



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

**HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL
AFFAIRS

Reference: Crime in the community

FRIDAY, 23 JULY 2004

MURRY BRIDGE

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

Friday, 23 July 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 and Mr Secker

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

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

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

WITNESSES

ARBON, Mr Allan Ernest, Mayor, Rural City of Murray Bridge 1841

**GIGGER, Mr John Holden, Officer in Charge, Murray Bridge Police Station, South Australia
Police 1841**

WADE, Mr David Edward, Human Services Officer, Rural City of Murray Bridge..... 1841

WEINERT, Councillor Milton, Elected Member, Rural City of Murray Bridge 1841

**WHEARE, Mr Robert Clive, Chairperson, Neighbourhood Watch; and Chairperson, Crime
Prevention 1841**

**WILSON, Mr Jerry, President, Murray Bridge Business and Tourism; and Past President,
Rotary..... 1841**

Committee met at 10.25 a.m.

ARBON, Mr Allan Ernest, Mayor, Rural City of Murray Bridge

WADE, Mr David Edward, Human Services Officer, Rural City of Murray Bridge

WEINERT, Councillor Milton, Elected Member, Rural City of Murray Bridge

GIGGER, Mr John Holden, Officer in Charge, Murray Bridge Police Station, South Australia Police

WILSON, Mr Jerry, President, Murray Bridge Business and Tourism; and Past President, Rotary

WHEARE, Mr Robert Clive, Chairperson, Neighbourhood Watch; and Chairperson, Crime Prevention

CHAIR—It being past quarter past 10 and a quorum being present, 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 which 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 Murray Bridge this morning to hear from you about your concerns and how you think crime issues can be addressed. We will commence this morning's program with a roundtable discussion at which various organisations are represented. As the proceedings will be recorded by Hansard, it will be appreciated if you would not mind addressing your remarks through the chair. Following this initial discussion, there will be an opportunity for others here today to put their views to the committee.

Although the committee does not require you to be sworn this morning, I do advise you that these hearings are legal proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings of the House of Representatives. The giving of false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. Perhaps we will begin with Your Worship the Mayor.

Mr Arbon—Thank you, Madam Chair. On behalf of the Rural City of Murray Bridge, I welcome members of the House of Representatives standing committee, and particularly welcome you as chair of this committee; and Patrick Secker, of course, our federal member for Barker, who also is a member of this committee. I understand this committee is inquiring into crime in the community and seeking grassroots feedback from the most exposed to crime, the everyday citizens of Murray Bridge.

Today is an opportunity for our community to give its views on the state and federal government's crime prevention initiatives and whether they meet the needs of our community; if not, why not; and what initiatives we can have to meet these needs. I need to leave early and I need to thank you for coming today. I look forward to this committee leaving Murray Bridge with a better understanding of our needs and a clear resolve to meet those needs in the near future.

Our community has been working for some time, in close cooperation with the police and Neighbourhood Watch, to try to make Murray Bridge a safer place for people to live and work in. There are quite a few threats to prevent us doing that. Quite a bit of the problem is the funding cuts that we have had in previous times for initiatives that we have had here.

We have had things like Your Home, Your Castle where there has been the initiative of crime prevention officers being here. The expectation of our community is that those sorts of programs would go forward and it has made it a little bit difficult, from council's point of view, to keep those services going when the funding is cut. We are no different from other communities; we have a certain element of people that want to use drugs and/or commit vandalism. We are very grateful for the work that our group on graffiti is concerned with. We have a great bunch of volunteers working on that. They will need some help in due course. It is only recently that they have been supplied with a vehicle—they have been using their own vehicles up until now—so it is very much from love of our community that they do it.

We have figures here, and I will let my other staff talk about them later. We have crimes figures for, particularly, in our reserves, where there are a huge number of needles being found; for vandalism, particularly in our Sturt Reserve, our major tourist area, where houseboats suffer damage at night because of the lack of initiatives that we would like to put forward, such as cameras, extra lights, or things of that nature, that seem to counteract that problem to a degree. Those sorts of measures are all a matter of funding and we think that we can counter some of our problems with some initiatives.

We would like to see some hard money. We have had enough pamphlets et cetera telling us what the crimes are. We need some money to put some cameras where they do the most good and we would hope that somehow or other the state and federal governments could help us with that. We feel it is a real positive for us to take a stand on this because Murray Bridge is a growing city and we are looking forward to encouraging people to live here. We want to create a good environment so that Murray Bridge is considered a great place in which to live and work, and we need to take action for that process to be encouraged by government instrumentalities.

We are seeing some vital growth in this area through a whole range of businesses that have come here and through people wishing to come to Murray Bridge to retire. The blight on all of that is our difficulty in trying to address our problems of vandalism, drug use and things of that nature. There are a whole range of programs that we could think of. I am just doing an overarching philosophical outline. We may be no different than others, but we are sensitive to this area, and we need to ask people in higher places for help to bring those things about.

CHAIR—Thank you. I might say that Patrick, as your local member, was very keen that we should come to Murray Bridge and hear the story of this community so that we had a good

picture that could feed into what is happening in other communities. We are looking at different areas and the sharing of information and different aspects that people have developed.

Mr Arbon—We are very happy with Patrick's support here, Madam Chair. He would realise—and I would back him up—that Murray Bridge is the most important city in his electorate. We need to recognise that.

CHAIR—We are here.

Mr Arbon—That is right.

CHAIR—You did mention in your statement that you had anticipated that a program was going to be put in place and you would be funded for it. Which program was that?

Mr Arbon—We have had a meeting of police representatives, Neighbourhood Watch, business owners, houseboat owners on the Sturt Reserve. We have not come back with a recommendation yet.

We are still looking at what can be funded. There was an opportunity to look at cameras or extra lighting in that area. It seems people like to do their worst mischief in the dark. We think that lighting and cameras would be somewhat of a deterrent and we are hoping that somehow or other we could get some help for funding those types of programs.

Mr SECKER—What sort of damage has been done to houseboats at Sturt Reserve?

Mr Arbon—It has got to the point, Patrick, that houseboat owners are being told by the houseboat renters or other people not to come to Murray Bridge because at half past two in the morning they will find themselves with a broken front windscreen, the ropes untied and they are adrift in the middle of the river somewhere, which does not give you a good night's sleep. We have spent a lot of money as a community on Sturt Reserve to make it attractive to not only our own people but visitors.

We would encourage houseboat owners to come here. However, if they got that sort of treatment you could understand they are a bit reluctant to do that. That is where we think either lighting or cameras or both would be sufficient. We hear of businesses down there who have got floodlights. If they have the initiative to switch them on all night, they do not seem to get into trouble, but as soon as it becomes a little bit dark, people seem to revel in the fact that people cannot find out who they are.

CHAIR—Are they an identical group of people who are doing the vandalism and exhibiting this bad behaviour?

Mr Arbon—Sergeant Gigger might comment on that. I understand that they pretty well know who they are. It is a matter of catching them and of doing something about it when they are caught.

CHAIR—This might be a good opportunity, then, to go to Senior Sergeant Gigger to perhaps shed some light on those issues.

Mr Gigger—Thank you, Madam Chair. Sturt Reserve is a significant problem, more so within the summer months. I need to reassure you that things are not out of control within the town area in relation to crime. It is a seasonal crime pattern that we have down there: summertime, of course, because we attract more houseboats to the area. We have a Pedal Prix that occurs in September.

Whilst there are not dedicated groups of people that are offending—and we are aware of certain people that do some of the offending—it is a recreational area where people gather with their vehicles and consume liquor. There are a number of issues that occur down there which create problems.

The staffing issue is a state issue, which is my issue as the officer in charge here. I can dedicate people to specific operations to combat what we see as a problem there for certain times, but unfortunately, if they get called away to do other duties, the areas become vacant; there is no police resource down there. That is why I need to reinforce and support the concept of the cameras, if that is possible, because we work with Neighbourhood Watch; that is a dedicated Neighbourhood Watch area as well. Council has created some initiatives in relation to closing the road off and restricting access to certain people down there.

A high number of people go there in the summertime, whether it is daytime or not. People love to come to Murray Bridge and gather on the foreshore. The council has created playgrounds. We are looking at skate parks. There are different initiatives that council has put in place, so it is a significant area of the town. I would love to resource it more. I would like to be a proactive person instead of being reactive. I would love to have police there all the time to do that, but I do not have that resource available to me.

Yes, we do target. That is the current policing concept: to be in the face of certain people that are committing crimes. That is our job within this community. I have a dedicated TAC team that performs those duties, but we have other crime issues in the town, so I cannot dedicate that specifically all the time to Sturt Reserve. That resource of the cameras would be invaluable because it would give Neighbourhood Watch the opportunity to have volunteers that would resource the film. A member of the police station would be dedicated to identifying people that are offending. We could clear up a number of the crimes in the area.

Mr SECKER—The lighting is important for the cameras to work?

Mr Gigger—I do not know enough about that technology, sir; unless Bob knows. Bob has done a bit of research on it. It is the CCTV program. I am aware of it in other business premises in the town and it works wonderfully well. We have had some significant clear-ups in this community because of CCTV.

CHAIR—Have they put that in themselves?

Mr Gigger—Yes, those companies which—

CHAIR—Want to protect their own things?

Mr Gigger—Exactly. They have seen a need, and that is part of something that has been identified by the police, working in partnership with Neighbourhood Watch on crime issues in the community. The Woolworths complex is one. Some of the roadhouses have seen the need to do it as well.

Mr SECKER—But Sturt Reserve would be your key problem area at the moment?

Mr Gigger—Yes, but I have to be specific about seasonal. It is the summer and springtime when the offences occur. It is too cold down there at the moment. There is no-one there at night-time. They still go down with the cars at night-time and they carry on a bit, but it is not out of control. There are other crime issues within this community.

CHAIR—What sorts of crime issues would they be?

Mr Gigger—Property damage from people in hotels. It occurs regularly, but we have liquor licensing contacts and we are working on different strategies. We have people on foot patrols at night-time, so we are using different sorts of strategies in relation to different issues in the community. At Woolworths and the central business district, there were children on bicycles; but that is at the lower end of crime. That has been resolved at the moment; it has been a successful operation. That is our job as police: to dedicate certain people to certain tasks. It is working well.

Mr SECKER—Under the new program that was announced in the federal budget this year, where communities can get up to \$500,000 for local solutions, would you say the Sturt Reserve lighting and camera would be the highest priority?

Mr Gigger—For this community it is, yes.

CHAIR—I think under the program you have to find a partnership; you cannot get all the money. It is a very good program. So many of the programs previously have been programs where we have paid money to the state governments and then the state governments have—

Mr SECKER—It got shifted.

CHAIR—Yes. So the beauty of this program is that it does not go through the state government, it comes direct to communities.

Mr Gigger—Sturt Reserve is popular during the summer and spring months and a high number of people visit this community because of town activities, whether it be rowing or the Pedal Prix or whatever. I want them to feel safe and secure here as well—not only the local people but those that visit this community. There is nothing worse than negative reports within the local newspaper or being circulated within the state. It reflects badly on the police and it reflects badly on the community and the council, so we are working together strongly.

CHAIR—You said that you have foot patrols and that they work well?

Mr Gigger—Yes. I may be an old-fashioned cop—

CHAIR—I think you are a great cop. I think you are right.

Mr Gigger—but people like to see the policemen walking down the street or walking through the shopping centre.

CHAIR—Yes, they do.

Mr Gigger—That is John Gigger's philosophy. The troops do not like it particularly because it is cold, but in fact they need to be there and they need to be present. I am just reinforcing what SAPOL wants me to do, but I have my own way of doing things as well, and if I can get some positive results from that, then that is good for SAPOL and the community, isn't it?

CHAIR—I think we could do with a few more like you.

Mr SECKER—We have heard quite often in the submissions and information that is given to the committee that they do want to see the presence of the police on the beat.

Mr Gigger—They certainly do.

Mr SECKER—I commend you for that.

CHAIR—One of the interesting things about reality and statistics and trying to match the two up—and they do not necessarily match up at all—is that fear of crime is a very real issue in communities. The people who fear crime most are usually the elderly.

Mr Gigger—That is correct.

CHAIR—Yet they are the least likely to be the victims of crime. I am not telling you anything you do not know. Young men aged 17 to 25 are both the main perpetrators and the main victims. But you ask yourself the question: are older people not the victims of crime simply because they do withdraw from the community? If they do not go out at night, they do not put themselves in a position where they are likely to be a victim, so that fear actually impacts on their life and their quality of life.

Mr Gigger—An example is the Woolworths Centro complex. It was at Christmas time last year that the group of youths were on their bicycles going round and everything. Elderly people felt unsafe just going shopping at Christmas time. Of course, they speak to their families and it flows throughout the community. It was something quite significant. We worked with Centro, which is the shopping complex, and we put security people in. We put foot patrols in place. You are liaising with the business people through business and tourism or through the management at the shopping complex. It has worked out particularly well and we have resolved the problem at the moment. It may come back but we would do the same things again or we would do it better next time.

CHAIR—That is excellent. One of the other things that has come up is that the actual design of shopping centres and public spaces can attract areas where people like to congregate and cause mischief, and that by lighting up a particular area where they like to get up to things in the dark, you can avert the problem. Is that part of what you did?

Mr Gigger—Yes. The security manager from Centro is well aware of the problem. He is limited with his finances as well, but cameras are going into the complex—the CCTV again—so we have seen that as an initiative in working together. We will get some excellent results from that in future times.

Mr SECKER—Are you using mainly police personnel with that or is there a lot of volunteer work to work with CCTV?

Mr Gigger—No, it is their security. They have to take some responsibility as well, which they have done. They have put security people in and they support the police.

CHAIR—That is good.

Mr SECKER—It might be useful if Bob Wheare talks about how the Neighbourhood Watch works in with council and the police force for the good of Murray Bridge. I suppose that is one way of putting it.

Mr Wheare—Madam Chair, I have two hats on this morning: one is Neighbourhood Watch, which I am the chairperson of, and the other is Crime Prevention. I have been chairperson of that for nearly 10 years. I have given you some notes there referring back to what Patrick said before about the scheme, the \$20 million which was going to be issued for crime prevention. I do not want to sound negative or anything. The Labor government here in South Australia ceased our moneys and supplies for crime prevention in Murray Bridge and we have been struggling ever since.

The only reason we are still going now is that we do have in Murray Bridge a dedicated group of people that work very hard in conjunction with council and the police in doing these programs that we have going. I am referring back to what Allan Arbon, the mayor, said about the graffiti. We have a graffiti trailer and we go around. The town is physically proud to say we are graffiti-free because of the dedication of this group of hard workers, each one of them a volunteer. As you all know, the world would not go on without volunteers. Then you have the group of Neighbourhood Watch. The whole town of Murray Bridge is covered with Neighbourhood Watch now because we have a very dedicated group, and we work well in conjunction with the police and the local council.

I could almost classify myself as a resident of Murray Bridge. I have been here 40 years! In that period of time—I do not want to sound like I am blowing my bags here—I was a fire chief for 19 years. I shifted the boundaries of the town and I have seen this town grow. My love is this town. I want to see this town stay safe for everybody, including all the tourists that come in.

Referring back to what John said regarding the cameras, at this stage it is a problem that we need to address in this town because of the fact, as Allan Arbon said, that we have problems with the Houseboat Association, just to make it a little bit worse. People come along and they cut the ropes of the houseboats and let them drift down the river. I can understand the association telling them not to come to Murray Bridge, because no way in the world would I like to tie up at Murray Bridge and end up down at Wellington when I wake up in the morning—not very nice; bit of a shock.

We have some big things coming to Murray Bridge. We have the Pedal Prix. At the local speedway up here we have a world series sprint car event that is going to take place. The whole town is booked out now. That is going to be in February, and they want houseboats. If we have no security down there, the poor people are going to get a bit of shock when they wake up the next morning. They could be down at Jervois or something.

Mr SECKER—Just for the information of the chair and the committee, the Pedal Prix is either the largest or the second largest in the world, isn't it?

Mr Wheare—That is correct.

Mr SECKER—It is a pretty substantial tourist attraction.

CHAIR—What precisely is it?

Mr Arbon—The Pedal Prix was born out of an idea that the young people be challenged to build their own pedal bikes, of a certain height and a certain width, and it has grown from 100 teams for a start to around 200 at this stage. We have something like 15,000 people here on that weekend. The schoolchildren come from all over Australia. They have to build their own bikes. They have to race for 24 hours, from midday on a Saturday till midday on a Sunday, around and around. They have teams of between seven and 10 children. They are backed up with the support of parents, friends and other students.

It is about 2.1 kilometres around the Sturt Reserve perimeter and the winners last year, over that 24 hours, did the distance of from here to Melbourne in their little pedal car. And that is all human power. They are not going to get up to much mischief for a week or two after they have done that. It is an Australia-wide thing. In fact, we have had teams from overseas. It is just growing and growing in popularity, to the point where we will probably have to put a restriction on the number of teams coming here soon.

That creates its own problems. We have had instances where someone has done the wrong thing even in that period, with the security the police provide as well as the security the Pedal Prix committee provides. You always have some person that wants to create problems. But it is a major event of this state. It is very well supported at the state level and very much supported from interstate. It is just getting more and more popular. We welcome them to our area but we want to know, as John says, that people feel that they are safe when they come here. That is an outline of what happens on that particular weekend in September.

Mr SECKER—It has a lot of pluses because it gets our youth involved in something worthwhile.

Mr Arbon—Of all the youth programs, it would be the major one. They have team-building; they have fitness; they are challenged to build their own bikes. There are different categories. They have tandem; they have two pushing the bike. They have to have their own team, they have to have the will to do it over a 24-hour period, so it is a win-win situation for the young people to grow into that team spirit.

Mr SECKER—It keeps them off the streets by putting them on the streets but with a fence around them.

Mr Arbon—Yes. It is certainly a major attraction and it is certainly popular. We have been trying to improve the conditions year by year with different things. I know schools are practising already.

Mr SECKER—They practise for months ahead. And it is around the Sturt Reserve area.

CHAIR—Sturt Reserve is obviously a very important resource.

Mr Wheare—I just wanted to say a little bit more, if you do not mind. The Murray Bridge Council supports Your Home, Your Castle. It is a program that we got going here some four or five years ago, and Your Home, Your Castle is assisting with the police as well, because for any person that gets broken into the police do a security audit, and I think John will back me on this: that, rather than the police do a follow-up six weeks later, they hand it to the Rural City of Murray Bridge to give to the Your Home, Your Castle audit team to go round and do the security work, and we physically go round and do the security work for these people. We actually do secure the place, using very good equipment. It is all volunteer work, done for nothing. All the person has to pay for is a small amount, the cost; the council purchases the equipment. It is a very good system and it is working very well.

CHAIR—Is that after someone has had an incident or just for someone who would want it?

Mr Wheare—Both. We did it with people talking to the community. This is through Crime Prevention. We moved it on; this is how it all started. Then the police came on board with a system that they have running and came to a meeting up here. Mal Hyde came up here and discussed it with the councils and the police took it on board to show that it was a very successful operation.

CHAIR—You go in and do a security check?

Mr Wheare—Yes. Two people go and do a security audit. They look at requirements. We send them a letter showing what the requirements are, and then it is up to the individual person to come back to us and say, ‘Yes, I want it done.’ Then we send another group of maintenance people in to physically do the repairs to make the house secure. It does not matter whether you are a 20-year-old or a 90-year-old; anybody can do it.

CHAIR—And do they volunteer too? Are the maintenance people volunteers?

Mr Wheare—They are all volunteers. Retired people do it. We have another one going here that was once again a drive by Crime Prevention, but the state government in its wisdom has ceased to give us any funding. We had what we called an immobiliser system, where the council physically gives you an immobiliser to put into your car if your car is vulnerable to being stolen. The only thing that you, the person, have to pay is X amount of dollars for individual business people of this town, who fit them for us, to fit them into your car. You get an over \$300 unit free of charge. That system is working well, but once again I have trouble finding funding. I lean on everybody for funding.

Mr SECKER—Because of a cut in crime prevention by the state government.

Mr Wheare—Yes. As you know, Patrick, it has been reduced severely.

Mr SECKER—Yes.

Mr Wheare—We have put in an application to get some money for lighting and cameras et cetera through this letter here. There is another small problem, too, that we address as a group in Neighbourhood Watch and the council: if you look on the second page of that list there, you will find a list of needle usage. Down the bottom of it you will see Long Island Reserve, Sturt. There are 132 there. These are loose ones that are just picked up, not in the containers. There are two at Sturt Reserve. They have been reduced because of the work that we have been doing. We put boom gates in and tried to stop a lot of it, but what we did was move the problem, so we need those security cameras to look down there to try to address this problem as well. You will note there is another reserve there, Thiele Reserve. There are not very many needles, but there is another associated problem there that needs addressing.

CHAIR—Is there a big drug problem in the town?

Mr Wheare—What town hasn't got one? I think anybody with any commonsense can understand there is a problem. It does not matter what town you go into in Australia, you will find there is a drug problem.

CHAIR—What is the major drug usage?

Mr Wheare—John, you might be able to answer that for me.

Mr Gigger—Madam Chair, the use of cannabis on a daily basis is quite significant; you can also call alcohol a drug problem, because it is quite significant, unfortunately; and the use of heroin, amphetamines. We have dealers in this community, and that is part of our police target package that we have to do on a daily basis. We use other resources from Adelaide specific to those people, but there is a circle of people within this community that are regular users and there are regular suppliers.

Mr SECKER—Is ecstasy a significant problem here as well?

Mr Gigger—Not to my knowledge, in this community.

CHAIR—But speed is?

Mr Gigger—Yes.

CHAIR—But it is amphetamine, not methamphetamine?

Mr Gigger—No. I would have thought cannabis was a priority within this community.

CHAIR—The priority, mainly?

Mr Gigger—Yes.

CHAIR—Do you think that it is affected because of the laws you have here in South Australia with regard to your tolerance being to have two plants, no matter how big they are? Can't you have two plants that fill up a room?

Mr SECKER—It used to be 10. Now it is down to one or two, is it not? I am not sure.

Mr Gigger—Madam Chair, I have some personal issues on that. I am representing SAPOL here, but if they had been fair dinkum about it, they would have changed some of the issues within this state. The expiation system has been in since its inception, which is about 15 years now, and, yes, those regular users know. We have the drug diversion process. They know that if we go to their place, we have to drug divert. They are pretty cunning themselves, but I would like to see the laws improved.

Mr SECKER—Is there much grown here locally, do you think?

Mr Gigger—Yes, because Murray Bridge is, I suppose, the base area. There are six outstations at the Murraylands end, and you would be aware of some of the parks and the significant crops that have been located within close proximity. But in the town area, yes, people are doing it all the time, and we have regular drug actions in which I use the TAC team to target specific offenders all the time. People are providing information through Crime Stoppers on a regular basis.

CHAIR—Do you feel that, the way you manage it, you keep a handle on it?

Mr Gigger—Yes. It is not out of control.

CHAIR—Because you police it.

Mr Gigger—We have to police it. That is what policing is all about. A number of different issues come up on a daily basis and we need to address them, but drug actions are ongoing in this community.

Mr Arbon—Madam Chair, unfortunately I need to go because I have another appointment. I think I will see you later this afternoon, anyway.

CHAIR—That would be lovely. Thank you for being with us this morning.

Mr Arbon—Thanks for coming to our community and listening to us.

CHAIR—Thank you very much. Mr Wheare, would you like to continue?

Mr Wheare—Yes, I would, Madam Chair. On the front page here you will see this \$20 million. We were a little bit late getting it because we were not—

CHAIR—Getting the application in.

Mr Wheare—Getting in the application. If we do put another application in, is it humanly possible that we may have a bit of a chance?

CHAIR—There will certainly be another round. It is not a one-off program. I will make some inquiries for you, if you like.

Mr Wheare—If you do not mind.

CHAIR—You missed this round?

Mr Wheare—Yes, we missed this round because we did not get the information quickly enough for us to act on it, and it put pressure on David and me. We did not have a crime prevention officer at the time—and still do not at this stage. We still have applications out, trying to get somebody. We would like to have a second crack, if it is humanly possible.

CHAIR—We will see when the next application dates are.

Mr SECKER—That is right. I think we need to look at putting a price on the huge amount of volunteer work that we do here in Murray Bridge, and putting value on that as a contribution from the local community.

CHAIR—As a two-way thing?

Mr SECKER—Yes.

CHAIR—We will take that up and come back through you.

Mr SECKER—There would not be a much better community than Murray Bridge as far as getting the volunteers involved.

CHAIR—I think the two programs we have just heard about are very impressive.

Mr Wheare—Thank you. I had better stop now and let somebody else have a go. I do not want to hold the floor, so I will finish at that, thank you.

CHAIR—All right. We might hear from the deputy mayor.

Councillor Weinert—Thank you, Madam Chair. I think the mayor has listed most of the problems we have here, and I would just like to confirm that. We had a pleasure boat that had to shift away from the reserves through vandalism and that sort of thing. It is a big problem, but I do not want to focus on Sturt Reserve alone.

I just have an observation about crime prevention. The old saying ‘Prevention is better than cure’ is pretty short-sighted, I think, and I am not playing politics—it applies to whichever government has cut funds on crime prevention. I think that is disastrous in trying to control crime, and I blame the state government as well. They funded crime prevention in this community and we had a very successful program. We still have a good program, thanks to the

volunteers, but what I am saying is that money spent on crime prevention is money well spent, and that seems to be cut all the time, rather than increased.

CHAIR—How much did you get under that program previously?

Councillor Weinert—David might be able to answer that.

Mr Wade—Madam Chair, we receive around \$79,000 per annum. Part of that was towards a full-time crime prevention person, and other parts towards the actual spending on crime prevention activities, and there was always other money which the crime prevention officer then accessed. That was virtually cut to zilch.

We approached the Attorney-General and indicated that we had some very successful programs, more successful than in other areas: as Bob was saying, Your Home, Your Castle; the immobiliser program; the no tolerance for graffiti. We are very proud of the fact that our city does not have graffiti—not because no-one does it but because Bob and his volunteers get up at 7.30 in the morning and go out and find it and take it off, and in their own vehicles till recently. It was those kinds of arguments which persuaded the state Attorney-General's to then give a funding last year of about \$35,000 to maintain those programs and to gain assistance with them. But, basically, what it does is just maintain what we have. It does not allow us to extend programs or start new programs to reflect the changing nature of society.

That funding is not guaranteed. We are applying for it this year. We have not yet been given a definite answer as to whether we can get some funding from the Attorney-General. In a very real sense, we are maintaining what programs we can, not knowing whether we can maintain them over the coming year. That kind of indecisiveness is not very good for our volunteers, who want to continue what they are doing and need the resources to be able to do it. I cannot guarantee it at this point in time, and it makes it very difficult. Volunteers are hard to come by, anyway.

Councillor Weinert—It makes it very hard for council too.

Mr Wade—It makes it very hard for council to plan ahead, but we are planning on the basis that we can continue to persuade the state Attorney-General that our programs do need to be maintained, and not just the ones that Bob is talking about. We have other programs. One is called Transition House, where we support the expert, a psychologist, in trying to improve people's home environments and to do all the domestic violence prevention. Our whole aim is prevention. We support that. We also support the graffiti program.

The federal government funded, to the tune of \$130,000, the opportunity to set up an Internet centre here at Murray Bridge. We set it up in the community centre, and I am pleased to say that probably every time we have a Saturday night lockdown we have up to 40 young people there who use the computers for games, and play cards. That is 40 young people who are not on the streets; that is 40 young people doing what they enjoy doing. Again, it is manned by volunteers, who give up their Saturday nights to go down there and look after those young people. That kind of capital investment is giving the young people—and other people—things to do. That is why we fell over when we saw the \$20 million. We became very excited, first of all, but then noticed that what we could not go for were things like large-scale capital equipment; we could not use it for IT equipment.

Mr SECKER—Which is what you need most of all.

Mr Wade—Which is what we need most, and that is the area where we are now finding difficulties. We have had all the talkfests; we know what the crime situation is. We are a growing population: about 17,000 people at the moment, and 5,400 are under 24. We are going against the national trends in regional areas. We are growing, we are expanding, and at the same time the land values are going up, and so places like our squash centre, our indoor cricket area and our poolroom were sold for a variety of reasons. The entrepreneur who bought our indoor cricket area now wants to sell it for the land. Whilst the population is growing, the values are going up, properties are being sold or closed down for housing, and they happen to be the places where people are going. So in one breath we are doing one thing, supplying more facilities—and I am sure Jerry will talk about the skate park program, because the young people petitioned for a skate park and we are looking now at council supporting that—and in the other breath, while we are doing that, in other areas in the private enterprise side we are losing facilities, and so places like the Sturt Reserve and the other reserves become far more important, because it is where people congregate.

CHAIR—Is this Internet centre still functioning?

Mr Wade—Yes, very much so, and it is growing all the time.

Mr SECKER—It is a very good investment.

Mr Wade—It is growing all the time.

CHAIR—What program did that money come out of?

Mr Wade—Communication technology, a general federal program to teach the community how to use a computer. In the day sessions there, we have retired people, unemployed, mothers, young housewives who want to be able to pay their bills over the Internet, and they learn how to use a computer at that centre.

CHAIR—That is very good.

Mr Wade—And of course night-time is put aside for the youth. They are the types of things that we are actively trying to achieve; we are not saying against all odds. What we are saying is that we really would like to have more support from both state and federal government; less support for pamphlets and more support for equipment, because it is equipment that we need.

Mr SECKER—And whilst I cannot guarantee this recommendation will come out, from hearing submissions like yours we can then recommend to the government and the minister, ‘Why not look at these capital items like lighting and cameras and perhaps make it a bit more flexible so that the local areas who are wanting it and saying this is a good idea can do it?’ The usefulness of a committee like this is that we can make recommendations based on what you are telling us.

Mr Wade—Yes. We do not think it is overkill. People might say, ‘Why are you putting cameras in certain areas?’ Sturt Reserve is a large area; it is a public area. As has been mentioned

earlier regarding the houseboats, people are waking up and finding anything that was on their deck gone; they are waking up and finding their houseboats have been graffitied. There are groups of people who will harass them when they are going towards their houseboat or when they are actually at the Sturt Reserve, and by the time the police get there, they cannot see what is going on, the kids have moved on quickly, and people generally steer away, and the cameras are not there to be Big Brother. The cameras are there to, firstly, deter, and secondly to assist the police to identify the culprits and have some record of what they were doing.

Bob and I have taken the view—and I think the police would too—of, ‘If you’ve got nothing to hide, don’t worry about the cameras being there. If you’ve got something to hide then don’t go there.’ We feel that with the increasing tourism—and tourism will become our bread and butter in far more ways than not—we need people to be able to come to Murray Bridge and know they are coming to an area where they can be safe; where their children can be down by the river, on the Sturt Reserve, and perhaps be at the skate park if it is there—we have other facilities there at the moment; where children can play without the fear of being accosted, but if they are accosted, they know that the police, in that mobile situation with the TV cameras in their stations, can see what is going on and can address that incident very quickly. That is what we see as the importance of those kinds of steps at the moment.

ACTING CHAIR (Mr Secker)—Jerry.

Mr Wilson—I am going to wear two different hats. I will start with business and tourism. First of all, we think this is a magnificent place to live; we would not be living here if we did not. With my accent, you know that I was not born here, but I have lived here for 30 years now. I spent 20 years as a schoolteacher and 10 years as a business person, and I absolutely love it. In fact, I am here, as I say, by choice, not by chance.

We do have a tremendous number of groups that work together. On Business and Tourism we have representatives from council. We are starting to work much more closely with council. We also have a representative from the police that is on our executive and gives us a report every month. We are trying to put all of these groups together and work as a unit to try and help each other. We have had this new philosophy for only about a year but it seems to be working quite well. We would really like the cameras. Sometimes when you buy these cameras you do not get just one camera, they come in modules of 16, so you buy a module. You might as well have eight or 10 or a dozen cameras which means that one of John’s people can then look at eight or 10 different places at once, so there is a cost saving in manpower because of technology advancements. I do not see where it is going to be that expensive. The other thing is that in the back of my mind I always know that we have a prison here at Murray Bridge and it costs about \$75,000 per year per inmate. If we can do anything to stop somebody from going in there, that is \$75,000 we have saved.

I might just talk about the fact that the chamber has put in for a federal government grant to hire a person to make the Murray Bridge community more concise and able to work together. In the past we had the main street, we had the Woolworths complex, we had the Bi-Lo, we had the golden mile strip. They all competed against each other. We are going to try and get those people to unite, to be one force, and then compete against shopping in, say, Adelaide or Mount Barker. We want to raise the profile of Murray Bridge. We want it to be a very positive place to come; and it is. I feel very safe here. I have raised my three kids here.

One of the things we are trying to raise the profile with is: on the television on Thursday nights during the ski season they have somebody over in the ski fields explaining what the snow skiing is going to be like, and we would like to have the same type of thing during the summer for waterskiing, and have a report on what the weather is going to be like.

Mr SECKER—It would be perfect every day, wouldn't it?

Mr Wilson—Absolutely. We can provide it. We have a different weather pattern than Adelaide. Once again, we want the tourists to feel safe; we want them to think of this as a good place to come to. Talking about cameras, we are thinking about actually mounting a camera on the bridge so that people can log in on their computers and see what the waterskiing conditions are. That is part of our submission that has gone in to the government through Steve Chappel. We are waiting for that result.

Mr SECKER—That is a unique idea, I think.

Mr Wilson—Those are some of the things we are trying to do. I will just change hats for a second and talk about Rotary. Rotary is very concerned with the youth. We have even set up a special youth director in our Rotary club, which is unusual for Rotary clubs. We have done things like raise money for a skateboard park, as David mentioned, by selling calendars. We raised over \$10,000 to help these youth have some place to ride their bikes rather than over the bonnets of cars in the Woolworths complex—especially over the security guard's car. We also take young kids, in about grade 6 or 7, to the Flinders Ranges.

Mr SECKER—What is that program called, for the record?

Mr Wilson—Going Bush with Rotary. It has won all kinds of awards through Rotary. We have Rotary volunteers who take these kids. They are mostly from single parent families, but not necessarily the bad kids, because sometimes they get a little bit of attention. We try and get some kids by asking a different school every year, 'Who are the kids that could benefit from being with a group of people for a week?' We take a nurse or a doctor with us and we go up to the Flinders and we camp, which some of them probably have not done. It is rough camping—no showers for a couple of nights. One of our kids who came back from that in the next year won a state rowing championship. That person really was not going anywhere before that. That is just one that we have helped.

We are trying to put a lot of energy into kids. We are very concerned about truancy from school. It does not matter which hat I am wearing there. Both the business people and the Rotarians are very concerned at the kids that we see riding their bikes or walking the streets when they should be at school. I do not know if that is a state or a federal matter, but it is a concern that we have.

Mr SECKER—It is a key concern.

Mr Wilson—Absolutely.

CHAIR—It is.

Mr SECKER—And are they causing mischief?

Mr Wilson—Absolutely, yes. Murray Bridge is still safe. The traders can have racks of clothes out on the footpaths and stuff like that. If you had a high crime rate that was super bad, they would be all stolen. As a business, we have been broken into once in the eight years that we have been there. That was our own fault. We left the tills full of cash. Somebody threw a big rock through the window and they came in and took the two tills. Now we leave the tills open so they can look through the window and see they are empty. We were pretty silly. We have a camera now.

Mr SECKER—You would agree that crime prevention is probably the most important part?

Mr Wilson—Absolutely. As Dave was saying, we were getting \$79,000 a year for crime prevention, yet just one person at Mobilong Prison is \$75,000. If we can just keep two out, we are more than in front.

CHAIR—They probably import a few in, I dare say.

Mr Wilson—Most of them are not pinched from here, anyhow. They are pinched from other places and they are brought here. That does create jobs and other things. I used to live right next door to where the prison is and I was very vocal and jumped up and down and moved to the other side of the town to avoid it, but now that it has been here it is not as bad as I thought it was going to be.

CHAIR—And it does create jobs and activity.

Mr Wilson—That is right, yes, and I am really impressed with the next expansion that is going on there. It is going to be where four people live in each of these rooms and they are going to be going out and doing work in the community. That should be really good, and it is trying to break that cycle.

Mr SECKER—Rehabilitation.

Mr Wilson—Yes, rehabilitation.

CHAIR—In my own electorate, one of my surf clubs did an extension to their clubhouse. They used some of the prisoners on the work program and some of them were literally apprentices and learning skills, which is going to give them an opportunity subsequently; and they did a good job.

Mr Wilson—We need builders here—and I will speak just for a minute on schools. Like I said, I taught for 20 years. We need technical schools. We are in terrible need of electricians, carpenters and joiners. Our Rotary club helped, and the Rotary club from Tailem Bend also put in money, so that we could have a Doorways 2 Construction, which is a carpentry class up at Mannum, which is 20 miles, or 30 kilometres, up the road, because we do need tradesmen. The community is concerned. Some classes in schools are cheaper to run. English and some of the others are cheaper.

To put one person in front of 35 kids is cheaper. When you are on a construction site, it has to be one to 10 and it is more expensive to have that. That is why we run it on an area. Not all the students involved in that come from Mannum High School. Mannum is only where it takes place. The kids come from Coomandook, Murray Bridge—

CHAIR—And you do that as Rotary?

Mr Wilson—Rotary put in \$1,000 to help fund that. The school just could not afford to run that particular class. It is a department of education curriculum, delivered by the school, but the cluster of schools did not think they could afford to run it. The local community said, ‘Here’s some money. We think it’s so important that we’re going to give you some extra money to make sure this runs.’

CHAIR—It is a carpentry course?

Mr Wilson—It is a carpentry course, yes.

Mr SECKER—Yes, and they come from Coomandook, which is 60 kilometres away.

Mr Wilson—More. It is 90 kilometres by the time they get up to Mannum—and Bowhill.

Mr SECKER—Probably 100 kilometres.

CHAIR—Does that class then act as a spur to introduce them to that so they might want to go on to do a TAFE course?

Mr Wilson—Absolutely, yes. One of my son’s friends is an apprentice carpenter and he went through that deal. They ran it for a couple of years and they were going to drop it. We said, ‘Hang on.’ Hopefully, the schools are going to have another look at their budgeting this year and say, ‘Well, the community says such and such.’ We are trying to get schools to work a bit more closely with the community and with the community needs.

Mr SECKER—We have had a lot of evidence where the communities that work together like you are saying have more success than when just relying on the police force to do everything.

CHAIR—I agree with you, Patrick. One of the things that is coming out of these forums is that in the communities where this interaction occurs they are really getting a handle on reducing crime and having quality of life for the community.

Mr Wade—We agree, Madam Chair. It cannot be done in isolation. Throughout the community—the council, the police—we are working together. We have our Community Safety Committee.

CHAIR—How often would that meet?

Mr Wade—Monthly. That is where we look at practical ways of trying to prevent things from occurring and to address the things that are occurring. It is an ‘Idle hands make mischief’ concept. On that basis the whole community is working towards creating situations where we

can offer not just our young people but others in our community who are idle, something to do, something to work towards for their futures, and also to enable them to gain responsibility for their own community. The council has set up the Youth Advisory Committee. That is basically where we facilitate that so that youth can understand and have responsibility towards their community and involve their friends in those things as well. They are the things we are trying to address.

We know that crime is going to exist. It always has done. We would not like it to exist in our community but we know somewhere along the line it is going to happen. We prefer it to be minimal. We prefer it to be the normal mischief that occurs when someone is growing up. We do not want situations to occur where young people hurt themselves or cause themselves damage that will last the rest of their lives, or hurt somebody else. Our view is: the more we can get them involved in our community the better, but also, as we said before, we are reacting to the fact that we need to have those facilities. The community can only go so far, then we need help from outside our community.

CHAIR—Would you say it is true in your community that, basically, what we are talking about is street crime which is what you need to combat? Is there an incidence of break and enter, car theft, muggings, those sorts of crimes?

Mr Gigger—Not muggings. Home invasions are very rare, but it should be the case that local police should know who their criminals are, because they are habitual and because of the local knowledge of the police. Part of what the tactical team does is that if there is a break-in overnight then we are at the doorstep the following day. Invariably, we are pretty spot-on. We should know what is happening in our local community.

Whilst we are in close contact with Adelaide, being only 40 minutes away, the Adelaide Hills end of our local service area in policing may have a greater problem with that type of crime, where they come up from Elizabeth or down at Christies Beach and commit crime in the Hills area. A recent example is, \$100,000 worth of games was stolen from semitrailers at the Woolworths complex at Monarto. We have cleared up that crime. There were four arrests yesterday. That is local knowledge by local police. That is what we should be doing and that is what the community expects.

CHAIR—Your clear-up rate is pretty good?

Mr Gigger—Yes. It is not always great. There are lots of crimes, like property damage, that sometimes you have no chance of detecting. In our schools at the moment the property damage numbers are quite high, particularly for Unity College and the high school. That is a matter of us working with the high school, with the security companies and having police doing foot patrols, again, at night-time. Because the schools are so large, that is a difficult scenario, but, again, we are looking at extra lighting and cameras within those. Those sorts of institutions have to take responsibility themselves. The police cannot do everything. This is the working together relationship that we have, the partnership.

Mr Wade—There was one thing I wanted to say regarding your comments about fear of crime. Like Jerry, my family chose to live here. We are here by choice, not by chance. The thing that surprised us at Murray Bridge, and that we asked about, was why are couples tending not to

go out much? You did not see too many couples out, except when they went for dinners either at their clubs or at a hotel. The word that came back was that they chose not to. The man said, 'I would rather not take my wife out, because there are problems. There is a fear of problems occurring.' I said, 'But have they occurred?' 'No.' 'Has anything ever happened?' 'No.' 'Why don't you go out and socialise?' 'Well, because it could.'

CHAIR—And you hear reports of it happening to somebody else.

Mr Wade—Yes. Our view was that we would like to be able to remove that preventative fear by saying, 'Well, you can go out because it is far more secure.' Even though I do not believe and I have not come across any situation at all where that fear is founded, the fear is still there: to protect one's own. It is a shame. We have experienced that and we would like to be able to change that as well. We think these measures will help us to change that approach that some people are taking.

Councillor Weinert—Madam Chair, I harped on about crime prevention being important and it is—vitally important—and not enough money is being spent on it. It is a fact of life. But crime prevention is a pretty complex situation. If you have idle hands, you have crime. You have to give young people something to do, and that probably does not fall under the umbrella of crime prevention: a new skate park or new squash courts or something like that.

Mr SECKER—Good sporting facilities and the like.

Councillor Weinert—That is right, things that keep people occupied. I was just going to touch on one aspect. When I travelled around I heard, 'You've got a big Aboriginal population in Murray Bridge. You must have problems there.' But I take my hat off to them. They are very well behaved and they look after themselves. That is a form of crime prevention that I give them full marks for. There is very little crime in that regard. They have their own people that go out and look after them. Perhaps John Gigger could touch on that. He would know more about it than I do. I give them full marks. That is a crime prevention that is important.

CHAIR—The Lower Murray Nungas Club had accepted the invitation to appear but their chairman, Mr Clyde Rigney, sends his apologies because unfortunately there is a funeral on today.

Mr SECKER—Thank you for putting that on the record. I think it is important that that is on the record here.

Councillor Weinert—I admire them for what they do. You go to other communities and they cannot believe we do not have a problem here.

Mr Wade—They have a very strong, established community and they are developing programs themselves which are very much in parallel with what we are doing. They have their child-care centres and the Nungas Club and their own IT centre down there, as well, and their arts centre.

Mr SECKER—And the medical centre, but they are opening it up to everybody and they are saying, 'Everyone is welcome.'

Councillor Weinert—If there is a drinking problem, they have their own dry-out facilities and so on.

Mr Wade—They are just entering a keep fit system. That will be opened up, too, with everyone to be involved. They very much are a part of our community.

Councillor Weinert—Their crime rate is very low, I would think, compared to other communities.

Mr Gigger—Madam Chair, they are a group of people that like to look after themselves, but we do have a great working relationship in that I have two community constables and I have two members from my staff that are working hand in hand with them and on a daily basis. I keep saying to you that the crime management journal which comes out each day identifies issues. Some may be Aboriginal and I expect them to respond accordingly and go straight to that source, to whatever need is required in the community. Yes, there are a few that are committing offences and they are habitual. We can deal with them. We can restrain their movements by different measures.

We have a police Aboriginal liaison meeting, which is the key Aboriginal people working with the police. We have a multicultural section from Adelaide that works with local police as well. Yes, they do like to address their own problems. We do not, at times, want to interfere with that. Since I have been in this job a short time, I have made myself the point of call. If there is a problem, then you come to John Gigger. We resolve it fairly quickly because I do not want ongoing problems in the community. I cannot resolve all the problems but at least we are working together in relation to that.

We are smart, too, with some of those community issues about the skate park. We have a lot of responsible people in the community that want to do things but we also have the kids on board in relation to that. They are part of that committee.

Mr SECKER—They have ownership.

Mr Gigger—That is right—and their parents. They are some of the kids that were involved in the problems at Woolworths. Now they are on the committee. They will be part of the committee that forms the skate park, and that will go ahead.

CHAIR—Very often, the kids who are getting into trouble are the ones who do not fit into things that are organised and available. They are the ones who are not good at sport, they are not good at being involved, and the only thing they find that they get attention for is being bad or being naughty, and so you have to find something where they can excel, too. You have to find something different for them.

Mr Wheare—If you can get them involved like they are doing now with ownership of that thing, it is the perfect answer—‘If you damage it, look out.’ They have their own little group.

Mr SECKER—You actually then bring in peer pressure, to say, ‘Don’t you dare damage what we’ve got here.’

Mr Wheare—That is exactly the same. There is an area down in Sturt Reserve that was handpainted by the kids. No graffiti goes anywhere near that. It is taboo.

CHAIR—We took some evidence in a particular town in New South Wales, up on the central to northern coast, and again there had been a strong volunteer effort and the kids had come on board to help clean up the graffiti, and they keep a list. They know who's who and whose signature does what, and if they are an out-of-town signature, they know where to go and find them.

Mr Wheare—We are a little bit like that. I photograph every tag as it comes into the town. It is then sent down to the headquarters and then they can pick up who it is. At one stage we had a little bit of a blitz on imported ones because a group came into the town. Bang! They knew them straightaway. A knock on the door, 'How do you do.' The cooperation between the groups in this town is really good.

Mr Wilson—Madam Chair, can I just tell a quick story. In my computer shop I had a traveller that came who used to sell us stationery. He decided, because of amalgamation of a couple of companies, to take a package, and he bought a local lawnmower shop here. After he had been here for 12 months, I asked him, 'How do you find Murray Bridge?' and he said, 'You know, I like it so much I've talked my mum into moving up and retiring here.' The older people feel safe here. I just thought that was a little story that should be told.

CHAIR—Yes, excellent.

Mrs Bentley—I am the owner of the paddle ship *Madam Jade* on the Sturt Reserve. I have now been in Murray Bridge for just over two years. Prior to that, I travelled with my husband up and down the Murray River, from the bottom of the Murray up as far as Mildura on a continuous basis, because I live on board. When we started out in 1991, we did not have any problem with security or problems along the riverfront, but gradually we saw the increase in vandalism, theft, breakages—you name it. You have listed quite a lot of the items here today.

My particular concern is one of the items that you have not really focused on—you just touched on it a few moments ago, Madam Chair—and that is about the causes of crime, particularly relating to a group that do not fit into the normal programs. I know the police do a wonderful job in visiting the schools and educating children. There are programs to try and direct children into alternative activities, but you inevitably have people who do not fit into those, who are not interested in fitting into those, and so a lot of the good work that is done is addressed to children who are never going to offend anyway.

I am interested in the causes of crime that start with children. We all know from our own histories that as children we do things that perhaps we should not do and, generally speaking, we grow out of it. Also, in the past, the focus was on police and parents being able to deal with their children, having responsibility, being able to collect children, take them home. They might get a clip on the ear or a backside whack or whatever. We have a different society today, where that is not recognised as being appropriate. However, what we have not done is replace it with anything,

Because I live on the riverfront at Murray Bridge, I have been the subject of vandalism and theft; numerous broken windows; one time being let out into the river, my ropes all drifting, at four o'clock in the morning and finding myself on a 23-metre paddleboat hanging out into the river on my own. You can imagine what a frightening experience that was. The police had to come down at four o'clock in the morning and rescue me.

The police do a wonderful job but, unfortunately, there is a gap, and the gap is in responding to the child vandalism, and mostly along the riverfront it is child vandalism or teenage vandalism. We know who the groups are. We can actually point them out. We might not know their names because we do not know them personally, but we know who they are, the police know who they are, and continually we get the response, 'We can't do anything.' The children will chant this back at you. 'The police can't do nothing.' That is their favourite response.

The other problem is that when we report it to the police, the police will come down, but maybe they come down half an hour, three-quarters of an hour later; the children are gone. There are times when the children have actually stayed around to see if the police will come and then eventually they give up and go home because the police are not there. I can cite numerous instances from my own personal experience where this has occurred.

I report all incidences, whether it happens to me or whether I see it happening elsewhere along the riverfront, and one of the most frustrating things for anybody who is a victim of crime is when they do not see any results, when they know what can be done, when they can point to who is responsible and nothing happens. This is what detracts from having confidence in your police force in the community. Why bother to report it? It is one of the reasons why you will not get people showing up or reporting offences. They say, 'Why bother?'

My concern is the fact that it is not about how much money you have got to spend on your resources; it is how you apply those resources. I attended a community meeting at the community club a few months ago in which the police gentleman who attended put the highlight on dealing with road offences. Okay, yes, we know that there is a big problem with road offences and with the accidents that occur. Fine, that is reasonable, but if we are not addressing the issue of child crime, these are your future criminals that police are going to have to deal with in the future, regardless.

We really need to look at our resources and how we are applying them. We need to use new strategies in confronting children. I had a particular instance last summer of one child who has regularly broken windows on my boat and done other things. I happened to be able to catch him specifically in the act. He would not have been more than about 12 years old. He is a regular at the riverfront with a group of his mates, and I am sure that particular group is known to the police.

When I confronted him, he was about to throw a pigeon's egg at one of the windows, and I grabbed it out of his hand and I clamped it down on his head, and he got such a shock at that—it was only a little confrontation—that he has not been back since. He is still at the riverfront. He sees me. I look at him, he looks at me, and he keeps going, because somebody confronted him. Somebody said, 'You can't do this.' Somebody said, 'Stop. No.'

This is what we are not saying to our children. We are afraid of saying 'No' to them. I get repeated instances of that, time and time again, when I get children coming on board with their parents. I run a little tourist operation on board, and the children are trying to go on parts of the boat where they are not supposed to go. The parents get annoyed because I say 'No' to their children. The children are not allowed to do this or they are not allowed to do that. The parents seem to think that it is okay for children to do what they like these days. We have a lack of parental accountability for children and a lack of police actually confronting children, yet if you can stop some of that in its tracks, you are going to reduce future crime.

I know that might seem trivial in itself, but think about it and think back to the way that we used to hold children accountable—and when I say 'children', this can go right up to the late teens. We treat teenagers as adults these days, but if they are behaving like children, why shouldn't they be treated as children? That is what I was taught. If you do not have self-discipline and respect and do not know how to behave as an adult, you do not expect to be treated as an adult. These might be old-fashioned ideas, but they are as relevant today as ever they were in the past.

Mr SECKER—Absolutely.

Mrs Bentley—So this is what I am suggesting to you: start focusing on not just how much money you can throw at programs or how many education seminars or leaflets you can put out, but get back to basics, because the causes of crime start with the children who grow up to be criminals. If you investigate that as an issue, you are looking at families, you are looking at policing, how we call ourselves to account as a society, and some of that can be addressed with very little money. I am not talking about throwing buckets of money at an issue, but if I ring the police and say that my window has been broken and the children that did it are still standing outside the boat, then the police should be able to come down, they should be able to deal with it, and they are not dealing with it. I know they will tell you that they are dealing with it, but they are not dealing with it in a way that will prevent those children from offending again. I hope I have not taken up too much of your time.

CHAIR—No, indeed. Thank you, Mrs Bentley. Sergeant Gigger, would you like to comment?

Mr Gigger—Madam Chair, I have heard the comments before and obviously I need to speak personally with the lady concerned. Police do respond. We prioritise our work and police do respond to those complaints from victims of crime. I am sure they have responded to a number of your complaints at Sturt Reserve. I am disappointed to hear your response today and it would be best if I investigate some of those and perhaps make a point myself of contacting you if you have any complaints. But we do respond to incidents at Sturt Reserve.

CHAIR—There is a perception and we do hear from time to time that children will just be warned or there will not be any—in your words—confrontation: 'They are kids. We can't do anything.' We certainly have heard evidence that kids will be used to commit more serious crime organised by older criminals simply because they do get off and they cannot be charged. That does not seem to be your problem here. What do you do with a child you catch in the act? What do you do?

Mr Gigger—With that example of a 12-year-old, under the juvenile justice system there are five steps of the ladder. There is an informal caution, depending on the nature of the offence. There is a formal caution, family conference, or the child goes to the court. That is a determination that is made by the officers at the time, and their supervisor, when the report is submitted. If there is an absolute crime and there has been a victim that is prepared to give police a statement, then we will proceed with that matter and it will be dealt with accordingly. We have a lot of complaints where victims are not prepared to support us in court if it became a contested matter.

All complaints are investigated by police and I just have to go with the judgment of the members that attend the incident. At times I read articles in the crime management journal where I am disappointed with the results, but I have to trust my staff and the decisions they make in the field.

CHAIR—Let me give you an example. In New South Wales, in March of the election year, which was 2003, suddenly there was a political statement put out that said, ‘Crime rates are down. Aren’t we doing a great job?’ When I looked at the Bureau of Statistics figures that were backing them up, what I saw was that the number of charges, of actually charging them with something and taking them to a court, was dramatically down and warnings were dramatically up. This so-called drop was simply that you recorded it as something else. It seems in New South Wales there was a problem with that sort of culture. You are saying you trust your people, you seem to have a good handle on your people, and that that sort of attitude has not crept in.

Mr Gigger—I would like to think so. I have a feel for my staff, and in my position I must question some of the decisions they make in the field. I do that on a daily basis. If there is property damage which is vandalism, then I would expect an incident report to be initiated and investigated appropriately. I cannot be there all the time holding the hands of my members and you would not expect me to do that as a manager. That is the support provided in the field by the shift manager and the team mentors, if there are a number of probationary people involved. All I can ask is that you continue to report matters to the police and I will reinforce it, as I say, in the policy.

CHAIR—Suppose you got your lighting and your cameras and you picked up the 12-year-old who has just broken the window. What would happen then?

Mr Gigger—If we identify the child—or the victim may be able to do that at the time—then, if that person were 12 years old, they are generally reported for the offence. Police have the option to make an arrest as well, depending on the evidence at the time. If they are reported, the report goes to our community programs unit, which makes an assessment on which is the best step to take for the welfare of the child and also the victim, because there are compensation issues as well.

Mr SECKER—Would there normally be a family conference?

Mr Gigger—Yes, there may be, depending on the circumstances.

Mr SECKER—A little bit like what they have in New Zealand?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Gigger—An example would be \$1,000 damage to a window on a boat. The insurance will pay for that and that is unfortunate, because that impacts—

CHAIR—They might do it the first time, but if it keeps going—

Mr Gigger—Exactly. The conference itself has the victim on board, has the parents of the child and the child who is the offender, and it is negotiated at that level about what the penalty should be. A lot of the victims in fact say, from experience, ‘What is the point of the parents paying the \$1,000?’—the compensation—if you decide to go that way. ‘Then there is little or no penalty on the child.’ That is something that is negotiated between the people at a family conference, if that were the situation.

Mr Wade—If my daughter did that and I had to pay \$1,000, there would be a penalty on the child.

CHAIR—Big penalty on the child.

Mr SECKER—Police have a very difficult job at times. They cannot go and confront the child like you did and put the egg on the head or whatever.

CHAIR—They would be charged.

Mr SECKER—They would be charged with inappropriate behaviour. The idea of giving them a kick up the backside is just not—

Mrs Bentley—They are not doing that these days.

CHAIR—You cannot.

Mrs Bentley—Sergeant Gigger is quite correct in saying that the police respond. They do, and they respond as quickly as they possibly can. Unfortunately, it is generally not quickly enough because they have other responsibilities and obligations to fulfil. The problem with the response is not the response per se, it is what follows. The standard response that I get from the police when they attend, and when I can point out to them who has committed the offence, is that, ‘We didn’t see them in the act,’ and unless the police catch them in the act they are not prepared to take it any further.

As I said, most of what occurs along the Sturt Reserve is done by certain groups of children. We can identify them. We, the boat owners along the riverfront, know who does these things. We cannot get the police to actually get hold of those children and tackle them. I am not even particularly worried about whether those children get charged or not. It is the fact that they do not get confronted with they have done, they do not get called to account.

The other point about insurance is that I carry \$1,000 excess in insurance on my paddleboat. That would be probably fairly standard. The broken window might amount to \$200. When you get five of those in a year, there is your \$1,000 but you have no claim on insurance. If you are a

pensioner, as I am, where do you get that money from? It is not just the broken windows we are talking about. It is the general intimidation; it is the fear; the constantly looking out the window.

You see kids going past on their bicycles or whatever, and I am constantly having to be up and down to be on top of it. If I am upstairs where my little shop is, then it is what is going on down below that I cannot see. You are on tenterhooks all the time. This goes on, I might say, for nine months of the year, during spring, summer and autumn. Winter is the only period when you do not get much of this sort of thing occurring. I am speaking not just for what happens on my boat but on the other boats.

We have lost a major tourist attraction recently in Murray Bridge, the *Captain Proud*. The main thing is not the lack of business. Yes, they were short on business, but Captain Peter Hunt told me the major thing was the vandalism. One of the worst things that he had was faeces all over the windows of the boat. You can imagine what it makes you feel when you come down to your boat in the morning and find that. I am a little luckier in that respect because I live on board, so I am at least in attendance all of the time; but I know that I have to be constantly 24 hours on the watch-out. I now have one of my dogs sleeping on board inside because she will let me know when there is a noise outside. Unfortunately, by the time I get to the noise it is probably too late and there will be a broken window on my truck or the vessel or whatever.

I am speaking not just about the police responding. Responding is not enough. When will they confront these children and call them to account? Last year we had a few new children in their blue Murray Bridge High School sweaters. I stopped them to check and ask what school they were at. There they were, with their foul language directed at people just walking along, minding their own business. You get children dropping their trousers and baring their bums at tourists. How do you think the tourists in Murray Bridge feel about that?

Mr SECKER—Would you like to see cameras and better lighting? Do you think that would make a difference?

Mrs Bentley—It would help. It is one part of it, but there also needs to be more regular policing. I was particularly pleased to hear Sergeant Gigger talk about foot patrols because I would certainly support that 100 per cent. When I have stopped children when I see them doing the wrong thing, it is amazing how they want to run away. It is that simple little action of calling children to account. If police could come down and they could talk to these children, if they could actually say to them, ‘I know what you’re doing and you’re going to be in strife,’ if they could speak to their parents, it would not be difficult.

But, as we have it at the moment, children are vandalising. They come down for a swim. They get bored after an hour or two. They have had their swim, so they are looking around for a bit of mischief, something to do. On the way home they pass local businesses or what have you, so will throw a rock or two. Throwing the rocks is an interesting thing. That is half their entertainment. They actually get rocks and break them up so they are a good size to be able to throw. I am a constant observer of what is going on. I have had two years in Murray Bridge doing this, plus there is what I have seen going up and down the river as far as Mildura and the different incidents that have occurred.

As I said, I have always had the policy of reporting to the police. I fill out incident sheets. They go on the police computer, I understand, and the police tell me that they build up a picture. When the incident rate gets to a certain stage, they will look at directing more of their resources to that action. Unfortunately, this kind of vandalism does not rate very highly.

CHAIR—You are making the point that if you report every incident and others do too, you are more likely to get a response because you will get a build-up?

Mrs Bentley—Yes, but I do not think that is the whole thing. It is more about, if we do call the police down, what the police do or do not do when they respond. There is no doubt about it, they do respond. Generally, they take the details from you and away they go; and I can say to you, ‘That’s the child that did it,’ but because the police did not see that child in the act of doing it, nothing happens.

CHAIR—Is that the case, Sergeant?

Mr Gigger—Again, I am disappointed with the comments. All I can do is take on board the comments that are made here today and I will action some issues from the police station, particularly during the months that you have mentioned.

Mrs Bentley—Spring, summer and autumn.

Mr Gigger—If I put police in uniform, nothing happens, which is always the case. It is proactive; it is a great thing. But I have the option of putting on plainclothes members. That is an option that I will do.

Mrs Bentley—I would like to emphasise that I am not singling out police for criticism. I know the difficult job that they have and I know the wonderful things that they do, so I emphasise that this is not a criticism of the police. It is a matter of how we address these issues, what we are going to do about them.

CHAIR—You sound as if you feel harassed?

Mrs Bentley—Very harassed, and I am not alone. I am just one that is prepared to stand up and be counted and speak about it. If you spoke to some of the others along the riverfront where these things happen, too, they would probably speak even more strongly, but they are not as willing to come out in public the way that I am. I have always been prepared to stand up and be counted because you cannot do anything about it unless someone is prepared to stand up and say, ‘Hey, how about it?’

CHAIR—It is definitely a quality of life issue, isn’t it? You are forever vigilant. Thank you, Mrs Bentley, for coming forward and taking advantage of the public forum. Is there somebody else here who would like to say something?

Councillor Weinert—Just to take that one a bit further, I believe that the police in Murray Bridge do a marvellous job. They have a big area to look after with a lot of activity. During the Pedal Prix we had a lot of trouble and we had to get in private security people to help in this regard. I am wondering whether there is a role for them to play. But private security people are

very expensive and as a council we cannot afford to have people running down there. Perhaps Sergeant Gigger could comment on that. Is that an option?

Mr Gigger—We met with the committee of the Pedal Prix, and that has happened again just this week. Their request was for additional police staff, but there are limitations on who I can provide, so in fact we put that responsibility back onto the organisations themselves. They want to make a profit from the Pedal Prix and we understand that, but there are some significant security issues that occur within that 24-hour period, particularly in relation to the large numbers of people that come into this community. Not only do I have the responsibility of the Pedal Prix, I have to police the rest of the community at the time. That is what working together is. They must accept that, and the council must accept part of the responsibility of security for the Pedal Prix.

We addressed the issue in particular this year in relation to night shift. Last year we did not have any night shift and a number of incidents occurred, so this year we put two on night shift and I myself worked as an operations manager up until half past two, three o'clock to monitor the behaviour of people and how it was going. It was a 100 per cent improvement on the previous year, but we all have to put our hands up in relation to issues like that. The whole community must take on board the responsibility for the Pedal Prix. The police will do the policing side of things, yes, but I do not have the resources available for us to just police it solely by ourselves.

CHAIR—Exclusively?

Mr Gigger—Yes.

Councillor Weinert—I was not so much concerned about the Pedal Prix. I know that has been fixed to some extent, but what about other times? Is there a role for private security people?

Mr Gigger—Yes, we did that. The example I have given previously is with the Woolworths shopping complex. That was a matter of just meeting with the management themselves and saying, 'We can't do this all the time but let's dedicate certain times of the day when we have problems, which is after school, and put people in there.' Just the presence of the security person had a huge impact. The feedback has all been positive. That was supported by police when the occasion arose. That is something that we need to be doing all the time. That is just a matter of working together.

Mr Wilson—We talked about the Pedal Prix and that this year there were not nearly as many problems. That is because we paid for a fence to go around it and we charged people to get in.

CHAIR—There is nothing like charging for it to improve the behaviour.

Mr Wilson—That is right. It seemed to separate the hooligans from the rest. It cost money to put the fence up and it cost money to have people there, but it was one of those crime prevention things that we did that seemed to work. To put up 2.1 kilometres of fence for a weekend is not really cheap.

Mr SECKER—No. Have you bought that same fence and put it up each year, or do you rent that?

Mr Wilson—Council owns it.

Mr SECKER—So that was a fairly substantial investment by the council. Hopefully it will last for a long time.

Mr Wade—Plus we knew where the black spots were from the previous year—and that is, the unlighted spots—so we went there ourselves at certain times to check it out, to make sure that no-one was there to throw tacks over the fence.

Mr Wheare—This is where if they approach the community—for example, Neighbourhood Watch et cetera—they are bound to find groups that will assist them with more lighting. Plus, if hypothetically we were lucky enough to get the money to put those cameras in, there is another deterrent; somebody could be sitting watching it. The police could be in the proximity and say, ‘Listen, down at such and such a corner there is a problem and he is wearing such and such.’ Bang! They are in and they have him. These things can all contribute towards much better behaviour.

Another quick point I missed out before is that in my tours of graffiti spotting, I talked to a lot of people down at the Sturt Reserve during the day. They come from everywhere and they love to come to Murray Bridge because it is so nice and clean and well organised. We do not need a black name. We want everybody to come, to drive from Adelaide, come up to Murray Bridge and spend their dollars in Murray Bridge—lovely.

CHAIR—Or come in the boat.

Mr Wheare—Yes, same thing. It does not make a difference. We like to keep our name. All these little things that we are looking at and doing are things that are going to make that better. I think you, Jerry, said that you brought your mother up and your mother is living up here. That is beautiful. That is what we want. We want people to come to Murray Bridge and to feel safe.

CHAIR—Is it the wish of the committee that the exhibit from Mr Wheare be received as an exhibit and authorised for publication? There being no objection, it is so ordered. Are there any other issues that people might like to raise at this stage? We have done pretty well.

Mr Wilson—There is just one matter, and that is that both Business and Tourism and Rotary would like people to be responsible for their actions. We do not know how that can happen, but that was the one thing both requested that I put forward.

CHAIR—Certainly. Thank you all very much for coming this morning. It has given us an insight into the way you are looking at dealing with issues in this community. It is always good to have members of the public who just come and put their point of view. Others can hear, and you are going to have a conversation afterwards. That is an outcome on its own. The committee is very grateful for your input. I am particularly grateful to Patrick, as a member of the committee, for saying that this was a good community where we should come and take evidence. I think that will bear proof.

Mr SECKER—Can I just add, Madam Chair, that it is always good to come to an area where some positives are happening, and we have tried to do this because, often, we get only the negatives. We can use those positives to help elsewhere, so thank you for that as well.

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

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.

CHAIR—We will forward a copy of the transcript to you so that you have a transcript of the evidence that you have given, which you might find useful for your own purposes as well.

Mr SECKER—And that we would like you to change if you think we have made a mistake.

CHAIR—Yes. It comes in proof form, so you can correct anything which you think is not so.

Committee adjourned at 12.09 p.m.