element. But I know that if I am wont to walk up the street alone with my children and I see these 20, 30 or whatever people hanging around mostly with cars that have P-plates on them et cetera, I will not walk up there. I will go another way or I will just not go there at all. That must cost this town a lot of money. You could not even qualify how much it might be; there is no way at all of telling how much it could cost. I know from my own experience that we have had many guests refuse to come back. They comment, ‘We love the accommodation and we love the town, and everything was great—the beaches are beautiful—but the noise on Friday night; goodness me!’ That is fairly frequent on Saturday morning.

A third group that I have had the unfortunate ‘pleasure’ of experiencing is on Friday nights when, at approximately 3 a.m., all hell breaks loose. I can be asleep in my apartment when wheelie bins go flying across the road in the CBD, cars do wheel spins, you name it—the language—and there is usually a fight. Someone calls someone an unpleasant name of some description. It is amazing, if that person yelled that out at four o’clock in the afternoon, you probably would not raise an eyebrow, but at three in the morning it amplifies it, for whatever reason, even if it is just the fact that you are asleep and someone is yelling not far from your window. It is amazing how much noise it makes and how disturbing it is. Again, that is the comment we have from our guests regularly. It is not even a case of ‘Will we get a comment tomorrow?’ It is a case of how many complaints or comments we will get. It is just nonstop.

Then there is another, criminal group. I cannot comment on that because I actually have no experience of it at all. But the three groups that I first mentioned are a big problem, costing the town a lot of money. It is probably something the police do not see a lot of and probably cannot do a lot about. In a lot of cases I do not think they are actually acting in a criminal way but it is an antisocial behavioural problem. One thing that I did not mention was the guys with their cars. They do lapping. I have seen them doing time trials. I have rung the police a number of times with numberplates—you can only do so much, I guess. They do wheel spins, burnouts, whatever stunts you want to call them—they have tried them all, and I have seen them all. That is another thing to mention as well. That was part of the third group, with their cars. I think that is all I have to say.

**Mrs Krzemien**—I have Bella Vista Motor Inn in Forster—I am in the same situation as this gentleman. We have a problem a lot with adults at three o’clock in the morning threatening

people, causing malicious damage, smashing things, abusing customers. I have been threatened. I have been threatened by adults from the Cabarita mission, so I have rung up the elders and dealt with it through them, because I felt I did not want to involve the police. They have said to me, if I have any more problems, to ring the police.

I have worked in the drug and alcohol area for nearly 20 years in Mount Druitt in Sydney. I set up a 24-hour drug centre there for adolescents. I felt adolescents needed a program from nine until two in the morning, because there was nothing for anybody using drugs or for anybody who had nothing to do at that time in the night. So we set up a drug centre, a halfway house, whatever you want to call it. I worked with Richard Amery, and we got that off the ground. That worked well until they moved it over to Westmead Hospital.

As for adolescents in the whole of this area, I have been here for three years. I am very proud to say that as a motel owner I can tell the customers when they come in where to send their kids: over to the skateboard centre, because I have never seen one in New South Wales as clean and as well organised. Those youths over there are running it with Ted. As for a youth centre, I think incorporating all youth in the area to integrate together is a good idea. Alienating the Indigenous and the other children by having one youth centre here and one youth centre there—that is only alienating kids, in my experience. I worked in the disability area. I worked with kids in wheelchairs who all got together, and they were happy to be together because they were not alienated. I just feel that having a youth centre here and one over there is going to cause more of a problem than it is going to help. We should all get together and integrate the kids of this area, as Ted has done. I have had dealings with a lot of the adolescents in the area, but I have had more dealings with the adults and I have had my life threatened by the adults. That is all I have to say.

**ACTING CHAIR (Mr Cadman)**—Thank you very much.

**Mr Little**—I am associated with golf, and through our golf club here we have two courses, at Forster and Tuncurry. Probably in any given week there are 100 young people involved in golf and, over the period of a year, at least 200. I would be near enough to certain that those who are involved in golf, like those who are involved in netball or tennis and other sports like that, are very seldom involved in crime, because they are occupied. So our sporting facilities here keep a lot of people away from crime. I think, as other speakers have said, that these crimes are committed by a very small minority of people. I think often they are people who may not have consistent ability in sport, so sport is no good to them. They may also find that they do not do terribly well at school, so they become alienated. There is a degree of jealousy which leads to graffiti and desecration of property.

I believe that you should not take the message back to Canberra that throwing money at the problem will solve it. ‘Graffiti Ted’ and ‘Sausage Sizzle John’ have illustrated very clearly that community involvement by a number of people with only a small amount of money does far more good than throwing money at it. I also agree with the last speaker: do not separate our people. We have any amount of halls and facilities in our primary and secondary schools for a dozen youth centres. Perhaps the message should be put through to the principals of these schools and to the state governments: open them up and make them available for youth centres or any other ideas. Take the message back to Canberra that it is not just money. We have people here who can do it. Give us the encouragement and just give us a little bit of money.

**Ms French**—I work with the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council, but I am here as a member of the public because, basically, I have a heart. I agree with both things. We should be putting in funding for youth centres and stuff like that, but it is also a responsibility of the public to look at underlying factors and to understand people, and also to help. On the commerce side of it, I can understand that private businesses have their insurance costs going up and everything, but maybe part of the money that they get in profit could be put into some of that prevention and in the long run it will turn around.

Also, I agree with Donna that there are hardly any youth venues around. The skate park is excellent but it only focuses on the needs of a certain age and a certain gender group. About 10 years ago I saw within a period of two years a lot of youth venues all taken away at once. We need to have somewhere for the kids to hang out; somewhere that they can believe in themselves; somewhere they can support each other.

On parents being responsible, I do not turn around and blame a parent. I understand where that parent is coming from. Our parents—especially Indigenous parents—are facing a lot of traumas. It has only been a short time for healing to happen. That is what we are watching. I do not think we should be quick to be judgmental and say that the parents are irresponsible and that they do not care for their kids. They love their kids. Half of it is because of that love that was taken away. That is what I see today. You also see a lot of laughter, alcohol and drugs. That is because there is a lot of pain, even with the laughter. It really is a whole-of-community thing. Everybody can help out. Like we are saying, the schools can open up halls. We have everything there. Even the open land is a facility. Ted, I admire you. You have the right way of doing things. I really respect you for it.

**Mr Austwick**—I am a just a concerned citizen. I have listened with great interest to Donna, Ted and the other gentleman over there. I cannot put the blame with any one group, and I am not trying to, but I have a couple of solutions that might help Donna and the other gentleman in broadening their thoughts about a youth centre. I wonder if that could be expanded a little. Instead of the traditional things of teaching football, boxing or whatever, it could perhaps include a car rebuilding class or something like that. When I was growing up the great thing that I had was rebuilding cars. It could pay great benefits if some of the TAFE teachers or some other people could perhaps donate some time or be paid for a project to expand the range of interesting things that youth could do. I would like that to be thought about just to widen things. The one thing that I have a problem with is that it is not only in the CBD; it is all over Forster-Tuncurry between the time of 12 o'clock and three o'clock in the morning on Fridays and Saturdays. It is out of control. I think the way to address this is to give the police more resources to have the stations occupied on that nightly basis. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate the efforts of Donna, Ted and the constable.

**Ms Vaughan**—I have lived in this area for more than 30 years. I apologise for not being here at the beginning. As a new councillor, I found out about this meeting only on Thursday and we had a number of commitments. I apologise if I am treading on material that has already been mentioned. I totally agree with the previous speaker. I would be the last person to lay blame. One of the things that I feel is really important is the need for education of families, because, as we were saying before, they need the support. There are young people here having children and there are older people who have children who have grown up and, through no fault of their own and through lots of other circumstances that we are all familiar with, they do not have positive



role models. We need positive programs and activities to educate people on, first of all, how difficult it is to be a parent and all the positive things that you can do.

Everybody knows that you love your children, but nobody knows that sometimes to love your children you have to be strong, and that is not easy. We have a number of programs already in progress here. There is the Homebase activity. The council, at the last meeting, approved the Guide hall as a centre for use for activities. We all agree that youth need somewhere to gather and that there need to be structured activities and guidelines given. But I feel that we should also have a structured program available for the education of young people becoming parents.

**Mr Bramble**—I have made a few notes. I did not expect to speak today. I will give a bit of background information, a couple of theories of mine and then some suggestions. My background is that I am a lifetime local. I have been involved in the hospitality industry. I know Ken Sheather from when I managed a club in Taree. We were involved there to do the first liquor accord in any community in New South Wales and that worked tremendously in reducing crime in Taree. I am an active sports player and coordinator, particularly with pool competitions. I have been involved with Youthtopia, which was a trial youth venue in town. We utilised the school of arts hall for that. That was over a couple of periods, mainly over Christmas time. That was very successful and we learnt a hell of a lot from that. I have a marketing background.

I will mention a few theories of mine, which are mainly related to young children and youth, particularly young adults, some of whom can be troubled for various reasons. I believe peer group pressure is probably one of the largest factors why children can become troubled. Boredom is also a factor, as was mentioned previously. Things are not always right at home, which is a bit of a trick to counteract. There is also a lack of understanding of other cultures or age groups, which I think can be dealt with. Leigh mentioned that we have a lot of kids who, I believe, need a local hero or a role model. I believe all that relates to children or young adults needing a positive identity. A youth venue can be many things to many people. As Ken mentioned before, there needs to be more to a multipurpose centre—perhaps an advanced PCYC or it might involve a little contingent of our friends in blue, maybe one day a week or something to that effect.

It also needs to be more than just physical sport—boxing for example—although that is a very good part of it. I used to be a boxer at the PCYC in North Sydney for a while. It needs to be appealing. One of the big tricks for making a youth venue a success is to have it appeal to the younger generation. Obviously, things come and go. The skate park has been a big success; I expect it to continue being so. There are things that will stay around for eternity, such as dancing. Maybe there should be a monthly dance that is made a good night and not a late night. Pool is possibly one of the most popular indoor sports played in the world. You can really achieve legendary status if you are good at it.

I mentioned boredom. Boredom can be counteracted by making the venue appealing using a range of means. Peer group pressure can be troubling for some kids. We could give them the chance to be a legend, via competitions such as a battle of the bands or a regular pool competition. I run pool competitions or tournaments. The most recent one involved 137 players from this area, mainly 18- to 40-year-olds. But I do not think I am even scratching the surface as to what I could do with pool competitions—especially with the younger people.

A lot of younger people do not understand what is required to be a responsible adult. Having regular interaction with others at a local venue will help them. It might even involve a coach or large amounts of interaction with adults. I mentioned trouble with things not being right at home. We might be able to have a regular pool competition that, using the same example, involves a parent and their child. The parent is actively encouraged to go to this venue, compete and be part of their child's upbringing. The venue obviously involves a bit of expense, but with the right marketing and methods it could be self-funding in the future—even involving sponsorship. I would love to be involved in some sort of pilot to that effect.

**Mr Short**—I am the secretary of the Forster Neighbourhood Watch. A publication comes out of the Commonwealth parliament called *About the House*.

**CHAIR**—That is right.

**Mr Short**—The last couple of pages of each issue for 12 months or more has referred to this inquiry by the Commonwealth into crime and related problems, and the word 'fear' comes into their quotation. At what stage is this inquiry at? I assume this meeting is part of it, but it seems to have taken a long time to get to this stage where you find out what the opinions of the public are. Can we expect some sort of reply or result to this inquiry in the near future? If not, can something be put out in the paper as a progressive report on its activities?

**CHAIR**—No, we have not waited until now to see what the public is saying. Right at the beginning of the inquiry we put out an advertisement and invited anyone who had anything to say to put submissions in to us. Lots of people did that, including councils, people at the grassroots level. We have taken evidence all over Australia. We are here today because your local member, Mr Baldwin, was very keen that we hear from the people in his electorate because of their concerns, which we have been hearing about both here and in Raymond Terrace. With regard to the reporting: I apologise for the phone calls but I have been doing interviews today. We also put out press releases on a fairly regular basis. We are in the writing process, if you like, to produce volume one. There will be more than one volume because the scope of this inquiry is so large. It covers everything from corruption to issues like fear of crime, victims and what support we give them, early intervention to stop children who might be at risk of following a criminal path through to mitigating circumstances of offenders, trying to stop them reoffending and so on.

**Mr Short**—I am very pleased that you explained that, because today I have sat here and listened and we have concentrated almost entirely on youth crime. The minister in the letter that we received from Mr Baldwin said that crime across Australia costs \$32 billion a year. If that is true, I am pretty certain it is not all committed by youth. I am very pleased to know that you are covering other subjects. I think the public would like to know about this on the odd occasion. Thank you very much.

**CHAIR**—On that point, I will add this. One of the major growing crimes is identity fraud, and then there are all the things that flow from that. That includes everything from people who might steal mail from your letterbox to gather information which would allow them to establish themselves as you, and then open bank accounts in your name and be able to operate as you, through to scams like the one that was on the news last night with regard to an attempted theft of \$150 million from the Commonwealth superannuation fund. It is a very big and growing

problem. There are all sorts of agencies, with which we are working as well, who track the movement of money in and out of the country and start to build up patterns as to what gangs are operating in which areas. It is a very large thing that we are looking at. The largest group of people in prison and the largest group of people who commit crime are young men, aged 17 to 25. The crimes that impinge most on people's lives are street crime, property crime, break and enter and graffiti. That is why we have heard a lot about that today.

**Mr Short**—Thank you.

**Mrs Holstein**—Madam Chairman, I never miss a chance for a commercial. There is no reason whatsoever why old, young or in between cannot attend a community meeting in this town. I am the President of Forster Neighbourhood Watch, and we absolutely long for people to come to our meetings. We have them in the afternoon to suit the elderly. We could have them at night-time to suit those who are working. Neighbourhood Watch is not old-fashioned; it comes from the community. It is for the community. It is for things like what Ted is working with. Donna needs help. Ken Sheather wants information from us. Those things can be talked over at a Neighbourhood Watch meeting. I wish the community of Forster would support its Neighbourhood Watch. I thank you for the time.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much.

**Mr Lean**—My name is Kevin Lean, and I am an ordinary geriatric in the area. I would like to thank Ted and all the people working in these areas, but what are they doing? They are parenting. Supposedly, 80 per cent of the children in school here are not with their biological parents.

**CHAIR**—Twenty per cent—

**Mr Lean**—They are with one parent or maybe with a grandad. At the bottom of it, it is the parents. How were we brought up years ago? It has changed; I realise that. We do need more policing. Another thing—and I have talked to police about this before—is that the judges are not handing out the correct judgments to these kids. It is easy done. They come back martyrs and do it again. It is not safe to walk around this area. I live at Tuncurry. It would be beautiful to have a walk of a night if you were not sleeping too well. I am not game enough. The kids have not been taught any respect. They do not respect age or anything. Whose fault is that?

I witnessed an ugly scene on Friday night at the Bellevue Hotel. There were 15 or 20 young kids out on the footpath. One kid had a long-necked bottle, broken off at the bottom and with a jagged edge, and was running around trying to poke it at someone. The police were made aware of it by the Bellevue Hotel, and they came and corrected that. That is all I have to say. You have to get to the grassroots of it, and that means the parenting.

**Mrs Reid**—I am a mother and a private citizen. I agree with a lot of the things that have been talked about here today. However, I think a lot of it is just fluffing around as well. I do not think it is just the youth. There are adults here too who are equally, if not more, responsible firstly for the children but also for their own actions. This is a small town and I feel that there is a lot of covering up of things in this community. There is a lot of networking of 'mates'. A lot of the issues here relate to drugs. I am very concerned because I have three young children. I have

looked at the community over the years—I have been here for twenty-something years now—and I feel I have to protect my children a lot of the time. I also fear that, within the authorities here, there are all sorts of things going on that the general public does not know about—things in sporting groups, for instance, that I have major concerns about. Our young children are growing up, and if they see particular role models among our adults then I cannot really blame the youth of today for being as they are. I do not wish to lay blame on anyone. I agree with a lot of the comments that have been made here about the need for parental responsibility and, in some cases perhaps, parental education.

**CHAIR**—When you say authorities are covering up, what do you mean?

**Mrs Reid**—This is what I have come here to speak about today. I would like to ask the Great Lakes Council if they do background checks and/or criminal records checks on their employees. I have been to the police over the years. I have lived here in fear but I come here today in courage. I want to ask the Great Lakes Council if they do that kind of thing and, if not, why not, because they go into our community. They go into our homes and into our properties and they have access to a lot of things that we as normal individuals do not have access to. That is the question I pose to the Great Lakes Council, to whoever the employer of staff is.

**Mr Chadban**—No, the council does not invade the privacy of people by checking on such matters. The people the council employs to do their respective jobs are covered by the law on what they can and cannot do in releasing information, entering people's property or, indeed, dealing with private issues of people and the law. The local government act and other acts cover very carefully what those people can do. Quite simply, if a staff member exceeds that authority, they are breaking the law and are liable to retribution under the law. The answer to the question is no, we do not do a criminal check. We are not required to under the law and it would be an invasion of that person's privacy. If staff exceed their entitlements they are subject to the law as it is. So, no, we do not do that.

**Mr CADMAN**—Mayor Chadban, do you have a form that you require staff applying for a job to fill in asking whether or not they have been charged with any offence or have any prison record? As a member of parliament, I have to fill in that sort of thing all the time.

**Mrs Reid**—Teachers also have to fill in those things now.

**Mr Chadban**—We have a set form and, if you are applying for a job with the council, you have to fill it in. It asks for that background information, but we do not check that. If a person wants to escape that particular notation and says no, we do not check whether or not they are telling the truth.

**CHAIR**—Does that apply to all jobs? Wouldn't some jobs be more sensitive than others?

**Mr Chadban**—No. Anyone who applies for a job with council would fill in the standard application form.

**CHAIR**—I will draw an analogy. In the area in which we work, there are some people you do run checks on because they are in more sensitive areas.

**Mr Chadban**—We have a different set of circumstances for those running preschools or those running youth groups in community halls. I am thinking about the building inspector or the person on the roads or the person in the rates department who has information on people's property. So I guess there is differentiation between those dealing with children and public groups like that and the ordinary employees of council.

**Mrs Miles**—I would like to make a comment on that. I represent the local Catholic school by teaching in the state schools. I attend the local public school as a scripture teacher every Friday. My right to privacy was not considered. One of the things we had to do was to indicate all of our background, and it was all checked before we received our certification to go into the schools. A check was done on all of us as to whether we had any criminal background. I cannot really see what harm there is. If you have nothing to hide, it does not matter. It might be a good idea to check if people have any problems in that regard.

**CHAIR**—That certainly applies to anyone who works with children.

**Ms Beevers**—I am an area health promotion officer with the Mid North Coast Area Health Service and I am seconded to Great Lakes Council two days a week to work with the Safe Communities coalition, which was touched on earlier. I would like to take the opportunity to explain how that works, because it is going to do a lot for this community as far as crime prevention is concerned. It looks at safe communities, which is what we want to have, and it looks at doing that in partnership with the community, with different community organisations and organisations that service the community, including government agencies, working together at the same table to look at these issues.

One of the task forces working under the Safe Communities coalition is the crime prevention task force. That task force is currently starting the process of developing a crime prevention plan for this council area. That is why this forum is fantastic—we are going to be able to refer to everything that people have said here today and incorporate today's findings into the crime prevention plan. I would also like to invite people to attend our next task force meeting if they would like to take further any of the concerns they have addressed today and look at how we can build those into the plan.

This is really about looking at the things that are already happening in the community and how we can support those existing programs, while also identifying any gaps, and looking at how we can build those programs into the plan. Once we have a plan, we are going to look at putting it forward in a strategic way and building in the partnerships and being able to attract funding to support the implementation of those programs. The next task force meeting will be held between 10 and 12 on Wednesday morning next week at the Forster police station.

**CHAIR**—Have you developed any part of this plan yet, and would you like to give us an example?

**Ms Beevers**—We have a lot of agencies involved such as police, fire brigades, ambulance and Neighbourhood Watch. We have a lot of different organisations. I am here from Health and we have a number of councillors and council staff. We have quite a few members of the task force here today who are representing different organisations.

**CHAIR**—That is the task force, but have you done an outline or any actual suggestion that you are going to work on that will be part of the plan?

**Ms Beevers**—There are a number of things we have been looking at. That is where Safe Communities is fantastic because, as well as the crime prevention task force, we have a number of other task forces—

**CHAIR**—It is the crime prevention task force that I am interested in.

**Ms Beevers**—What I am saying, though, is that they are also feeding into that process. That is why it is great to have this big picture.

**CHAIR**—But have we got anything out of the process yet?

**Ms Beevers**—For example, the child safety task force is working on implementing a Safety House program in this community. That is going to be fantastic because the community will be leading the way in protecting this community and the children in it.

**CHAIR**—But that is a long-time program, isn't it? That used to work under the old community Neighbourhood Watch program.

**Ms Beevers**—It is something that currently is not running in this community. It has been identified as a real need, not only to set it up but also to set it up in a way that can be sustained long term. That is where the partnerships are coming in. We are able to look at how we can work together to ensure that it is not a short-term thing, that we can sustain it and also support the people who are involved in that program. The people who have made a commitment to have a Safety House also need to have support structures around them. All of the people who have Safety Houses which are open to people coming into those homes for sanctuary need to have support structures for debriefing, training and supporting each other.

**CHAIR**—Your funding comes from the state government. Do you have any funding, for instance, to provide that youth centre that so many people have talked about?

**Ms Beevers**—This Safe Communities coalition does not actually have any funding. That is a real issue, because it is a fantastic program. It is something that we are looking at. That is where we can collaborate. That is why collaboration is so important, because it does really need that support. It is one thing to do the crime prevention but it is another thing to ensure that all of the partners and the community are not just there for feeding in the ideas at the beginning. They must be there throughout the process as part of the implementation as well as keeping it going and keeping it a working document.

**CHAIR**—That is terrific—thank you very much.

**Mr CADMAN**—You have great enthusiasm.

**CHAIR**—Yes. That is terrific to hear. If you had some resources you would probably do 1,000 times more.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—The crime prevention plan that we are working on, which is very formative at this stage, has the basic idea that, as a committee, we pool what we see as the issues and then put them out to the public and see if they agree or whether they want to expand on them further before we look at strategies to try and impact on them.

**Mr CADMAN**—Do you have a timetable in mind for that?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Yes. We do have one, but I do not have it in front of me.

**Mr CADMAN**—At a guess, will you have something in place by Christmas?

**Ms BeEVERS**—Yes, we are looking at having something in place by Christmas. The general time line is to circulate surveys through to every household in the community to get not only the statistics but also people's perceptions. Perception of safety is just as important. If you are feeling fear then you are feeling fear and that is a real thing. The first thing is to survey the community, have community events and forums and also look at the statistics that we do have and the experiences of service providers and organisations that are already working in this community at the coalface. Then we can also build that into a plan and review process. That is where we are going to be taking advantage of the Attorney General's Department program of providing financial support to implement the plan. There is no money to support the development of the plan, but then there is funding to support the implementation of the plan.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Basically, what I was alluding to was that, once the plan is registered with the state Attorney General's Department, there are openings there for funding for your strategies.

**Mr CADMAN**—One thing I did not ask you, if you do not mind the interruption, is whether it is possible for you to provide us with a copy of your statistics. Is that okay or not?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—No.

**Mr CADMAN**—Okay—that is all right. I did not know whether you could.

**CHAIR**—So it is possible that, once you have registered that plan, if you see a need for a youth centre then there might be funding to build a youth centre?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—Possibly, yes, particularly if it were shared with another department. It is not a huge bucket of funds that is there. They are normally quite accepting of a range of proposals. I have done this process already with the Taree council. We put our first plan in place in 2000. It is a three-year plan; we have just entered into our second one. We received \$70,000 in one grant for the Street Beat program. Other amounts were sizeable but probably not enough to do the capital development of building a centre if we had to do that. If we were able to get another location, and it was looking at the other issues of setting it up, then that might be more feasible. It is certainly worth a look.

**Mr Abbo**—I have a real estate office in town, Richardson and Wrench Forster. I am simply representing the main street at this stage; everyone else has gone. Michael Yarrad also owns a shop in town. It was mentioned earlier that there was a \$7,000 bill for glass breakage a while

back—it was actually \$11,000—and that was Michael’s windows. He is in dire danger of being uninsurable for his windows, which is fairly frightening because he has two shops in town and they are both very nice shops. We have had three windows broken.

Fortunately at this time of year, winter, things are cool. In summertime, Saturday night fever strikes and all the kids are in the main street from half past six or seven o’clock onwards. Young people in the main street with cars drink—from polystyrene cups—alcohol, which are they are not supposed to have in the main street. That goes on. I think Jim McShane knows a fair bit about that. In Tuncurry we were at a restaurant; I forget what it is called now. They say that on Saturday night there are young girls over there—this is the frightening part, the part that worries me—with backpacks of alcohol. They drink alcohol and they get drunk. It is also possible, if you are going through Tuncurry at five o’clock in the morning, to see young girls of 12 or 13 out in the street. I do not know what their parents are doing. I do not think our problem here can be pointed at the Indigenous groups. I think at this stage they are very good. I think it is a lot of white kids that are causing a lot of problems.

We have a major problem. A property manager, Greg, spoke to you before up on the main front. People there vow and declare they will never come back to Forster again because of the noise that goes on up there and the language and the drinking that goes on up near the surf lifesaving club. This is fairly horrifying. They speed up and down. The police presence is getting higher now. I do not blame the police. I have a lot of time for the police and I think they do a good job. But I know their funding is short. They are short of staff. And the young folks are fairly smart.

We have a major problem with cars—four-cylinder cars—racing around town. I live in One Mile Beach; at all hours of the morning you hear cars screaming around. They go past our place: we live in a bit of a loop and they use that as a speed track. I think that our problem appears to be a bit of policing, but I know that is a state government problem and a matter of getting sufficient funding for it. When we did major works in the main street and made it one way, we put cabling in for cameras. I really was very keen on this, through the Chamber of Commerce. We got permission to put the cameras on poles. The conduit is there; the cable is there. We put it to council but council would not take it on because of privacy matters. They are doing it elsewhere. They do it all around Sydney in a lot of places. Why can’t we do it here?

**CHAIR**—They even do it in Parliament House now.

**Mr Abbo**—Well, there are some characters there you probably don’t want in!

**Mr Stephens**—Present company excluded.

**Mr Abbo**—Yes. I would like to see those cameras activated. We could put a camera outside these motels and around the area we are having trouble with near beaches. There is a big roundabout there where they do this work at night, in the early hours of the morning. They race across the bridge at night too. These cameras can be very good. They can zoom in on a car number plate. You can know exactly who is doing the crime.

**CHAIR**—What is the matter with the police camera picking them up for speeding?



**Snr Const. Sheather**—We do not have a police camera.

**CHAIR**—You do not have a police camera?

**Snr Const. Sheather**—You do not have police cameras attached to every local area command. There is not an issued police camera in this area, no. If we have one it comes up from Newcastle area on reasonably regular occasions, but it is mainly looking at targeting the highway area. Our main traffic problem is the Pacific Highway.

**CHAIR**—Perhaps we could lend you a few. We have heard the rumour that those cameras are mainly put in place in areas where people drive registered cars and pay fines as distinct from areas where they behave in a different way.

**Snr Const. Sheather**—I can comment on John's points on cameras and so forth when he is finished, if you wish.

**Mr Abbo**—I think we could solve a few problems at that roundabout and up on the beach where we get major problems also. I know that we could run a line back to the police station. I brought that up previously with the police, but they did not want to be involved because they would have had to man it. I can understand their problem, but it would be there for them. If there were a problem in the main street of town, they could look at the cameras and maybe follow around whoever was causing the problem. I can understand that they did have a problem with manning and that they did not want to get involved with it. I would like to see that revisited pretty quickly here.

I would also like to comment on the young people in town. I am in Rotary and we do a lot for the young people. I am now trying to start a program of getting to the children when they are young, and I think this is when you have to get to your children. These little blokes of six, seven, eight or 10 years of age have got to be got. They have got to be taught the right way. They should not be allowed to be out with the older kids. You have to get them at that early age. If we can get them then, we have got them. I think if you leave them until they are 14 and 15, they will not listen to you; they have had too much pressure from outside. Let us go back to those little kids and get them.

**CHAIR**—I do not know if we have any teachers here today, but teachers have told us on many occasions that, when they look at the playground, they can tell you who is going to be a problem right from the beginning.

**Mr CADMAN**—Can I ask somebody from the council: is it possible to declare the main street of Forster dry and enforce that?

**Mrs Payne**—It is already.

**Mr CADMAN**—What is the problem with keeping it dry? Can you appoint 'traffic cop' sort of people?

**Mr Chadban**—Policing and supervision of that at night is the issue.

**Mr CADMAN**—Do you have to have somebody in uniform to do that? Surely you can have council officers or rangers enforcing that.

**Mr Chadban**—We have an assortment of rangers, but to have our rangers on the street late at night to supervise it is not a function or a role that the council wants to take on. It does not see its role as policing the streets at that hour of the night, and that is usually the problem time when these things seem to occur. We do it in the daytime and on weekends, particularly Sunday afternoons—that sort of time. Unfortunately, you catch the innocent person who did not know that the street was like it is.

**Mrs Moffat**—I will be a little briefer than I was going to be. My experience comes from two regions. I have a business in the Port Stephens area and I have had a lot to do with the Newcastle area. For the last four months I have been residing in and working a business from the Forster-Tuncurry area. I am a mother of two teenage sons. I am the liquor licensee of a licensed premise in the Port Stephens area. I am also a student at Griffith University in Queensland, where I am studying criminology and social justice.

The crimes statistics for malicious damage in the Forster-Tuncurry area are grossly understated. I am a strata managing agent in charge of 300 properties in the Forster-Tuncurry area and my experience is that most of the repairs and maintenance that are caused by this vandalism go unreported for a number of reasons. One reason is that it takes a long time to get an event number from the police to try and put through an insurance claim. As most of the damage is of an emergency nature, it needs to be attended to straightaway: the glass is replaced straightaway, the fire hydrants are replaced straightaway, the electricity meter boxes are fixed immediately, and then some time down the track an event number is got and an attempt is made to try and recoup those funds for the body corporates through insurances. So I think that, if you are looking at the statistics of this area, a lot more malicious damage is occurring than what is being reported.

Having come from Newcastle and from the Port Stephens area, I work until 9 o'clock at night, and I am absolutely horrified at what happens in the Tuncurry Park, and across the bridge. At 9 o'clock on a Friday night I am terrified walking over to my vehicle, and I only have to walk six feet. There are young people who are drunk and abusive in the park—it is just horrific. I think that is the area that should be the alcohol-free zone. I can already see the problems with people coming from Foster to Tuncurry across the bridge. It is a driving nightmare. For anyone who is trying to negotiate the bridge there should be some sort of guard rail put along the walking path along that bridge. You have drunks staggering all over the road. These children are nine and 10 years old. I understand from a liquor licensee point of view the responsible service of alcohol, but it is the older kids who are plying these young children with alcohol. That is what needs to be addressed.

I take my hat off to Ted. I agree—there should be 100 more people like him. But I think the problem goes a bit further than that, in that there is a breakdown in our society of role models. Look at parliament, for example. They are supposed to be the leaders of our nation, yet when I turn on the television to watch a session of parliament I see that that is not the way that I think people should be behaving. They are screaming and yelling over the top of each other. There is snide innuendo. That is what our children are learning. They are learning that from the top of the

heap. If that is the sort of role model they have been set, what hope is there for those children? Where do they look to get encouragement?

The other think I would like to talk about is the car circuit hoon, the young car enthusiast. There is a massive problem in the Newcastle region. There is one area, for example, called Kooragang Island. It has been in operation for 38 years. It is on Water Board land, and it is a highly illegal venue, but it attracts up to 200 and 300 kids and adults every Friday and Saturday night. How that is managed is that every three or four months the police come along and have a massive hit, and they impound all the vehicles. Those vehicles are impounded for three months at a cost of between \$15 and \$20 a day, which the kids have to pay to get the vehicles back. Those vehicles are impounded if they have been engaged in burn-outs or street racing—or they just have to be there to be impounded. I have seen what has happened in Newcastle at the same sort of circuit where the kids drive in their hotted up cars. I have come here to Foster and Taree and seen exactly the same thing.

In all of these areas there is a need identified for something to happen. There is a lot of money available through private enterprise for that to happen, but it is not happening because of the insurance implications. I see the police not helping in this circumstance, because it is a very good revenue raising exercise, rather than addressing the problem. Foster-Tuncurry is absolutely no different. So I think it is the community leaders who should be looking for somewhere for these kids to go. We are calling this antisocial behaviour. For these kids of this generation this is normal behaviour. This is a way of them getting together. Being car enthusiasts, they do not see what they are doing as wrong. They say, 'We are not on heroin, we are not drinking, we are not on drugs. We just like our cars and we need somewhere to go.'

**CHAIR**—You are suggesting that there ought to be somewhere they can go, and Kooragang Island is such a place, but it gets raided for revenue.

**Mrs Moffat**—It is an illegal place, because it is owned by the Water Board. I am saying that after 38 years—

**CHAIR**—Is there any reason why it shouldn't be made legal?

**Mrs Moffat**—That is exactly right. Or, if they do not want the kids to go there, then someone should put a fence up. The children see it as a revenue raising exercise. No-one does anything about it, except impound their vehicles and then allow it to build up again. They allow it to build up and then impound the vehicles again. Then car enthusiasts from Sydney will make their way to Newcastle. People from Newcastle are now coming to Taree. This is a problem right across the state, not just here in Foster-Tuncurry. I have been and had a look at what happens along the waterfront here in Foster. They get between 10 and 15 cars. If they went to Newcastle and had a look at what happened down there, you are talking about hundreds of vehicles.

**CHAIR**—Is this Kooragang Island you are talking about?

**Mrs Moffat**—Or in the suburban areas of Newcastle and all along the waterfront. And it is exactly the same on the Central Coast. Any areas where car parking is available along waterfronts have this same phenomenon occurring.

**CHAIR**—They are doing burnouts, wheelies and so on.

**Mrs Moffat**—Or on a Sunday afternoon in Newcastle they have this parade and they drive at 20 kilometres an hour. There are hundreds of them driving around and around in circles. It stops the flow of traffic. They are not actually doing the burnouts and the street racing because they are driving too slowly. It is identified as a problem and it needs to be addressed. It needs more than just booking them and impounding their vehicles and raising the revenue from it. For most of these cars, it is going to cost these kids between \$3,000 and \$5,000 to get them out. If that vehicle is involved in a second offence, then the cars are automatically confiscated by the Crown.

**CHAIR**—Is there any speedway that these kids can have access to that is legal?

**Mrs Moffat**—There was one at Tomago in Port Stephens, but it was closed down because of insurance. It was run by private operators. There are two applications on the drawing board in the Port Stephens area. Bronwyn, you know me; I am the aircraft noise campaigner from Port Stephens. I have been lobbying Senator Hill's office about defence owned land near the RAAF base that has been resumed because of the aircraft noise. That would be a very suitable site. Defence could donate that land back to the community and a facility could be put in that would solve the problem for everyone.

**CHAIR**—You would still have the insurance problem, wouldn't you?

**Mrs Moffat**—Private enterprise could factor that into putting a facility there if the land was donated by the Crown. Of course, they do not have the other problems of the excessive noise because they are not going to make as much noise as the RAAF base are making there as it is. From a logistics point of view, putting that sort of facility there would be fantastic. And I am sure that, given what is already going on within the area between Newcastle and Taree, most of these kids would travel to such a facility to be able to do these things that young men do, but do it in a safe environment. Their parents and their friends could be there supporting them, and it solves a community issue.

**CHAIR**—On this role model question, we hear people's opinion that violence in films, violence on television and lyrics in rock songs, some of which are truly horrendous, together create an attitude from kids who are bombarded with them all the time. That does breed antisocial behaviour. Do you agree with that?

**Mrs Moffat**—Absolutely. I am very passionate about a lot of these issues, especially about the breakdown of the family. If you want to look at a generational change, for example, my parents worked. They retired early enough that they are now the people who are tripping all around the place enjoying themselves and having a good time, but they are not there as part of an extended family. I have had a career; I have had to work. My children have gone into care. It is a society problem about the fabric of the family breaking down, because there is this imbalance between women who have this core instinct to want to look after their families and also have the desire to have a career and to make a difference in the world. Dads are not staying at home to look after the family.

**CHAIR**—Some are.

**Mrs Moffat**—Not enough are. It is the family that is suffering. You have a lot of kids in day care; you have a lot of kids who have a lot of outside influence. They are getting their values from preschools, from day carers, from a school system and, might I say, from a state government that supports any child that does not like what happens at home and does not like what their parents say and says, ‘That’s fine, you can move out of home if you are 14 or 15. We’ll encourage you and we’ll set you up in a flat and you can leave.’

**CHAIR**—We have certainly been aware of that. In fact, I did a program regarding kids like that fairly recently. The reality is our society has changed but the statistics have remained actually fairly constant. Most kids are good kids and they make it. The ones that we are concerned about are the ones that are at risk and you can draw up a profile of those kids at risk. We are certainly interested in looking at ways in which you can have early intervention to prevent those kids going into a crime cycle. Interestingly enough, music is one way. Giving kids instruments and letting them learn opens up horizons of other things that are available to them.

**Mrs Moffat**—One other thing is the government’s Tough on Drugs stand, which I do not think is tough enough.

**CHAIR**—I might be inclined to agree with you there.

**Mrs Moffat**—I think most people in this room would agree that we should have zero tolerance to drugs in this country.

**Mr CADMAN**—Hear, hear!

**Mrs Moffat**—When you see the government pouring money into heroin injecting rooms, it is sending the wrong message.

**CHAIR**—I certainly agree with you 100 per cent on that issue, and there are a whole lot of issues. But I think that certainly does lead to the honey pot effect and a whole lot of other things that flow from that. It has been very interesting to hear your point of view.

**Mr Patteson**—I live at Hawks Nest, which is at the southern end of the Great Lakes shire. One of my employments is working for a resort as an outdoor education instructor with large groups of school kids on camps. I have had quite a bit of experience with them, including Forster kids. I see a lot of teachers who try to bridge this imaginary gap that seems to exist between youth and the rest of us in society. It is hard to get back—as one gentleman over here said—to the grassroots. A lady in front of me said that the general breakdown of society is a big problem. I think it comes from lack of respect and discipline. Remember the days when most of us in this room got the cane. I am not suggesting that we bring that back but—

**Mr CADMAN**—Why not? It is the best punishment for boys.

**Mr Patteson**—It certainly frightened me when I was at school, and I was lucky enough not to get it. Back to the point: it seems that in some cases kids have more rights than their supposed role models and teachers. I guess the message which I would like to send back to Canberra is: have a look at the policies that are in schools. It is schools, it is parents, it is society in general—

we have to teach kids respect and discipline. In my opinion, if we do not do that, all these other projects that we put in place might not work.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much. I appreciate that because it is a young person’s point of view as well. At this stage we might call the meeting to a close. I thank you all very much for attending. Your testimony will be most useful to us in our deliberations and the report that we will be putting together. This is the first time that it has ever been attempted to have a nationwide look at crime in our country, to look at how it manifests itself in small and large communities and to try to get a separation of fact and mythology, because there is plenty of mythology around about crime. I thank everyone who has appeared today for their testimony. As I said, it is most useful to us in our deliberations. I now declare this public meeting closed.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Cadman**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

**Subcommittee adjourned at 5.14 p.m.**