

## **Fear of Crime**

### **Introduction**

- 2.1 Crime and fear of crime are significant matters of concern to communities across Australia. This Chapter contains a review of evidence received by the Committee which demonstrates that the issues surrounding crime and fear of crime are complex and often inconsistent. The Committee has examined a range of surveys conducted by several different organisations, the results of which demonstrate some key themes:
- some people may be afraid of particular types of crime but not of others;
  - some individuals may be afraid of crime in the home but not in public places;
  - there is a wide range of perceptions of crime, which differ across sections of society, for example, women and older Australians;
  - many factors contribute to fear of crime, including personal victimisation, anecdotal evidence and the reporting of incidents in the media; and
  - the perception of the extent of criminal activity is not supported by the evidence of crimes committed.
- 2.2 In the course of its Inquiry, the Committee received a substantial number of submissions from individuals who shared with the

Committee their personal experiences and fears. Not surprisingly, many of these submissions were provided on a confidential basis in the interests of personal safety. The Committee appreciates receiving these submissions and has taken them into account in the preparation of this Report.

- 2.3 Importantly, the number of submissions prepared by such individuals demonstrated to the Committee that fears of crime are widespread, and have had a crippling effect on some groups within our society.
- 2.4 However, the Committee also found that there is little correlation between the levels of fear experienced and the actual levels of reported crime.
- 2.5 This Chapter will examine some of the underlying reasons for these fears and the factors which contribute to them, as well as the means by which they are being addressed in different parts of Australia, in response to the specific requirements of certain sectors of the community.

## **Fear of crime – a significant community issue**

- 2.6 The Committee is aware that surveys have been conducted by shire councils, locally-based organisations and government agencies, including the police, which identified crime and fear of crime as among the most significant issues of concern within communities across Australia.
- 2.7 The Committee's attention was drawn to several general surveys which have been conducted by council or government bodies. Surveys have also been conducted which target the needs of particular sections of the community, for example, women and older Australians. Some councils have conducted public meetings to ascertain the level of concern amongst the community on certain issues. The Committee is also aware that specific crime surveys have been conducted by police and criminology organisations.
- 2.8 The Committee recognises that it is difficult to compare the findings of such surveys as a result of differences in methodologies employed and questions asked. The Committee noted that there was a lack of consistency in terms of whom the surveys covered, how they were completed and whether they focussed on crime alone or addressed other community issues as well. Notwithstanding this, from the

findings of community surveys, it is evident that fear of crime is a serious community concern.

## Findings of local councils

2.9 The Committee received evidence from a range of local councils, representing both metropolitan and regional areas.<sup>1</sup> The Committee noted that generally the surveys conducted by local councils were aimed at determining the communities' views on the priorities to be addressed by them. Canterbury City Council, for example, informed the Committee that:

In one study we conducted recently, Council was merely consulting the community about priorities for its own management plan. Given the many other services we provide we did not expect that the one issue more residents ranked as both "most important" and "requiring urgent attention" for Council to address would be "law and order", yet it ranked highest amongst 800 households randomly surveyed.<sup>2</sup>

2.10 In fact the residents of Canterbury had been asked to consider 29 different services and issues. 'Law and order' was the issue identified as the one most needing to be addressed by the Council.<sup>3</sup>

2.11 Similarly, the Sutherland Shire Council in New South Wales:

undertook research with 17,000 residents for our strategic plan and one of the highest priorities that came through from residents was about perceived levels of crime. Crime and the fear of crime ... can hold older people hostages in their homes.<sup>4</sup>

2.12 The residents of the City of Gosnells in Western Australia were also surveyed to ascertain the greatest need in the community. The extensive survey found security and safety, coupled with the fear of crime, to be one of the two highest issues of concern.<sup>5</sup> A *Community*

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1 Sutherland Shire Council, the City of Gosnells, Fairfield City Council, City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Great Lakes Council (Forster-Tuncurry), Port Stephens Shire, and Canterbury City Council.

2 Canterbury City Council, *Submission 31*, p. 10.

3 Canterbury City Council, *Submission 31*, p. 10.

4 Mr David Ackroyd, Manager, Community Services, Sutherland Shire Council, *Transcript of Evidence*, 10 October 2002, p. 326.

5 City of Gosnells, *Submission 68*; Mayor Pat Morris, *Transcript of Evidence*, 1 July 2004, p. 1812.

*Needs Analysis* and a *Safety and Security Audit* conducted by the City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder also identified public safety as a major area of concern.<sup>6</sup>

- 2.13 In a survey focusing on the views of women, the Fairfield City Council found that violence in the community was their highest concern.<sup>7</sup>
- 2.14 The Great Lakes Council situated at Forster-Tuncurry, New South Wales, informed the Committee that it regularly holds public meetings to listen to the concerns, perceptions and experiences of the people in the community. The Council observed that perceptions of crime have a negative impact on peoples' sense of personal safety and good neighbourly behaviour.<sup>8</sup>
- 2.15 The Canterbury City Council advised that it also conducts open-ended consultations for 'our Social Profile, our Youth Summit and our Community Safety Summit' which also identified law and order as a community priority.<sup>9</sup>
- 2.16 Notwithstanding that local councils serve diverse constituencies with differing needs, evidence to the Committee demonstrates that they share similar findings in relation to perceptions of crime and fear of crime experienced within their communities.

## Findings of other community organisations and interests

- 2.17 Organisations other than local councils agreed that fear of crime was a significant issue.
- 2.18 Groups such as Neighbourhood Watch have been involved in ascertaining levels of awareness and concerns about crime within their localities. The Ravenswood Neighborhood Watch (Launceston) Group, for example, contended that fear of crime in their region was an important issue to be addressed, given the high crime rate there and its share of elderly residents.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.19 The Australian Federal Police advised that the levels of fear of crime are also identified through a *National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing* which is conducted by the Australasian Centre for

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6 The City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, *Submission 62*, pp. 3-4.

7 *Exhibit 38*.

8 Great Lakes Council, *Submission 87*.

9 Canterbury City Council, *Submission 31*, p. 10.

10 Ravenswood Neighbourhood Watch, *Submission 72*.

Policing Research (ACPR). ACPR conducts a telephone-based survey which includes questions such as:

How concerned are you about being a victim of motor vehicle theft?

How safe would you feel at home by yourself after dark?<sup>11</sup>

- 2.20 The Office of the Status of Women advised the Committee of a *Women's Safety Australia* survey which measured physical and sexual violence perpetrated on women and women's feelings of safety in the community and at home. The survey found that 17 per cent of women reported living in fear for their personal safety after being sexually assaulted.<sup>12</sup>
- 2.21 The results of a survey conducted through the electorate office of the Hon Bruce Baird MP (Federal Member for Cook) indicated that crime was the issue considered to be the most important. Of the 1,559 respondents to the survey, 95 per cent thought the area to be less safe than it was five years ago, 53 per cent felt threatened by gangs in the neighbourhood, and 91 per cent did not feel safe travelling by train at night. Mr Baird concluded that these figures indicate the existence of real unease in the community about levels of crime.<sup>13</sup>

## Who fears crime?

### General observations

- 2.22 The Committee recognises the difficulty of making generalisations in answering the question 'who fears crime?' as fear will depend on a range of factors and circumstances. Determining which people within the community most fear crime is complex as fear of crime affects different people in different ways at different times and in different locations. The Committee notes the observation of the *National Crime Prevention Program* that:

fear of crime is complex, in that some people may be afraid of particular types of crime but not of others. Moreover, some

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11 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

12 Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 88*, p. 17.

13 Hon Bruce Baird MP, *Submission 46*, p. 2.

individuals may be fearful of crime in the home, but not in public places.<sup>14</sup>

- 2.23 By way of example, Queensland Government surveys including studies conducted by Queensland Rail suggest that:
- older people have a greater fear of being a victim on public transport;
  - parents fear transport crime as teenagers travel a lot by night for their leisure activities;
  - female teenagers have a greater fear of physical assault and other crimes against the person;
  - higher income earners demonstrate higher levels of fear than low income workers; and
  - white collar workers demonstrate higher levels of fear than blue collar workers.<sup>15</sup>
- 2.24 Levels of fear also vary according to whether people are at home or in public places and whether the activity occurs during daylight hours or after dark. The Victoria Police submission provided statistics relating to fear of crime gathered during a *National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing* conducted during the 2001/2002 fiscal year. The survey indicated that:
- 94.3 per cent of respondents felt safe or very safe at home by themselves during daylight hours in Victoria. This compares to a national average of 91.3 per cent;<sup>16</sup>
  - 81.6 per cent of respondents felt safe or very safe at home by themselves during the night in Victoria. The national average was 80.4 per cent;
  - 90.5 per cent of respondents felt safe or very safe whilst walking or jogging locally during the day in Victoria. The national average was 87.6 per cent;
  - 42.9 per cent of respondents felt either safe or very safe whilst walking or jogging locally during the night in Victoria. The national average was 39.8 per cent.<sup>17</sup>

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14 Attorney-General's Department, *The National Crime Prevention Program*, p. 27.

15 Queensland Government, *Submission 100*, p. 9.

16 Victoria Police, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2003, p. 3.

17 Victoria Police, *Submission 73.1*, p. 2.

- 2.25 The national statistic that approximately 60 per cent of Australians do not feel safe taking exercise in their localities during the night was borne out by a resident who told the Committee that he did not feel safe on the streets of Geraldton after dark:

I might add that I am also speaking for many more members of this community who will attest their fears also ...<sup>18</sup>

- 2.26 The *National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing* survey also provided statistics indicating the level of community fear relating to the following particular offences in Victoria and in Australia more generally:<sup>19</sup>

	Victoria	Australia
Sexual assault	36.7 per cent	40.5
Physical assault	52.2	56.4
Housebreaking	70.7	74.9
Motor Vehicle Theft	69.4	70.0
Fraud/Credit Card Theft	59.1	59.7
Internet Based Crime	44.2	44.4

- 2.27 The above statistics reflect concerns within the wider community. With regard to which sections of the community may be most fearful of crime, however, the Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform singled out older Australians and women:

The female shopper or elderly citizen is in fear of the young hooligan on drugs snatching her or her bag in the car park.<sup>20</sup>

- 2.28 The notion that drug addition is a root cause of crime is shared by Mr Bob Bottom who contends that, as a direct result of the illicit drug trade:

A heightened fear of crime has evolved in the wider community with more and more people being burgled or robbed or injured or even killed by persons affected by drugs.<sup>21</sup>

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18 Mr Malcolm Smith, Group General Manager, Geraldton Newspapers Ltd, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 November 2002, p. 443.

19 Victoria Police, *Submission 73.1*, p. 3.

20 Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, *Submission 77*, p. 21.

21 Mr Bob Bottom, *Submission 99*, p. 1.

- 2.29 The Committee was disturbed to find that children in certain circumstances feared being a victim of crime, particularly in relation to domestic violence.
- 2.30 While older Australians, women and to some extent children are perceived to experience the greatest levels of fear of crime, the Committee found that a significant level of fear of crime exists among small business owners and employees. Other elements causing fear are organised crime, and the possibility of being a victim of fraud, especially in relation to electronic commerce.
- 2.31 The Committee was told that other factors contributing to fear of crime include graffiti, vandalism, or other aspects of the built environment that reflect a general state of disrepair. In addition, the frequent presence of drunks, vagrants, or unruly gatherings of young men can add to people's fear of crime.<sup>22</sup>

## Older Australians

- 2.32 The following extract from a submission of an elderly citizen typifies many submissions made by individuals to the Committee:

As an elderly lady who lives alone I have a strong fear of crime. My house is locked up both night and day and I feel I need a guard dog to help protect me. There have been a number of break-ins in my area including my neighbour's homes. Many of my friends have been victims themselves. One of these ladies has had her home broken into five times and others up to three times. I am frightened to carry a hand bag as one lady I know had her skull fractured when a lout robbed [sic] her for her bag. Then in front of several people sitting out the front of a coffee shop another one of my friends had the strap of her handbag cut and stolen by a lad on a bike ... I will not go outside after dark, and I am frightened [sic] of attackers breaking my bones as I suffer from diminished bone density. My fear of crime has made me lock myself up for my own protection. The worst part is that while the elderly have to lock themselves up the louts roam free.<sup>23</sup>

- 2.33 Another submission referred to an incident where a man demanded money from an elderly citizen:

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22 Attorney-General's Department, *The National Crime Prevention Program*, pp. 27-28.

23 *Submission 39*.



I am in my 80s and have a medical condition ... There is a great fear of crime especially of being injured if you try to protect yourself.<sup>24</sup>

- 2.34 Constable Sue Munro described her findings in ascertaining the perceptions of senior citizens on crime in Geraldton and their individual concerns:

When I speak with senior citizens, their concerns relate more to their homes, their individual security in their homes, walking downtown, their own personal property such as their motor vehicle getting broken into and how they can secure their personal property.<sup>25</sup>

- 2.35 In relation to fear of being a victim on public transport, Ms Healy of the Older Persons Action Centre stated that:

Most people over the age of 75 do not have access to a car – everybody tends to say they do, but they do not – and so public transport becomes a vital thing in their lives.<sup>26</sup>

## Women

- 2.36 The *National Crime Prevention Program* states that:

The factor most consistently and strongly associated with fear of crime is gender. Almost everywhere, women in general tend to be more fearful than men of crime. Australia is no exception. Women are more fearful than men of being alone in their own homes and of walking in their neighbourhood at night. Recent research confirms that women report significantly greater perceived risk and fear of crime than men, regardless of how fear of crime is measured.<sup>27</sup>

- 2.37 While it is true that many women share with the elderly a fear of crime which emanates from ‘the inability of being able to do anything about it’,<sup>28</sup> there is an additional dimension to fear experienced by some women which relates to domestic violence.

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24 *Submission 14*.

25 First Class Constable Sue Munro, Crime Prevention Officer, Western Australian Police Force, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 November 2002, p. 491.

26 Ms Sue Healy, Older Persons Action Centre, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2002, p. 68.

27 Attorney-General’s Department, *The National Crime Prevention Program*, p. 27.

28 J M Marshall, *Submission 20*, p. 1.

- 2.38 The Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre Inc advised the Committee that from its contact with victims of family violence and sexual assault, DVIRC is aware that many women and children in the community live in fear of continued assaults from their partners/fathers. Domestic violence is a patterned form of behaviour, rather than an isolated event.
- 2.39 According to the Centre, research undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology has found that women who are victims of physical violence by a male partner, or by another male, admit to more fear of crime than do other women.<sup>29</sup>
- 2.40 The Office of the Status of Women commented specifically on women's fear of crime. Crime surveys consistently report women as being less likely to be victimized by crime than men and yet more fearful of crime than men. This apparent paradox may be explained by the fact that women are victims of a wide range of hidden violence in the form of domestic violence, sexual assault and threats of assault, as well as harassment. These are crimes which are not well documented by crime surveys.<sup>30</sup>
- 2.41 Analysis of *Women's Safety Australia* data by the Australian Institute of Criminology revealed that women's fear of crime is greatest among those who have lower incomes, those in older age groups and those living with a partner. Women who had experienced violence are more likely to be fearful of crime than other women and this particularly so among women who have been victims of domestic violence. This suggests that women's fear of crime is rational rather than irrational, as suggested by some studies.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.42 The Federation of Community Legal Centres' Violence Against Women and Children Working Group pointed out that females are more likely to know the perpetrator of crime and are often most vulnerable within the 'domestic sphere', that is in their own homes, where they may justifiably fear acts of violence from a spouse or intimate partner:

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29 Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre Inc, *Submission 59*, pp. 3-4.

30 Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 88*, p. 17.

31 Office of the Status of Women, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Submission 88*, p. 17.

This is supported by a recent Australian study that found only 11% of adult male victims were killed by intimate partners, compared to 60% of women victims.<sup>32</sup>

- 2.43 Many women and children who have experienced domestic violence remain fearful of further violence.<sup>33</sup>

## Children

- 2.44 The Committee was told that some children prefer to remain on the streets at night rather than return home to a situation in which they fear they will be abused. Mrs Charmaine Yeates, a Yamatji Patrol Worker, stated about the children that:

We try to talk to them and convince them that the appropriate thing to do is to get into our vans and we will take them home. We take home a lot of children. Sometimes it is not a safe environment. The kids come to the streets because, to them, that is a safer environment.<sup>34</sup>

## Victims of crime

- 2.45 In the 1998 *Crime and Safety Survey*, proportionally more victim than non-victim households surveyed had deadlocks on all doors, security on all windows, and burglar alarms. This may indicate that victims of burglary are more conscious of home security, and try to remove the opportunity for further victimisation.<sup>35</sup>
- 2.46 Although the results from the *National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing* survey are not publicly available, the Australian Federal Police advised that the survey has established that a victim of crime is more likely to be fearful of the crime re-occurring, particularly if it is an offence against the person.<sup>36</sup>
- 2.47 According to the Australian Federal Police, repeat victimisation is more likely to occur with assault than for other crimes covered in the *Crime and Safety Survey*. Assault victims in the 1998 survey experienced an average of 2.5 incidents in the period covered by the

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32 Federation of Community Legal Centres' Violence Against Women and Children Working Group, *Submission 85*, p. 2.

33 Western Region Domestic Violence Collective, *Submission 74*, p. 2.

34 Mrs Charmaine Yeates, Manager, Yamatji Patrol, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 November 2002, pp. 481-482.

35 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, pp. 7-8.

36 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, p. 7.

survey, compared with an average of 1.3 incidents for household victims of burglary and 1.1 incidents for victims of motor vehicle theft.

## Fears held by small business

- 2.48 Evidence to the Committee indicated that the small business sector had reason to fear crime. The Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform stated that:

The owners and workers in small businesses that are so often the soft targets held up by a young man or woman desperate for his or her next fix. The attempt may be half bungled but it still inspires terror and leaves disabling psychological if not other scars on the victims. So much of drug related crime by consumers crowds in on our home, our work and intrudes into the public spaces we frequent.<sup>37</sup>

## Fear of organised and ethnic crime

- 2.49 According to the (then) National Crime Authority the reach of organised crime in Australia is pervasive, multi-faceted and generates enormous negative social and economic impacts:

Fear of organised crime appears to vary and is based both on the impacts of the particular types of crime (drugs, violence, fraud, extortion, corruption, internet crime etc) and the mythology of organized crime groups.<sup>38</sup>

- 2.50 The Committee also notes that there may be significant underreporting of crime in ethnic communities.<sup>39</sup> Dr Richard Basham told the Committee that ethnic community members are often extremely reluctant to cooperate with police.<sup>40</sup>
- 2.51 Dr Basham believes this underreporting of crime in ethnic communities is largely because of a lack of identification with Australian law. Migrants may come from Asian countries where the State does not have the same moral legitimacy as it does for white Australians and victims are often afraid to go to the police.<sup>41</sup>

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37 Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform, *Submission 77*, p. 21.

38 National Crime Authority, *Submission 86*, p. 8.

39 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 267.

40 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 258.

41 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 259.

## Fear of fraud

2.52 In terms of fear of fraud offences, Dr Russell Smith, Director of Research at the Australian Institute of Criminology, told the Committee that there are probably lower levels of fear of fraud offences in the community than other types of crime:

although once a person has been defrauded there is a great apprehension about repeat victimisation.<sup>42</sup>

2.53 Dr Smith added that the other issue relevant to fear is that concerns about security of electronic commerce have tended to retard the development of electronic commerce and that is quite often fear driven. On the impact of these sorts of crimes on victims, sometimes there are very serious financial and personal consequences attached to victimisation. Individuals who are defrauded through theft and information about their identity sometimes have to go to considerable lengths to re-establish a credit rating and to have key proof of identity documents reissued, such as driver's licences. There is a very large impact on business, particularly in the area of electronic commerce where websites have been stolen – the so-called mirroring of websites in which an offender pretends to be a legitimate business and then acts deceptively. In terms of cost:

I think we can be confident that certainly many millions of dollars, perhaps hundreds of millions – or even, using some estimates, up to a billion dollars – are lost each year through fraud offences. On current estimates, approximately 40 per cent of fraud offences may involve some element of misuse of identity, and so in Australia the financial impacts are very large.<sup>43</sup>

## Factors contributing to fear of crime

2.54 Factors contributing to a fear of crime which were identified in submissions and public hearings include:

- personal experience and anecdotal evidence of crime;
- media misinformation and/or omission; and

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42 Dr Russell Smith, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2002, p. 45.

43 Dr Russell Smith, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2002, p. 45.

- perception of light sentences.

## Personal experience and anecdotal evidence of crime

- 2.55 The Committee heard from several organisations representing the interests of senior citizens. For example, Mr James Graham, President of the Geraldton and Districts Senior Citizens Action Group, told the Committee that the Group had been in operation for 19 years:

One thing that we are looking at is the welfare of our members, especially their safety ... Our members come to us with problems all the time. Their doors have been smashed and kicked in and they are absolutely petrified to go outside their houses ... All these people are locked in their homes – it is a terrible business. We are trying to do something to improve their lifestyle, but they are frightened to go out. When the sun goes down, they lock themselves up.<sup>44</sup>

- 2.56 The Older Persons Action Centre in Melbourne canvassed the experiences of its members at a meeting and reported that:

Of the 8 people present, each person was able to describe a house break-in of their own home or of a neighbour. None had experienced violence. The prevailing attitude was of annoyance rather than fear.<sup>45</sup>

- 2.57 The Older Persons Action Centre acknowledged however that:

We know of many older people who feel much more threatened by such break-ins.<sup>46</sup>

- 2.58 Lgov NSW suggests that:

we need to get away from the concern about the disparity between recorded criminal incidents (the statistics) and the fear of crime (the perceptions) and deal more squarely with fear of crime as a social phenomena in its own right. Whilst it is not a total explanation, it is hardly surprising that the fear of crime tends to relate to those types of crime that we know tend to be underreported. These underreporting rates are quite significant. Therefore, people may develop their fears not by reading crime statistics or indeed by media reporting

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44 Mr James Graham, President of the Geraldton and Districts Senior Citizens Action Group, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 November 2002, p. 482.

45 Older Persons Action Centre, *Submission 45*, p. 1.

46 Older Persons Action Centre, *Submission 45*, p. 1.

(or over-reporting crime statistics or individual incidents), but through their knowledge of local people who are choosing not to report crimes against the person such as assault, sexual assault and robbery.<sup>47</sup>

## The role of the media

- 2.59 In evidence to the Committee, criticism was leveled at the media for generating fear of crime through failing to provide a balance in reporting incidents of criminal activity. The Committee notes that media coverage enables people to make comparisons and become more critical. However, criticism seemed to focus on lack of balance in reporting. The Committee sees a great need for accurate and contemporary statistics to be readily available to provide such balance.
- 2.60 The Australian Federal Police Association stated in its submission that fear of crime is often out of proportion to the reality of its threat to the average person:
- In many respects the capacity for the media to make the worst excesses of humanity accessible to the broader community on a daily and greater basis, serves only an expansion of fear and loathing.<sup>48</sup>
- 2.61 The Inverell Shire Council also expressed concerns about the role of the media, notwithstanding that to a degree rural communities tend to see themselves as more removed from the possibility of violent crimes and thus the impact of crime reportage in the national media may be regarded as less influential in driving community definitions and perceptions of crime. Local media, both electronic and print, however continue to play a significant role in this regard.<sup>49</sup>
- 2.62 ACT Neighbourhood Watch Association suggested that fear of crime may well be increased because the media reports more of it.<sup>50</sup>
- 2.63 The Inverell Shire Council observed that the perception of crime within the community is predominantly driven by the media, which has a tremendous impact in terms of how crime is generally perceived and ultimately defined in society. According to the media, in both

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47 Lgov NSW, *Submission 57*, pp.9-10.

48 Australian Federal Police Association, *Submission 70*, p. 14.

49 Inverell Shire Council, *Submission 61*, p. 1.

50 ACT Neighbourhood Watch Association, *Submission 92*, p. 2.

fictional and factual types of reportage, crime tends to be defined as 'street crime', which is thus associated with personal terror in which fear and violence are seen as central. This has significant implications for the fear of crime within certain sections of the community.<sup>51</sup>

## Perception of light sentences

2.64 The Caxton Legal Centre suggested that there would appear to be fairly widespread disillusionment with the Court system, and a fear that offenders are not being sufficiently punished.<sup>52</sup>

2.65 This contention was supported by the *Enough is Enough* organisation which submitted that fear of crime:

is compounded by the frustration with the legal system which appears to be letting all offenders off lightly.<sup>53</sup>

2.66 Mrs Joy Potts, giving evidence on behalf of the Country Women's Association of New South Wales, also observed that the judges are 'still coming up with amazingly light sentences'.<sup>54</sup>

2.67 When this is perceived to occur, according to one submission, the impact on victims of crime is:

Resentment, utter resentment. Enormous anger and utter hatred of the Courts and all those involved in seeking to mollify the impact of the criminal justice system on the offender.<sup>55</sup>

2.68 Another perspective on the administration of the law was expressed by Mr Kevin Lindeberg who believes that a perception of double standards in the way in which the law is administered can contribute to a sense of fear of crime within the community:

Nothing engenders fear of crime or instils a sense of hopelessness more in any society than to have law-enforcement by double standards which, in turn, may tend to encourage ordinary citizens, out of disrespect, to take the law into their own hands to achieve so-called 'justice' when they see others in high places escape palpable wrongdoing while

51 Inverell Shire Council, *Submission 61*, p. 1.

52 Caxton Legal Centre, *Submission 82*, p. 3.

53 Enough is Enough, *Submission 94*, p. 2.

54 Mrs Joy Potts, *Transcript of Evidence*, 10 October 2002, p. 315.

55 Mr Paul Neri, *Submission 18*, pp. 2-3.



they, not so socially, financially or politically advantaged, must face the full force of the law when they breach it.<sup>56</sup>

- 2.69 The Committee also notes that, other than particularly long sentences, the media tends not to report stronger sentences.

## What are the effects of fear of crime?

- 2.70 Fear of crime impacts on the community in significant ways, including:
- withdrawal from participating within the community;
  - altered lifestyle and implications for health and well-being;
  - socio-economic consequences; and
  - effects on small business, particularly tourism, when a community is perceived to be unsafe.

## Withdrawal from participating within the community

- 2.71 The view was expressed to the Committee that property crime erodes our community spirit and creates a climate of suspicion towards those people seen walking around our suburb who are not known to us:

Particularly young males (16yrs to 25yrs).<sup>57</sup>

Elderly are afraid as they cannot protect themselves and realise they can easily be pulled up on deserted roads at night. Elderly people are staying home instead of taking the risk of being a victim.<sup>58</sup>

- 2.72 The Canterbury City Council believes that fear of crime stifles the participation of residents in community life and undermines their well-being. It disrupts their effective functioning in the community, damages social harmony and generates tensions and isolation which lead to further crime, major costs to the community and significant human suffering amongst victims, perpetrators and their families.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Mr Kevin Lindeberg, *Submission 142*, p. 3.

57 Mr Philip Gunnell, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

58 Seventh Day Adventist Church, *Submission 29*, p. 1.

59 Canterbury City Council, *Submission 31*, p. 9.

- 2.73 The Fairfield City Council refers to the impact that violence has on women's lives:

Fear of crime is a particularly important issue for women because it restricts their freedom to participate fully in society.<sup>60</sup>

- 2.74 One submission observed that:

Fear of crime is a daily part of our lives. It doesn't rule our lives but it saps our quality of life.<sup>61</sup>

### **Altered lifestyle: implications for health and wellbeing**

- 2.75 Several submissions commented on the effects of fear of crime on their lifestyle, which included refraining from going out at night and barricading themselves in their own homes. One submission pointed out that:

Many 'older Australians' recall their youth when their house was left unlocked, and indeed the car was not even fitted with locks.<sup>62</sup>

- 2.76 Another submission commented on their reluctance to leave their home and the impact this has on the 'Australian' way:

My wife and I despite all our security measures we have taken are now reluctant to leave the house for any length of time. The only security measures left to secure our house is to install metal shutters or bars to the windows and fitting a steel mesh throughout the ceiling/roof cavity. However, we have no wish to turn our house into a mini fortress as the external appearance of a fortified home is a sign of defeat to the criminals and should not be the 'Australian Way'.<sup>63</sup>

- 2.77 Yet another submission expressed regret at changes to their lifestyle arising from fear of crime:

So now we have to live in a jail and also remember to lock our doors when we are out in the garden.<sup>64</sup>

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60 *Exhibit 38.*

61 Mr Paul Neri, *Submission 18*, p. 2.

62 Neighbourhood Watch O'Malley ACT, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

63 Mr Phillip Gunnell, *Submission 27*, p. 2.

64 *Submission 10.*

2.78 The Older Persons Action Centre found that a number of older women have moved into some form of supervised living as a result of fear of break-ins:

As people grow frailer, they become more nervous, which may affect their quality of life.<sup>65</sup>

2.79 The Country Women's Association of Australia also commented that there is a great fear of crime in the city areas in particular, and that as a result, many of their members will not go out at night and live behind bars and locked doors.<sup>66</sup>

2.80 It would appear that most older people reliant on public transport are reluctant to undertake journeys after dark.

2.81 Some submissions however recognised that society has changed, and while not condoning the negative aspects of modern society, they accepted that people must alter their lifestyle to accommodate this. For example, the Older Persons Action Centre told the Committee:

In our group we all revealed we now take more care even in our own home – locking front and back doors and closing most windows while we are working around the house or in the garden. We do not feel that our lives are circumscribed by our caution, but that life for all people is now under different rules than it was when we were young.<sup>67</sup>

2.82 Nonetheless, as one submission pointed out:

Anyone who has had their home ransacked can speak of the invasion of their personal space and their losses. Some losses are of irreplaceable items such as documents and family jewels, collections of stamps and coins and other types of personal treasures. In addition the tendency towards home trashing by intruders adds to the drama.<sup>68</sup>

2.83 Another victim of property theft stated that:

we were insured and ... whilst we were financially recompensed nothing could replace those items of sentimental value that were never recovered.<sup>69</sup>

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65 Older Persons Action Centre, *Submission 45*, p. 1.

66 Country Women's Association of Australia, *Submission 49*, p. 1.

67 Older Persons Action Centre, *Submission 45*, p. 1

68 Neighbourhood Watch, O'Malley ACT, *Submission 26*, p. 3.

69 Mr Phillip Gunnell, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

- 2.84 It is evident that the effects on people who have been victims of crime of any kind are extremely traumatic, and often life-changing. The trauma can cause physical illness, and, in the older generation, can often be life-threatening.<sup>70</sup>

## Socio-economic consequences

- 2.85 The Committee received many submissions addressing the financial costs of fear of crime to householders, particularly in relation to fitting locks and security devices to their homes. The following extracts are typical:

As a result of the second burglary ... we spent a considerable amount of money to fit motion lights around the house, another security door to our rear French doors and a back to base burglar alarm. In addition to the financial outlay we have now incurred a monthly fee (\$45.00) to support the back to base monitoring.<sup>71</sup>

We have had to go to the expense of bars on all our windows after threat of being invaded while we slept.<sup>72</sup>

- 2.86 One submission pointed to the relationship between fear of crime and levels of income:

When you are on \$360 per week in hand and have to pay all expenses from mortgage to food bills the theft of even twenty dollars is very hard to handle. The loss of any personal possession is a major disaster, try replacing a video machine or TV let alone any essential household items on a pension as sole income. Try replacing a family car on that income. To that extent our fear of crime is very real.<sup>73</sup>

- 2.87 Another submission commented on the costs incurred by his family following a house break-in through a partially open upper storey window and the theft of his car from a locked garage:

A longer-term impact was the request by the insurance company to fit deadlocks to all doors and locks to all windows. Most of the windows on the ground level of the house had locks already but none of the doors had deadlocks.

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70 *Submission 10.*

71 Mr Phillip Gunnell, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

72 *Submission 10.*

73 *Submission 135.*

To comply with the request cost just short of \$1000. It would have been more but for the assistance of family in fitting the deadlocks. The impact of the loss of the car was more difficult to assess.<sup>74</sup>

## Effects on small business, particularly tourism

- 2.88 Crime, whether it be the incidence or fear of crime, and/or victimisation costs the community economically as well as socially.
- 2.89 One consequence of crime for small business related to the tourism industry in Geraldton. Mr Brian Boardman, a board member of the *Give Me Geraldton Any Day Positive Campaign Committee*, was concerned that the city of Geraldton which will be spending millions of dollars on developing a foreshore, an environment that would be attractive to both townsfolk and visitors, tourism being a growth area for Geraldton, would be disadvantaged by the behaviour of groups of people from 10 o'clock in the morning who terrify tourists.<sup>75</sup>
- 2.90 The Great Lakes Council also expressed concern about the effects of fear of crime on the tourism industry:
- 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.<sup>76</sup>
- 2.91 The Country Women's Association of New South Wales observed that the effect of even petty crimes against small businesses, such as graffiti and nightly smashing of windows, is wearing down the owners. According to the Country Women's Association of New South Wales, many do not bother to report such incidences to the police:

Service stations have to employ security guards and pharmacists lock themselves in, opening to only known

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74 *Submission 63*.

75 Mr Brian Boardman, *Transcript of Evidence*, 18 November 2002, p. 483.

76 Mr John Stephens, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 June 2004, p. 1746; see also Mrs Judy Payne and Mr Ken Sheather, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 June 2004, p. 1762.

customers after 5pm. The psychological effect on victimised owners and employees cannot be calculated; who knows what long term effect the victim will have as a result of having a knife or gun – any weapon – brandished at him. We see new staff at service stations which have been violated.<sup>77</sup>

## Disparities between levels of crime and fear of crime

- 2.92 The Committee found a significant mismatch between the levels of fear of crime and the actual levels of crime. Lgov NSW, which represents 172 local councils, 20 county councils and 13 Regional Aboriginal Land Councils in New South Wales, refers to the findings of Cook, David and Grant (1999)<sup>78</sup> that fear of crime is generally much higher than the measured level of crime. Despite the statistics on victimization occurring in the home with offenders known to the victim, many people are most afraid of the unpredictable strangers in an uncontrollable environment.
- 2.93 The Queensland Government stated that those who report being the most fearful of crime are often the least likely to be victims of crime, for example, elderly people. Females aged 55 and over are the least victimized group according to official statistics, yet reportedly are the most afraid.<sup>79</sup>
- 2.94 The Caboolture South Public Safety Project submitted that:
- Aged members of our community are particularly fearful of being a victim of crime. Their representation in the actual incidents of crime however are not indicative of legitimate cause for their fear, yet it exists nonetheless ... Actual risk to aged people is minimal on comparison to other groups.<sup>80</sup>
- 2.95 Mr David Madden, Deputy Commissioner of Operations, New South Wales Police, also asserted that the fear of becoming a victim is greater than the likelihood of actually becoming a victim. According to Mr Madden, while 80 per cent of the community felt that they were likely to become a victim of crime, only one in 20 persons is likely to

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77 Country Women's Association of New South Wales, *Submission 30*, p. 4.

78 Cook B, David F and Grant A, *Victims' Needs, Victims' Rights – Policies and Programs for Victims of Crime In Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology Research and Public Policy Series No. 19, Canberra 1999.

79 Queensland Government, *Submission 100*, p. 9.

80 Caboolture South Public Safety Project, *Submission 79*, p. 2.

be a victim of assault and only one in every 15 households is likely to become a victim of break and enter.<sup>81</sup> Mr Madden observed:

But the perception is another issue ... If you take the young people who hang around railway interchanges, for instance, there is a perception of fear generated by their presence. Often they are referred to as a gang. The reality in many cases is that they are simply school teenagers who are on their way home, but there is a perception generated that they are in fact gang members – by their behaviour, their attitude ... their behaviour is intimidating to other people.<sup>82</sup>

2.96 The Australian Federal Police also noted that fear of crime indicators have shown that a heightened perception or fear of crime does not necessarily correlate with the actual levels of reported crime, and low scorings on indicators of a fear of crime within a community can often appear in locations where high levels of crime actually do exist.<sup>83</sup>

2.97 The Police Association of Victoria contended that it is:

Well aware that whilst the elderly are least likely to be victims of crime, it appears that the perception among the elderly is that they have a significant fear of crime.<sup>84</sup>

2.98 The Committee was told that it may be that one of the reasons for the low level of violence against older people is that they are careful not to put themselves in dangerous situations:

while we realise that older people are less likely to be the objects of attacks than other people, we feel that one of the reasons for this is that we try to take care not to put ourselves in frightening situations.<sup>85</sup>

2.99 The Inverell Shire Council also submitted that fear of crime in the community is largely felt and expressed by the elderly and women even though these groups are less likely to become victims of crime:

Data that is available, would tend to indicate that males are in fact more likely to be involved as both victims and perpetrators of crimes against the individual and as

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81 Mr David Madden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 273.

82 Mr David Madden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 274.

83 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, p. 6.

84 The Police Association of Victoria, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

85 Ms Healy, Older Persons Action Centre, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2002, p. 67.

perpetrators of malicious damage and crimes against property.

Whilst the fear of crime is most often expressed by the elderly and by women, this fear appears to be disproportionately felt by these groups when compared to actual “reported” crime statistics.<sup>86</sup>

- 2.100 Evidence to the Committee suggested however that the statistics may be skewed because not all crimes are reported. One submission conjectured that older citizens do not report crime for fear of reprisals.

## Recommendation 2

- 2.101 **The Committee recommends that State and Territory Governments be encouraged to work more closely with organisations representing the elderly to collect more accurate data on the extent of unreported crimes committed against older Australians.**

- 2.102 Evidence also suggests that some crimes against women may go unreported. Dr Chris Atmore of the St Kilda Legal Service Cooperative observed that:

while men appear in official crime statistics as more likely than women to be victims of crimes like physical assault, there are a number of reasons why there is such a skew in that data. One of the reasons obviously is the fact that when you actually factor in crimes like sexual assault and domestic violence against women those crimes, as we know, are far less likely to come to official attention.<sup>87</sup>

- 2.103 Dr Atmore went on to say:

I think women, and also the elderly as a group, are often represented as having somehow an unreasonable or disproportionate fear of crime, given the official picture of who is most likely to be victims of interpersonal violence ... if we do factor in more systematically intimate violence against women – things like rape, domestic violence and sexual

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<sup>86</sup> Inverell Shire Council, *Submission 61*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>87</sup> Dr Chris Atmore, St Kilda Legal Service Cooperative Limited, *Transcript of Evidence*, 10 September 2002, p. 109.



harassment – there is some significant research that suggests that women’s fear of crime is not disproportionate at all; it is actually a reflection of the fact that a lot of their experience comes from already having been victimized in some form or another. If a woman has a fear of traveling on public transport at night, she may not ever have experienced an assault in that context, but my argument and the argument of some leading researchers is that that fear can be a projection of her risk of sexual victimisation in other intimate contexts. I think that can partly explain the high level of fear of crime in women.<sup>88</sup>

### Recommendation 3

- 2.104 **The Committee recommends that State and Territory Governments be encouraged to work more closely with women’s centres and refuges to collect more accurate data on the extent of unreported crimes committed against women.**
- 2.105 In relation to public transport crime, survey data indicates a disproportionately high level of fear in the community, both at a State/Territory and National level. Those perceptions exist despite empirical evidence suggesting that crime on public transport is low when placed in context. A number of factors influence these negative perceptions including:
- constant negative media attention and sensationalism;
  - second-hand accounts of experiences of public transport crime;
  - actual experiences of public transport crime; and
  - low awareness of public transport security measures and personnel.<sup>89</sup>
- 2.106 The Caxton Legal Centre pointed out however that there is extensive research material available that establishes that the risk of violent assault by a stranger is statistically much less significant than the risk of injury to the person from family members.<sup>90</sup>

88 Dr Chris Atmore, *Transcript of Evidence*, 10 September 2002, p. 110.

89 Queensland Government, *Submission 100*, p. 9.

90 Caxton Legal Centre, *Submission 82*, p. 3.

- 2.107 Nonetheless, there is considerable profile given to risk from strangers – either through, for example, violent attack, or through inadvertent injury from the by-product of criminal behaviour such as needle-stick injuries.
- 2.108 It seems clear that the more factual statistics that can be put across to a community, the less chance there will be of people living in fear of crime.

## Combating fear of crime

- 2.109 Strategies for combating fear of crime were raised in evidence to the Committee. They included:
- police resources and initiatives;
  - promoting caution and commonsense;
  - informing the community of local government initiatives; and
  - provision of accurate data on the nature and incidence of crime.

## Police resources and initiatives

- 2.110 Victoria Police advised that most of the programs developed within the Community Consultation and Crime Prevention Office of Victoria Police are done so with the knowledge that the perception and fear of crime is as great as the actualisation of crime. As such, the underpinning philosophy is that projects must not only be aimed at crime prevention, but also at reducing fear. This is particularly the case with groups identified as being more vulnerable, that is, older Victorians and women.<sup>91</sup>
- 2.111 According to the (then) National Crime Authority, law enforcement agencies working on organised crime are acutely aware of both the public perceptions and fears of organised crime and consider both in the context of national strategies to counter organised crime.<sup>92</sup>
- 2.112 The National Crime Authority also advised the Committee that a crucial element in investigating organised crime was financial intelligence, especially from the Australian Transaction Reports and

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91 Victoria Police, *Submission 73*, p. 2.

92 National Crime Authority, *Submission 86*, p. 8.

Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC), in 'revealing the anatomy of organised crime'.<sup>93</sup>

2.113 An example of an initiative by the National Crime Authority was *Operation Swordfish*, set up to target organised fraud on the Commonwealth, including tax evasion and money laundering and associated or underlying criminal activity. The operation involved a number of Commonwealth and State agencies.<sup>94</sup>

2.114 Police forces in the States and Territories acknowledge ethnic-based and organised crime and have task forces to deal with them. However, the Committee has been told that:

Organised crime – particularly Lebanese-based organised crime and, similarly, Asian-based crime - have taken a foothold in New South Wales in the past five years and have spread all over Australia.<sup>95</sup>

2.115 Mr Priest said that the New South Wales Police had no organised crime experience and therefore was ill equipped to deal with the emerging Lebanese crime gangs who were, in effect, 'handed the keys to the city of Sydney.'<sup>96</sup> Mr Priest also believes that claims that race is not the issue in organised crime are both 'stupid and dangerous':

My prediction is that within 10 years Middle Eastern crime groups will have spread and their influence will extend across Australia as they seek to expand their enterprises.<sup>97</sup>

2.116 The Committee notes revelations earlier this year that a report on organised crime prepared by former Assistant Commissioner Clive Small in October 1999 had been ignored by the (then) New South Wales Police Commissioner Peter Ryan. The report noted that organised crime syndicates were well established in New South Wales, and supported Mr Priest's contention that ethnic background was an important element in the composition of criminal groups.<sup>98</sup>

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93 Mr David Gray, National Crime Authority, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 223.

94 See Mr Marshall P Irwin, *Investigation of Fraud by the National Crime Authority: Operation Swordfish – Catching the Big Fish*. Paper presented at the Fraud Prevention and Control Conference, 24-25 August 2000.

95 Mr Tim Priest, *Transcript of Evidence*, 10 October 2002, p. 339.

96 Mr Tim Priest, 'Don't turn a blind eye to terror in our midst', *The Australian*, 12 January 2004.

97 Mr Tim Priest, 'Don't turn a blind eye to terror in our midst', *The Australian*, 12 January 2004.

98 Edited version of Report by Assistant Commissioner Clive Small, October 1999, published in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 1 February 2004, p. 48.

- 2.117 The report noted that ‘investigations involving ethnic groups has outstripped the agencies’ access to interpreter and cultural support’. Together with financial constraints this meant that:
- drug and organised crime groups requiring attention now are being left to grow stronger and more difficult to dismantle, and the threat they posed to the State and its institutions is increasing.<sup>99</sup>
- 2.118 The report noted that the threat posed by drug and organised crime had been underestimated; that resources available to investigate such criminal activity are inadequate and that:
- The increasing relevance of ethnicity to major investigations has been accompanied by a decreased operational capacity due to language barriers and lack of immediate interpreter capacities where electronic intercepts are used.<sup>100</sup>
- 2.119 Such conclusions are supported by Dr Basham who advised that underreporting of crime in ethnic communities not only ‘hampers the police in their inquiries but provides a fertile field for further criminal activity’.<sup>101</sup> Further:
- Attempting to cope with crime perpetrated by people who live in different cultural worlds, without understanding those worlds, is not only foolish; it is a waste of police time and resources.<sup>102</sup>
- 2.120 Dr Basham believes that it is necessary that ethnic Australians are shown that they ‘can get the full protection of Australian law, because the primary victims of ethnic crime are co-ethnics’.<sup>103</sup> He also drew attention to the fact that often ethnic liaison officers can assist but also intimidate via local communities: ‘they become gatekeepers and they can become real problems’. Accordingly:
- the goal should be ... a situation where you have large numbers of people of Asian background who want to become police officers.<sup>104</sup>

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99 Edited version of Report by Assistant Commissioner Clive Small, October 1999, published in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 1 February 2004, p. 48.

100 Edited version of Report by Assistant Commissioner Clive Small, October 1999, published in *The Sunday Telegraph*, 1 February 2004, p. 48.

101 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, pp. 258-9.

102 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 259.

103 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 259.

104 Dr Richard Basham, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 261.

## Recommendation 4

2.121 **The Committee recommends that State and Territory police forces further recruit from ethnic groups that are involved in significant crime, with the aim of promoting greater cultural understanding and thereby over time reducing ethnic-based crime, including organised crime, and the fear of crime within ethnic communities.**

2.122 Mr David Madden of the New South Wales Police told the Committee that:

We do not have total control over the community's perception of crime or their fear of becoming a victim. However, we believe that we are having some considerable impact on this.<sup>105</sup>

2.123 Mr Madden advised that when he and the Commissioner were appointed to their positions, they focused on trying to reduce the fear of crime in the community. He noted that a high-visibility police presence and high-visibility operations have an effect in terms of the community's perception.<sup>106</sup>

2.124 Mr Bob Baldwin MP, Member for Paterson, observed:

It is about having increased presence. It is about seeing people in blue uniforms out and about in the community, because that is a deterrent.<sup>107</sup>

2.125 In New South Wales, *Operation Viking* was instigated with a view to being seen to deploy large numbers of highly visible police to problem areas.

2.126 Commenting on the effectiveness of *Operation Viking* in the Raymond Terrace area, Mr Trevor Wark stated that:

The community does not really have any confidence in Operation Viking because it happens so rarely – obviously because of funding and lack of resources. It would be ideal if you could run it for a longer period, mainly during the

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105 Mr David Madden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 271-272.

106 Mr David Madden, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 October 2002, p. 280.

107 Mr Bob Baldwin MP, Member for the Federal Seat of Paterson, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 June 2004, p. 1718.

summer months. That would be effective. But, if it is just on a one-off basis, there is no confidence.<sup>108</sup>

- 2.127 Superintendent Charles Haggart, Commander, Lower Hunter Command, New South Wales Police, acknowledged that the program needed an increased level of resources, advising that *Operation Viking* operates on a priority basis:

In recent times we have been able to utilise Operation Viking and have them come and saturate the area for a couple of hours. We try to do that on a more regular basis. I actually have a request in for funding so that it can occur on an almost weekly basis for an extended period of 12 weeks or so ...<sup>109</sup>

- 2.128 According to Mr James Ritchie however, increasing the police presence is not the answer to reducing fear of crime:

The fear of crime is the new frontier in policing efforts. The current thinking is that as the fear of crime is greater than the actuality of crime then reducing fear is a useful thing to do ... However, it is the means of reducing the fear of crime that counts. Phony activity such as increased police 'presence' and boosted police numbers ... are not likely to produce meaningful improvements in this field. More police on patrol does not fool the criminal. It anaesthetises the public. The best way to reduce the fear of crime is to reduce the actuality of crime.<sup>110</sup>

## Promoting caution

- 2.129 The Committee commends groups such as the Country Women's Association and the Older Persons Action Centre for their positive roles in promoting the exercise of caution without panic in meeting the changes in modern society. The Country Women's Association of New South Wales believes that:

there is fear of crime in the community, sometimes engendered and magnified by the media (bad news sells newspapers). If this fear of crime, of being a victim of crime can be translated into a warning to the community to use caution and common sense – e.g. locking the back door if the

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108 Mr Trevor Wark, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 June 2004, p. 1729.

109 Superintendent Haggart, *Transcript of Evidence*, 7 June 2004, p. 1728.

110 Mr James A Ritchie, *Submission 121*, pp. 3-4.

house-holder is gardening in the front yard – then it could be called a healthy condition. We have to realize we are not living in the 1960s and '70s. We cannot move about at all hours as freely as we did in those days; society has changed.<sup>111</sup>

- 2.130 The Older Persons Action Centre is concerned to see people developing confidence in themselves to continue to live independently in the community:

I think that is really the point of the exercise if we really want to effect change in the attitudes of older people and also in younger people's attitudes towards older people.<sup>112</sup>

### **Informing the community of local government initiatives**

- 2.131 The Committee notes that local councils are implementing a wide range of initiatives and community-based programs. Such programs are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

### **Provision of accurate data on the nature and incidence of crime**

- 2.132 In Victoria, the Local Priority Policing agency argues that one way to manage the perception and fear of crime is to provide education programs which target the elderly within the community to reassure them that they are least likely to become the victims of crime.<sup>113</sup>
- 2.133 The Caxton Legal Centre also contended that the media plays a significant role in distorting perception of crime in the community. The Centre considers that it is incumbent upon government to provide some counterbalance to the debate through funding educational responses to community fear.<sup>114</sup>
- 2.134 These findings also highlight the importance of increasing awareness of security initiatives.
- 2.135 The Australian Federal Police contends that when a community is well informed of the realities of its crime situation it is in a position to both assist in preventing criminal activity (e.g neighbourhood watch schemes, target hardening in terms of prevention) and to enjoy an

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111 The Country Women's Association of New South Wales, *Submission 30*, p. 3.

112 Mrs Edith Morgan, Older Persons Action Centre, *Transcript of Evidence*, 9 September 2002, p. 69.

113 The Police Association Victoria, *Submission 38*, p. 2.

114 Caxton Legal Centre, *Submission 82*, p. 3.

appropriate life-style. The Australian Federal Police, in its ACT policing function, has done some initial work on developing fear of crime indicators in the past in order to understand the balance between the fear of crime and the actual levels of crime in the community.<sup>115</sup>

- 2.136 However, according to the Australian Federal Police, influencing the balance is often difficult as perceptions of crime appear to be driven by more than just events in the local community. Consequently, some elements of the community (for example, the aged) live with an undue fear of crime.<sup>116</sup>
- 2.137 When this occurs there are obvious effects on the community in terms of a decline in the standard of living (for example, fear to go out), economic costs (for example, loss of business), and a decline in the belief of the rule of law.

## Conclusion

- 2.138 The main points raised in relation to fear of crime suggest that people do feel unsafe in their communities. This seems to be associated with a number of factors including being victimised, knowing someone who has been victimised, and media coverage. Lenient sentences and the perception that offenders get away with crime have also been linked with fear of crime in the community.
- 2.139 The Committee believes that fear imprisons people. It restricts their freedom to participate fully in society.
- 2.140 The Committee notes the disparities between the levels of fear that are experienced by some groups within the community and the actual levels of reported crime. There is clearly a need to, in the first instance, obtain accurate information regarding risk and to ensure that the information is made available to the community.

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115 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, p. 6.

116 Australian Federal Police, *Submission 64*, p. 6.



**Recommendation 5**

- 2.141 **The Committee recommends that accurate information regarding levels of crime be published in order to reduce fear of crime within the community.**
- 2.142 The Committee notes the perception that the community would feel safer if there was a more visible police presence.
- 2.143 The Committee notes also that funding made directly available to local community initiatives by the Commonwealth appears to be an effective and efficient allocation of resources.

**Recommendation 6**

- 2.144 **The Committee applauds the National Community Crime Prevention Programme because it allocates funding directly from the Commonwealth to local community initiatives, and recommends that further funding be made available under this program.**